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Modern relationships and social media: exploring the digital dynamics of husband–wife interactions

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Social media has become an integral part of modern communication, significantly impacting various aspects of daily life, including interpersonal relationships. In the Palestinian West Bank, where social and cultural norms shape marital dynamics, understanding the role of social media in husband–wife interactions is essential. This study seeks to investigate how social media influences husband–wife interactions in Palestine. Specifically, it aims to address the following questions: How do Palestinian couples perceive the impact of social media on their marital relationships? Are there any gender differences in these perceptions? How do demographic factors such as location, duration of marriage, career status, and education influence the usage patterns of social media and the perceptions of its impact on marital relationships among Palestinian couples? A survey was conducted among 388 Palestinian couples in the West Bank of Palestine in April 2023. The survey instrument collected data on participants' demographics, social media usage patterns, and perceptions regarding the influence of social media on marital dynamics. Statistical analysis, including descriptive statistics and inferential tests, was employed to analyze the data and draw meaningful conclusions. Gender differences were observed in the perceptions of social media's impact on marital relationships, with women generally holding more optimistic views. Additionally, participants from rural areas tended to exhibit a more positive outlook, reflecting the influence of prevailing social norms. Social media was predominantly integrated into early-stage partnerships, primarily fulfilling connectivity and communication needs. Furthermore, demographic factors such as the duration of marriage, career status, and level of education were found to influence individuals' social media usage patterns. The study promoted conscious usage as a cornerstone of successful relationships because it acknowledges the complex balance between benefits and costs in marital relationships affected by social media. It highlights the need for intentional digital engagement and transparent communication strategies among Palestinian couples.

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Introduction

In Palestinian Muslim society, couples often navigate their relationships within a framework that emphasizes traditional gender roles and familial expectations (Meller & Marnin-Distelfeld, 2023). The cultural context of the West Bank is characterized by strong community ties, religious values, and social norms that influence every aspect of daily life, including marital relationships and social media usage (Eger, 2021).

In this society, marriage is highly valued, and the roles of husbands and wives are often clearly defined, with a significant emphasis on family cohesion and social reputation (Eger, 2021). Social media usage among couples is influenced by these cultural norms, where public and private boundaries are carefully maintained (Wafi, 2017). Unlike some Western contexts, where individualism may play a more prominent role, Palestinian couples often prioritize collective family interests and community standards (Meller, 2017). The use of digital technologies and social media has transformed how people communicate, access information, and build social networks (Li et al., 2022).

The evolution of digital communication platforms has profoundly transformed the nature of interpersonal interactions. With the emergence and proliferation of social media platforms, the world has witnessed a significant shift towards a more interconnected global landscape (Romeo, 2024). Physical barriers, once perceived as insurmountable, have been effectively diminished, paving the way for the creation of a "global village" rich with the intermingling of myriad cultures and traditions. This dramatic transformation has left indelible imprints across various facets of human life, leading to a range of outcomes - some beneficial, others detrimental. One of the more prominent areas affected by this digital revolution is the realm of conjugal relationships, a foundational element of the societal framework. As spouses increasingly turn to social media to forge connections and craft their virtual personas, there is an alarming trend towards fractured familial bonds. These modern relationships, in many cases, tragically lack the deep emotional connective tissue that once was the bedrock of their unity (Thomassin et al. 2016).

In an era where social media has seamlessly integrated itself into the very fabric of our daily experiences, its impact is far more profound than just keeping in touch with friends or sharing snapshots of life's moments. These platforms are not mere tools; they have become ubiquitous fixtures that touch almost every dimension of our modern society, reshaping even the intimate corridors of close personal relationships. While there is no denying that social media has been a groundbreaking force, ushering in an unprecedented era of global connectivity and communication, it is also ushered in a set of unique challenges. Relationships, especially those between spouses, have felt the ripple effects of this digital revolution. The dynamics have evolved, sometimes becoming more complex, due to the omnipresence of these platforms. This transformation has been observed and documented by many scholars over the years, including the works of Amin et al. (2020), Bhatti et al. (2019), Muftah, (2022), and Rieger and Christoph, (2019), who have examined the multifaceted implications of social media on marital and conjugal relationships.

