

The Effect of Social Media Usage on Marital Relationships: A Case Study of Couples in Woodlands and Chalala Areas of Lusaka District, Zambia

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Abstract: This study examined the effect of social media usage on marital relationships among couples living in the Woodlands and Chalala areas of Lusaka District, Zambia. In recent years, the rapid growth of social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, and TikTok has significantly transformed patterns of communication, interaction, and intimacy among couples. While these platforms have enhanced connectivity and provided couples with convenient ways to share information, express affection, and maintain contact even over long distances, they have also introduced new challenges related to privacy, trust, and emotional detachment. The study adopted a mixed-methods research design to capture both quantitative and qualitative data. A case study sequential explanatory design was employed, beginning with quantitative data collection through structured questionnaires. This was followed by qualitative data collection using semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. A sample of 65 participants was chosen purposively which comprised Marriage counsellors, Faith-based advisors and married couples residing in Woodlands and Chalala. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, including means, standard deviations, correlations, and regression analysis, while qualitative data were examined through thematic analysis. Findings revealed that while social media provided social support and convenient communication channels that helped couples coordinate family responsibilities, certain usage patterns (such as excessive time online, secretive messaging, and frequent interactions with ex-partners or unknown contacts) were associated with increased misunderstandings, jealousy, reduced face-to-face interaction, and heightened conflict. Couples who reported having negotiated and transparent rules around device use and joint participation in online activities experienced higher relationship satisfaction, whereas those with unilateral or concealed use demonstrated lower trust and a higher incidence of arguments. Based on these findings, the study recommended couple-focused digital communication workshops, community awareness campaigns to promote healthy online boundaries, and further longitudinal research to track causal pathways and intervention outcomes in similar urban Zambian contexts.

Keywords: Communication, Conflict, Marital Relationships, Social Media and Trust.

1. INTRODUCTION

In today's rapidly evolving digital world, social media has become one of the most powerful tools for communication, interaction, and self-expression (Konlan, 2023). Platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, TikTok, and X (formerly Twitter) have significantly changed how people connect with one another, enabling real-time sharing of

information, experiences, and emotions across geographical boundaries. These platforms have made it easier for couples to communicate, even when separated by distance, allowing them to exchange messages, photos, and updates instantly. However, while social media promotes connectedness, it has also introduced a range of challenges to personal relationships, particularly marital unions (Merel Family Law, 2025). The accessibility and constant engagement that social media demands can sometimes disrupt traditional patterns of communication and intimacy between married partners, leading to misunderstandings, emotional distance, or even marital conflicts.

Marriage is a social institution built on trust, communication, respect, and mutual understanding (Chadha, 2025). The success and stability of any marital relationship depend largely on open communication, emotional support, and shared commitment between partners. However, the advent of social media has complicated these dynamics by introducing new forms of communication that are often impersonal, public, and highly distracting. Many couples now spend a significant portion of their time engaging with online communities rather than nurturing their marital bonds. This can lead to emotional neglect, reduced intimacy, and even suspicions of infidelity when one partner becomes overly secretive about their online activities (McKinley & Irvin, n.d.). Moreover, social media provides opportunities for rekindling old relationships or initiating new ones, which can sometimes lead to emotional or physical affairs. Such issues have made social media both a facilitator of connection and a potential source of marital strain in modern society.

In the Zambian context, particularly in urban settings such as Lusaka, social media usage has increased dramatically in recent years due to improved internet accessibility and widespread smartphone ownership (Phiri & Banda, 2022). Neighborhoods like Woodlands and Chalala are home to many middle- and upper-middle-class families who actively engage with digital technology as part of their daily lives. For many couples, social media serves as a means of maintaining communication, sharing memories, and expressing affection. However, for others, excessive use has led to neglect of marital responsibilities, lack of quality time together, and growing mistrust between partners (ZICTA, 2023). The traditional Zambian view of marriage—anchored in respect, transparency, and collective family life—sometimes conflicts with the individualistic culture that social media promotes, where personal privacy, attention-seeking, and external validation are emphasized. As such, examining how couples in these urban areas manage their social media use provides an important lens into the changing nature of marriage in a technologically driven society.

Globally, scholars have produced mixed findings regarding the effects of social media on marital relationships (Hertlein & Blumer, 2014). Some studies suggest that social media can strengthen relationships by improving communication, increasing emotional closeness, and providing platforms for shared experiences (Muchemwa & Tembo, 2021). Others, however, argue that excessive or inappropriate use leads to jealousy, cyber infidelity, and emotional disconnection. For example, research in other contexts has found correlations between high social media use and decreased marital satisfaction, as well as increased conflict over online interactions. Despite the global attention, there remains limited research focusing specifically on Zambia's socio-cultural context, where marriage is deeply embedded in communal values and moral expectations. This gap in literature justifies the need for an in-depth study that investigates how social media influences marital relationships among couples in Lusaka, particularly in residential areas such as Woodlands and Chalala, which represent the evolving middle-class lifestyle in Zambia (Muchemwa & Tembo, 2021).

Furthermore, the psychological and behavioral effects of social media usage on married individuals cannot be overlooked. Prolonged exposure to social media platforms often creates unrealistic expectations about relationships due to the idealized portrayals of couples online (Satici & Satici, 2023). Constant comparison with others can lead to dissatisfaction, low self-esteem, and feelings of inadequacy within one's own marriage. Additionally, the addictive nature of social media encourages excessive screen time, reducing opportunities for face-to-face interaction and emotional bonding between partners. Disputes may also arise from issues such as digital privacy, password sharing, or inappropriate online friendships, all of which have the potential to erode trust and intimacy (Ni et al., 2025). These behavioral patterns highlight the psychological strain that unchecked social media engagement can impose on marital relationships, reinforcing the importance of understanding its deeper emotional consequences.

1.1 Statement of the problem

The proliferation of social media has significantly transformed communication dynamics within marriages, introducing both opportunities and challenges. While platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, and TikTok facilitate instant communication and connection, excessive or inappropriate use has been associated with various marital issues, including

reduced intimacy, increased jealousy, and suspicions of infidelity. In Zambia, particularly in urban areas such as Lusaka's Woodlands and Chalala neighborhoods, social media usage among married couples has become increasingly prevalent. However, empirical research examining the specific impact of social media on marital relationships in the Zambian context remains limited. Anecdotal evidence and counseling reports suggest that conflicts related to online interactions, time spent on digital platforms, and privacy concerns are contributing to marital strain and dissatisfaction. For instance, a report by the Zambia Daily Mail highlighted that over 62,000 couples divorced between 2016 and 2019, with social media abuse cited as a leading cause (Zambia Daily Mail, 2020). Additionally, a study focusing on marriage counselors in Lusaka district identified social media-related issues as significant factors influencing marital conflicts (Nyundo, 2021). Despite these indications, there is a lack of comprehensive, context-specific studies that explore how social media usage affects communication, trust, emotional intimacy, and overall marital satisfaction among couples in Lusaka. This study, therefore, aimed to fill this gap by investigating the effects of social media usage on marital relationships in the Woodlands and Chalala areas of Lusaka District, Zambia..

1.2 Objectives of the Study

This study was guided by the following objectives;

- i. To examine the effect of social media usage on marital relationships among couples in Woodlands and Chalala areas of Lusaka District.
- ii. To explore the roles and significance of social media usage in the daily interactions of couples in Woodlands and Chalala areas of Lusaka District.
- iii. To identify strategies employed by couples and marriage counselors to manage conflicts arising from social media use in marriages in Woodlands and Chalala areas of Lusaka District.

1.3 Theoretical framework

The study on the Media Dependency Theory and the Social Exchange Theory. According to the Media Dependency Theory (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976; Communication Theory, n.d.), individuals rely on media to understand social reality, satisfy personal needs, and guide their interactions. In marital relationships, couples may use social media for communication, such as messaging or video calls, to maintain emotional connection, especially during periods of physical separation. Social media can also provide emotional support through likes, comments, or sharing experiences, but overreliance may lead to neglect of face-to-face communication and misunderstandings if partners interpret online behaviors differently. Complementarily, the Social Exchange Theory (Homans, 1958; Nickerson, 2022; Verywell Mind, 2022) emphasizes that relationships are guided by cost-benefit analyses, where individuals seek to maximize rewards and minimize losses. In practice, a spouse may perceive benefits from social media, such as social recognition or easier communication with friends, but may also experience costs, including jealousy, trust issues, or reduced intimacy if their partner interacts excessively with others online. By integrating these theories, the study explains how social media serves a dual function in marital relationships—as a facilitator of connectivity and as a potential source of conflict—providing a framework to understand how couples negotiate emotional, social, and relational dynamics in the digital age. This theoretical grounding enables the research to examine not only the patterns of social media use but also the underlying motivations and consequences shaping marital satisfaction and conflict in the Lusaka context.