In the digital age, people's social tendencies have evolved to become intrinsically tied to online platforms, with many turning to social media to fulfill not only their connectivity desires but also their emotional requisites (Gull et al. 2019). As we will see, this digital socialization has had a profound impact on intimate relationships, particularly those between husbands and wives.

A significant consequence of social media's rise is its alteration of communication patterns and behaviors in romantic relationships. Social media not only connects distant friends but has also narrowed the communication gap between spouses. As posited by Leighton et al. (2021), these platforms have particularly aided married couples in bolstering their communication dynamics. Social media Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter have transcended mere entertainment; they have become crucial avenues for couples. They provide a canvas for couples to showcase their shared memories, exchange messages, chronicle shared experiences, and display their affection for all to see. Such public affirmations of love, as outlined by Konlan et al. (2023), can indeed strengthen the relationship's bond. Furthermore, these digital realms serve not just as interaction spaces but as sanctuaries fostering genuine connections. As Joo and Teng, (2017) pointed out, these platforms can be crucibles where couples reaffirm their commitment, rekindle their passion, and express their undying love, leveraging digital means to reinforce real-life bonds.

While social media can nurture a sense of community and support for couples online, meeting their emotional, psychological, and social needs, it also introduces challenges that have the potential to strain marital relationships. Aydin et al. (2018) noted that the very benefits of online community and support can paradoxically have detrimental effects on offline relationships. The balance between online engagement and real-life connection can sometimes tilt, leading to issues rooted in social media use. Specifically, when couples do not manage their social media habits effectively within the confines of their relationship, they may face feelings of loneliness, mistrust, jealousy, and privacy concerns (Gull et al. 2019; Kimeto, 2016; Latifi, 2015). These feelings can be intensified by the constant exposure to idealized portrayals of other couples' lives. The allure of these online interactions, especially when compared to one's personal life, can magnify feelings of dissatisfaction and insecurity, and in extreme cases, even influence a couple's decision regarding separation or divorce (Konlan et al. 2023). A related concern arises when one partner becomes overly preoccupied with the other's online behavior. This undue interest in a partner's online activities can breed discomfort and suspicion within the relationship (Arikewuyo et al. 2021). Moreover, misinterpretations can occur, especially when one partner reads ambiguous posts or comments made by or about the other. Without direct communication, these misinterpretations can have a detrimental effect, negatively impacting the joy, stability, and security intrinsic to intimate relationships. Fox and Warber, (2014) highlighted how couples might even monitor each other's online behavior, and this surveillance can compound the issues, with partners making detrimental assumptions instead of having open dialogues.

The pervasive influence of social media is evident not only at the individual or dyadic level but also within broader social constructs and networks. Contemporary digital platforms, due to their inherently engaging design, can be captivating, leading users into patterns reminiscent of compulsive behaviors. Such a proclivity can siphon off invaluable interpersonal time and engender potential relational discord (Konlan et al. 2023). A salient consequence of this digital integration into daily life is the ubiquitous sharing and portrayal of personal journeys, relational milestones, and even intimate tribulations. This phenomenon catalyzes novel paradigms of social comparison, where individuals juxtapose their relational experiences against those portrayed online. Consequently, this offers a conduit for extrinsic factors to modulate perceptions of relational contentment. Such a dynamic can inadvertently impose undue pressures or cultivate misaligned expectations, thereby recalibrating and potentially destabilizing inherent relationship dynamics (Verduyn et al. 2020; Appel et al. 2016).