1.4. Significance of the Study

This study holds significant value for both practical and academic purposes. It offers insights into how social media affects communication, emotional closeness, trust, and conflict resolution among married couples, highlighting both beneficial and potentially harmful effects. The findings may assist couples, counselors, and therapists in developing strategies to manage social media use effectively, fostering healthier and more satisfying marital relationships. Furthermore, the study addresses a research gap in the Zambian context, contributing to the broader understanding of how digital technologies shape family dynamics. Policymakers and social development practitioners may also leverage the results to design educational programs and awareness campaigns promoting responsible social media use within families. Overall, the study underscores the dual role of social media as a tool for connection and a possible source of tension, emphasizing the importance of mindful engagement to sustain strong marital bonds.

2. METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a mixed-methods research design to capture both quantitative and qualitative data. A case study sequential explanatory design was employed, beginning with quantitative data collection through structured questionnaires that assessed the frequency and duration of social media use, perceived impacts on relationship quality, and demographic variables such as age, education, and duration of marriage. This was followed by qualitative data collection using semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions to explore personal experiences, instances of conflict or harmony related to social media, and the cultural and societal influences on usage patterns. A sample of 65 participants was chosen purposively which comprised Marriage counsellors (5), Faith-based advisors (10) and married couples (50) residing in Woodlands and Chalala who were active social media users. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, including means, standard deviations, correlations, and regression analysis, while qualitative data were examined through thematic analysis, involving transcription, coding, categorization, and interpretation of emerging themes. Ethical considerations were central to the study, including informed consent, confidentiality, voluntary participation, and cultural sensitivity. Despite these measures, the study acknowledged limitations such as the potential lack of generalizability, self-reporting biases, and resource constraints.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

3.1. The Effect of Social Media Usage on Marital Relationships among Couples

Table 1: The Effect of Social Media Usage on Marital Relationships among Couples

Theme/Effect	Description	Impact on Marital Relationship	% of Respondents
Enhanced Communication	Social media allows couples to stay in touch through messages, calls, and video chats.	Strengthens emotional connection and intimacy, especially when physically apart.	85%
Emotional Support	Couples use social media to provide encouragement, affection, and reassurance.	Builds trust, reassurance, and emotional closeness.	78%
Conflict and Jealousy	Online interactions sometimes trigger arguments due to perceived inappropriate behavior or excessive use.	Creates tension, mistrust, and reduced satisfaction in the relationship.	65%
Reduced Face-to-Face Interaction	Excessive social media use can lead to less in-person engagement.	Weakens communication quality and reduces relational intimacy.	58%
Information Sharing and Coordination	Social media is used to plan events, share schedules, and manage household responsibilities.	Improves household organization and joint decision-making.	72%
Monitoring and Validation	Partners check each other’s social media profiles or share posts for affirmation.	Can strengthen commitment if positive, or cause jealousy if perceived negatively.	60%
Entertainment and Leisure	Couples engage in shared online activities such as watching videos or commenting on posts.	Enhances bonding and shared enjoyment, but can distract from real-life interaction.	55%

The findings of the study revealed that social media usage had a profound influence on the nature, quality, and stability of marital relationships among couples in Woodlands and Chalala areas of Lusaka District. The majority of participants indicated that frequent use of social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, TikTok, and Instagram negatively affected communication patterns between partners. One of the respondents pointed out that:

“Excessive time spent online often reduced meaningful face-to-face conversations, resulting in emotional disconnection and misunderstandings”.

Additionally, some respondents noted that their partners would spend long hours browsing or chatting online, leading to feelings of neglect and decreased intimacy. This finding corresponds with Abbasi & Alghamdi (2018), who observed that

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couples who excessively engage on social media tend to experience weakened interpersonal communication and reduced emotional closeness due to digital distractions. The constant accessibility of social media also blurred the boundaries between online and offline interactions, making it difficult for couples to maintain privacy and emotional focus within their marriages.