The rise of social media has given researchers a new dimension to explore in the context of marital relationships. Many studies

have shed light on its intricate impact, especially platforms like Facebook. For instance, Bahri and Widhyharto, (2021) and Qashmar, (2020) have unveiled both the positive and negative impacts of social media on marital quality, emphasizing the significance of mindful usage. Adegboyega, (2022) found that social media can often lead to disruptions in marriages, manifesting in conflicts and infidelity. Similarly, Restya (2019) found that social media plays a significant role in facilitating infidelity, which is subsequently linked to dissatisfaction and conflict. Ghanim and Al-Muhadeen, (2021) went a step further, linking excessive social media usage to heightened divorce rates, while proposing potential interventions like household rules and educational initiatives.

Contrarily, there are some findings that challenge the prevalent negative narrative. Aljasir study (2022) intriguingly suggested that "phubbing" or checking phones during conversations, predominantly due to social media engagement, might increase relationship satisfaction. Peerzade and Shaikh (2022) found no negative correlation between marital satisfaction and excessive social media use. Additionally, while Bouffard et al. (2021) acknowledged potential harm to marriages from excessive Instagram use, they also pointed out that personal sacrifices made for a spouse could act as a counterbalance. Scrutinizing the subtle differentiations, McDaniel et al. (2017) explored the myriad potential effects of online activities on relationships, while Trotter et al. (2019) engaged in a detailed discussion on the nuanced impact of perceived interference from social media. In summary, the diverse findings from these studies underscore the multifaceted role of social media in shaping marital dynamics. They collectively stress the importance of a balanced and conscious approach to social media use within the realm of marital relationships.

In conclusion, these studies have shown that social media engagement can lead to marital disruptions, conflicts, and incidents of infidelity. However, the intensity of these impacts varies depending on factors such as the duration of the marriage, age, educational level, and gender. While some research suggests curbing social media use as a measure to strengthen marital bonds, others emphasize the importance of personal sacrifices and mindful social media usage. Additionally, studies have explored the role of social media in facilitating infidelity, influencing marital dynamics, and contributing to divorce rates. The complex relationship between social media use and relationship satisfaction is evident, with factors like perceived interference and social media addiction playing a role.

Theoretical framework

To explore the influence of social media platforms on married couples, this research employs Social Exchange Theory (SET). Social Exchange Theory (SET) emphasizes the importance of reciprocity and fairness in relationships, where individuals and organizations engage in interactions expecting that the benefits will outweigh the costs (Rehan et al. 2023). This theory, considered a family of conceptual models, underlines the idea that when exchanges result in greater rewards than expenses, trust, commitment, and relational norms are established, fostering ongoing relationships (Mikayelyan, 2022). To explore the influence of social media platforms on married couples, this research employs SET, which is rooted in the principles of behavioral economics and interpersonal dynamics. It offers a lens to view relationships through a transactional perspective, emphasizing the inherent costs and rewards in interpersonal interactions. Fundamentally, SET postulates that individuals enter into relationships predicated upon the anticipation of maximizing benefits and concurrently minimizing potential detriments. Decisions,

then, are perceived to be grounded in these analyses—whether the rewards of an interaction or relationship outweigh its associated costs. For relationships to endure, they must be perceived as beneficial by those involved. Communication serves as a pivotal tool in this theory, allowing individuals to express their needs, negotiate wants, understand potential rewards, and make known the costs.

In the context of social media, couples are challenged to strike a balance, taking into account each partner's needs, expectations, and boundaries (Bouffard et al., 2021). The challenges they face in achieving this balance are influenced by various factors, such as role reversals (Musa, 2014), caregiving responsibilities due to illnesses (Sutton et al. 2020), and the effective management of work-home boundaries, as well as dealing with role overload and conflict among family members (Kreiner et al. 2009). Moreover, applying SET to social media use among couples allows us to explore how these platforms recalibrate the cost-benefit scales in marital interactions. For instance, do the rewards of connectivity, networking, and shared digital experiences on these platforms outweigh the costs of distraction, potential conflict, or even infidelity? The instant gratification and vast outreach offered by these platforms may skew perceptions of what is 'beneficial' in the immediate term, even if detrimental in the long run.