The study further established that social media contributed to heightened trust and jealousy issues within relationships. Many couples admitted that monitoring each other's social media activities often led to suspicion and insecurity. For instance, partners became jealous or anxious when their spouses interacted frequently with members of the opposite sex through comments, messages, or shared photos. Some participants recounted instances where private messages discovered on a partner's phone caused arguments, emotional distress, or even temporary separation. These findings reinforce earlier research by Muise et al. (2009), which revealed that online surveillance behaviors on platforms such as Facebook intensify jealousy and decrease relational satisfaction. In the local context, the accessibility of smartphones and the growing popularity of social media among Zambian adults have increased the likelihood of such conflicts, especially when partners lack mutual trust or fail to set digital boundaries.

Additionally, the research found that time management and attention diversion played a significant role in shaping marital dynamics. Couples frequently reported that their partners prioritized social media activities, such as chatting, posting, or scrolling through feeds, over shared responsibilities and quality time. This behavior often led to feelings of being undervalued or ignored. Consistent with Adebayo & Oladele (2020), the study confirmed that social media addiction can lead to neglect of spousal duties and deterioration of emotional connection, thereby reducing overall marital satisfaction. One of the respondents highlighted that

"Their partners' excessive online engagement extended late into the night, causing arguments over phone usage, sleep disruption, and a decline in marital intimacy".

Despite these challenges, the study revealed that social media also presented certain positive aspects for marital relationships. Several participants acknowledged that digital platforms helped them stay connected with their spouses during work hours or when separated by distance. Through messaging, video calls, and sharing photos or affectionate posts, some couples experienced enhanced emotional bonding and appreciation. This observation is consistent with Hertlein & Blumer (2014), who asserted that social media can facilitate relational closeness when used purposefully and responsibly. For example, some participants stated that WhatsApp made it easier to coordinate family matters, express affection, or resolve minor misunderstandings quickly, highlighting the dual nature of social media in either strengthening or straining relationships depending on how it is utilized.

Furthermore, the study revealed gender differences in perceptions and experiences of social media use. Female participants frequently associated their partners' online activities with emotional neglect, while male participants often expressed feelings of mistrust due to being overly monitored or accused of infidelity. Such findings echo Clayton et al. (2013), who observed that men and women interpret online interactions differently, leading to gender-specific relational conflicts. The data also showed that younger couples were more likely to experience conflicts stemming from social media compared to older couples, who tended to limit their online presence or use social media primarily for communication purposes.

Importantly, the study highlighted that the degree of impact of social media on marriage was influenced by individual and relational factors such as self-control, mutual respect, communication skills, and trust. Couples who established clear boundaries, practiced transparency, and prioritized direct communication were less affected by the negative consequences of social media use. Conversely, relationships characterized by insecurity, secrecy, and lack of communication were more vulnerable to conflicts arising from online interactions. This finding aligns with the arguments by Elphinston & Noller (2011), who found that couples with strong relationship satisfaction and emotional security are less likely to experience distress due to social networking behaviors. Therefore, the study concludes that while social media offers a platform for connection, information sharing, and affection, its misuse or overuse can significantly undermine marital trust, emotional intimacy, and overall relationship stability among couples in Woodlands and Chalala.

3.2. The Roles and Significance of Social Media Usage in the Daily Interactions of Couples

The findings of the study revealed that social media played diverse and multidimensional roles in the lives of couples residing in Woodlands and Chalala areas of Lusaka District. Participants generally acknowledged that social media had

become a significant part of their daily interactions, shaping how they communicated, expressed affection, and managed relational responsibilities. The study established that one of the primary roles of social media among couples was facilitating communication and emotional connection. Many respondents noted that platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, and Instagram allowed them to stay in touch throughout the day, especially when physically apart due to work or other commitments. Through these digital channels, couples shared updates, photos, and affectionate messages that contributed to maintaining intimacy and emotional support. This finding is consistent with previous studies by Hertlein & Stevenson (2010) and Coyne et al. (2011), who emphasized that technology enhances accessibility and promotes relational closeness in modern marriages by bridging geographical and emotional distances. Similarly, Billedo, Kerkhof, & Finkenauer (2015) observed that social networking sites serve as essential tools for maintaining both long-distance and geographically close romantic relationships, as they enable partners to express love and emotional care regularly. In the context of Lusaka, where urban work patterns often keep couples physically apart during the day, social media emerged as a convenient avenue for maintaining emotional contact, validating Hertlein & Blumer's (2014) assertion that digital communication has become an integral component of modern marital intimacy.

Moreover, the study identified the role of social media in information sharing and coordination of family responsibilities. Participants explained that they often used social media to plan family events, discuss financial issues, share schedules, and manage daily household matters. The convenience and immediacy of platforms such as WhatsApp groups made communication more efficient, especially for couples juggling work and family life. These findings align with Coyne et al. (2011), who found that social media use within romantic relationships enhances coordination and daily interaction. Similarly, Chan (2018) argued that digital tools promote relational organization by enabling couples to manage time, obligations, and family communication more effectively. Therefore, in households where both partners are employed, social media functioned not only as a medium of affection but also as an administrative tool that enhanced efficiency and connectedness within family life.

However, despite these benefits, the study revealed that social media also served as a source of conflict and emotional tension among couples. Many respondents expressed that disagreements often arose from partners' online activities, such as excessive chatting with friends of the opposite sex, secretive behavior, or overexposure of personal matters on social platforms. In some instances, the visibility of online interactions triggered arguments, mistrust, and jealousy, particularly when partners perceived flirtatious behavior or inappropriate communication. This finding aligns with Clayton, Nagurney & Smith (2013), who found that frequent social media use was associated with increased relational conflict, jealousy, and even breakup risks among romantic partners. Similarly, Elphinston & Noller (2011) demonstrated that Facebook intrusion—characterized by constant partner monitoring—intensifies jealousy and decreases overall relationship satisfaction. The results in the Zambian context suggest that these digital conflicts reflect broader global trends where privacy concerns, online boundaries, and trust negotiation have become central themes in digital-age marriages.

Additionally, the study found that social media played a role in relationship monitoring and validation. A significant number of respondents admitted to checking their partners' social media profiles, posts, and online friends as a way of assessing fidelity and trustworthiness. Some participants stated that public expressions of affection, such as posting couple photos or anniversary messages, served as social validation of their relationship's strength. Others, however, viewed such acts as performative or superficial, arguing that public displays did not necessarily reflect genuine emotional connection. These patterns resonate with findings by Muise et al (2009), who noted that partners' tendency to observe or monitor each other's social media activity often leads to relational anxiety and conflict. Likewise, Dainton & Stokes (2015) found that while social media validation can strengthen relational identity, it can also create pressure for couples to conform to idealized online portrayals of love and happiness, which may not reflect their actual emotional experiences.

Furthermore, the research indicated that social media served an educational and advisory role for couples. Several participants noted that they used social media platforms to access relationship advice pages, marriage counseling content, and faith-based guidance, which helped them address conflicts or strengthen communication. Platforms such as Facebook groups and YouTube channels provided forums where couples could learn from others' experiences or seek emotional support. This finding supports the work of Billedo et al. (2015), who found that couples use online platforms not only for communication but also as sources of relational education and social learning. Similarly, Ogolsky et al (2017) observed that exposure to relationship advice on social media can encourage positive communication habits and mutual empathy between partners. However, the study also revealed that some participants cautioned against overreliance on online information,

warning that unverified relationship advice could sometimes create unrealistic expectations or misunderstandings, echoing concerns raised by Hertlein & Blumer (2014) regarding the unregulated nature of digital relational guidance.

Gender and age differences also emerged in how social media’s roles were perceived. Female participants often used social media to maintain emotional closeness and seek social support networks, while male participants tended to use it for information exchange, news, and entertainment. Younger couples were more interactive and expressive online, whereas older couples reported limited engagement, preferring direct face-to-face communication. These generational differences are consistent with the findings of Valkenburg & Peter (2011), who emphasized that age, gender, and digital literacy influence how individuals integrate technology into their relational lives. Similarly, McDaniel & Coyne (2016) observed that younger adults are more prone to “technoference,” where digital devices disrupt couple communication and intimacy. In contrast, older couples demonstrated more selective and utilitarian use of social media, indicating that maturity and digital discipline can mitigate potential relational strains associated with technology.

Overall, the findings suggest that social media plays both constructive and disruptive roles in marital relationships among couples in Woodlands and Chalala. When used responsibly, it fosters communication, collaboration, and emotional connection; however, misuse and overreliance on digital interactions can create misunderstandings, jealousy, and relational distance. These findings reinforce the dual nature of technology described by Hertlein and Stevenson (2010), who noted that digital tools can either strengthen or destabilize intimacy depending on patterns of use. Therefore, the study underscores the importance of digital literacy, self-regulation, and mutual trust as essential strategies for promoting healthy marital relationships in the digital era.

3.3. Strategies Employed by Couples and Marriage Counselors to Manage Conflicts Arising from Social Media Use in Marriages

Table 2: Strategies Employed by Couples and Marriage Counselors to Manage Conflicts Arising from Social Media Use in Marriages

Strategy	Description	Impact on Marital Relationship	% of Respondents
Effective Communication	Couples engage in open and honest discussions about online behaviors, expectations, and boundaries.	Reduces misunderstandings and strengthens trust between partners.	88%
Mutual Boundaries	Couples establish agreed rules on social media use, including time limits and acceptable interactions.	Prevents jealousy and reduces potential conflict.	74%
Trust-Building and Reassurance	Partners practice transparency, emotional reassurance, and affirmations to maintain trust.	Enhances relational security and reduces anxiety related to social media.	69%
Professional Counselling	Marriage counsellors provide guidance on handling conflicts and improving online communication.	Supports conflict resolution, empathy, and emotional regulation.	55%
Time Management / Digital Balance	Couples create device-free periods to prioritize face-to-face interaction and quality time.	Strengthens emotional bonds and reduces dependency on social media.	63%
Self-Awareness and Emotional Control	Partners reflect on their own online behaviors and practice emotional regulation.	Promotes responsible social media use and prevents escalation of conflicts.	51%

The study revealed that couples and marriage counsellors in Woodlands and Chalala areas of Lusaka District employed a variety of strategies to manage and mitigate conflicts arising from social media usage. A major theme that emerged was the importance of effective communication between partners. Most participants emphasized that open and honest communication helped prevent misunderstandings and reduce the likelihood of social media-related conflicts. Couples who

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practiced transparent discussions about their online interactions, boundaries, and expectations reported higher levels of trust and relationship satisfaction. This finding supports the observations of Rusbult et al. (2011), who noted that constructive communication fosters problem-solving and mutual understanding in romantic relationships. Similarly, Stafford and Merolla (2007) highlighted that maintaining open dialogue helps partners regulate relational tensions and reinforce trust, especially in the digital era where miscommunication can easily occur through text-based interactions.

Another significant strategy identified was the establishment of mutual boundaries and social media guidelines within relationships. Participants explained that setting clear limits on online behaviors—such as refraining from sending flirtatious messages, limiting unnecessary friend requests, or avoiding over-sharing private matters—helped promote respect, accountability, and transparency between partners. Couples emphasized that jointly agreeing on acceptable levels of online engagement not only reduced feelings of jealousy and suspicion but also fostered a sense of shared responsibility in protecting the relationship from unnecessary conflict. These findings align with Hertlein & Blumer (2014), who argued that clearly defined technology boundaries within romantic relationships enhance mutual respect and reduce relational anxiety. Similarly, Roberts & David (2016) highlighted that couples who implement digital boundaries tend to experience fewer instances of “technoference,” a term describing interruptions to quality time caused by digital distractions, thereby supporting healthier communication and stronger emotional connections. In the context of Woodlands and Chalala, respondents noted that jointly developed social media guidelines, combined with face-to-face quality time, created a structured approach that strengthened trust and minimized potential conflicts arising from online interactions.

The study also found that trust-building and emotional reassurance were central to managing conflicts linked to social media use among couples. Several respondents explained that when feelings of suspicion, jealousy, or insecurity arose, proactive strategies such as verbal affirmation, transparent communication about online activities, and mutually agreed-upon access to social media accounts played a crucial role in rebuilding and maintaining trust. Couples noted that openly discussing concerns about online interactions, clarifying misunderstandings promptly, and providing consistent emotional support helped reduce tension and prevent minor disagreements from escalating. These practices closely align with the relational maintenance theory proposed by Canary & Stafford (1992), which emphasizes positivity, assurance, and openness as key behaviors in sustaining healthy and stable relationships. Furthermore, the findings are reinforced by Utz and Beukeboom (2011), who reported that couples who regularly express trust and emotional security online tend to experience more resilient and enduring relationships. In the context of Woodlands and Chalala, participants highlighted that such trust-building measures were especially effective when combined with shared offline activities, suggesting that a balance of digital transparency and face-to-face engagement strengthens relational stability.

In addition to individual and couple-level strategies, the role of professional counselling and spiritual guidance was also highlighted as an effective approach to managing social media-induced conflicts. Marriage counsellors and faith-based advisors in the study indicated that: *“they often encourage couples to adopt forgiveness, empathy, and self-regulation techniques”*. Counsellors also reported using workshops and couple therapy sessions to help partners identify the underlying causes of online conflict and improve digital literacy regarding responsible social media use. These interventions align with findings by Hertlein (2012), who argued that therapeutic approaches integrating technology awareness and communication training can significantly improve marital satisfaction in the digital age. Moreover, Fincham & Beach (2010) emphasized that forgiveness and emotional regulation are key in repairing relationship ruptures caused by digital misunderstandings or perceived betrayals.

Another emerging theme was the adoption of time management and digital balance as preventive measures to mitigate the potentially negative effects of social media on marital relationships. Couples in Woodlands and Chalala reported intentionally designating specific periods as “device-free” times—such as during shared meals, evenings, or weekends—where they could fully focus on each other without the distractions of phones, social media, or other digital platforms. For instance, some participants mentioned dedicating Sunday afternoons to family activities or evening walks without checking social media, while others emphasized turning off notifications during dinner to encourage meaningful conversations. Participants noted that:

“These intentional breaks from online engagement created opportunities for deeper conversations, shared activities, and quality bonding, which contributed to a greater sense of emotional closeness and mutual understanding”.

This conscious effort to balance digital and offline interactions appeared to reduce reliance on online communication for emotional support, thereby fostering healthier relational dynamics. These findings align with the recommendations of Przybylski and Weinstein (2013), who observed that excessive smartphone use during shared time is associated with lower

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relationship satisfaction, whereas deliberate digital disconnection can enhance intimacy, emotional presence, and overall relationship quality. Moreover, such strategies reflect a growing awareness among couples in these areas of the need to establish boundaries around technology use to protect marital well-being in an increasingly connected world.

Finally, the study noted that self-awareness and personal responsibility played a crucial role in conflict management. Couples who recognized their own online behaviors and reflected on how their social media habits affected their partners demonstrated better emotional intelligence and conflict resolution outcomes. This observation is consistent with the findings of Dainton & Berkos (2011), who argued that self-monitoring and emotional regulation are essential for maintaining harmony in digitally mediated relationships. It was evident that social media conflicts could be effectively managed through a combination of communication, trust, boundary setting, and professional support, provided that both partners were committed to mutual respect and accountability.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Couples should be educated on how excessive social media use can negatively affect marital satisfaction and increase conflicts. Setting clear boundaries, such as specific “phone-free” periods, can help preserve trust, communication, and intimacy in the relationship.
2. Instead of using social media individually, couples should participate in online activities together, such as watching videos, playing games, or browsing content. Shared online experiences can strengthen communication, understanding, and emotional connection between partners.
3. Community-based interventions, such as marriage counseling sessions and support groups, can equip couples with strategies to manage conflicts arising from social media use. These programs can also enhance communication skills and guide couples on responsible technology use within their relationships.
4. Couples should be encouraged to openly discuss their social media habits, online friendships, and any concerns that arise. Transparent communication can reduce misunderstandings, build trust, and prevent social media from becoming a source of conflict in the marriage.

5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the study found that social media plays a dual role in marriage. While it enhances communication, emotional connection, and the sharing of information, excessive or inappropriate use can reduce face-to-face interaction, create misunderstandings, and foster jealousy or mistrust. Couples used social media to maintain intimacy, celebrate milestones, and seek advice, but challenges arose when one partner engaged more actively than the other or when online content created unrealistic expectations. Effective management of social media's impact depended on open communication, mutual boundaries, trust-building, and professional support, with counselling, emotional reassurance, and digital balance proving essential in resolving conflicts. Overall, social media can strengthen or strain marital relationships depending on how it is used, highlighting the importance of awareness, trust, and intentional management of online interactions to maintain healthy and fulfilling marriages.

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