This theory offers insight into how couples navigate the trade-offs of rewards and costs associated with social media usage within their relationship. It also highlights the pivotal role of communication and negotiation in sustaining relationship satisfaction (Aljasir, 2022). By promoting open and candid communication about social media habits, establishing boundaries, and addressing concerns, couples can potentially reduce the negative impacts and amplify the positive influences of social media on marital relations (Bahri & Widhyharto, 2021). Research further highlights the critical role of clear communication, mutual support, and coping mechanisms, such as cognitive restructuring and problem-focused coping, in navigating these challenges (Lee et al. 2023). To foster a harmonious and balanced marital relationship that respects the individual needs and expectations of both partners, couples must establish strong moral principles, share caregiving responsibilities, set boundaries, and implement effective coping strategies. Additionally, individuals facing digital social challenges, including those with cognitive disabilities, utilize both emotion-focused coping (acceptance, avoidance) and problem-focused coping (confrontation, cooperation) to navigate these obstacles, emphasizing the importance of accessing problem-solving and social resources (Schetsche, 2022).

Social Exchange Theory proposes that individuals engage in relationships based on the perceived costs and rewards involved (Thibault & Kelly, 1959). In the context of social media and husband-wife relations, the theory can be applied to understand how social media usage influences the exchange dynamics between spouses. According to Social Exchange Theory, social media can offer rewards such as increased communication, social support, and validation from peers (Leighton et al. 2021). It provides a platform for couples to express affection publicly (Gull et al. 2019), share experiences (Konlan et al. 2023), and maintain a sense of connection (Joo andTeng, 2017). These rewards contribute positively to the relationship, enhancing closeness and satisfaction.

However, social media also introduces costs to husband-wife relations (Bouffard et al. 2021). It can lead to feelings of jealousy, privacy concerns, and the potential for excessive digital consumption, which may strain the relationship (Gull et al. 2019). The constant exposure to curated portrayals of other couples' lives on social media platforms can also create social comparison and unrealistic expectations, further influencing relationship dynamics (Verduyn et al. 2020).

This article examines the complex effects of social media on husband-wife relationships, highlighting both the advantages and disadvantages of this digital environment. By examining how social media usage intersects with marital dynamics, we can better understand the opportunities, conflicts, and changes experienced by couples today. We will scrutinize the impact of social media on various aspects of husband-wife relationships, including trust, privacy, emotional well-being, and its role in conflict resolution. Through this exploration, we hope to provide valuable insights and practical recommendations for couples adapting to the continuously evolving digital realm of their relationships.

Our study focuses exclusively on heterosexual and cisgender couples, reflecting the prevailing demographic characteristics and cultural norms of the West Bank (Withers, 2024). This specific focus allows us to analyze how these couples perceive and use social media within their unique cultural context. While global studies on social media usage provide valuable insights, it is crucial to consider the distinctive social and cultural dynamics at play in the West Bank.

Participants and procedures
A survey was conducted in April 2023, focusing on Palestinian couples residing in the West Bank. The participants, consisting of 388 Palestinian adults (120 males and 268 females), were recruited using online tools. Because there are no gender categories beyond male and female among couples in the cultural context of Muslim society in the West Bank, all couples in our study are heterosexual and cisgender. This reflects the prevailing norms and demographic characteristics of the population we surveyed. The participants were thoroughly informed about the study's objectives and subsequently provided their oral consent. A geographical breakdown revealed that 38.1% of the participants lived in urban areas of the West Bank, while the remaining 61.9% hailed from rural regions. Analyzing their marital durations, 33% had been married for less than five years, 26.8% for six to ten years, 11.3% for eleven to fifteen years, and 28.9% had been married for over fifteen years. In terms of educational background, 66% of couples both possessed academic degrees. In 9.3% of cases, only the husband had a degree, and in 19.6%, only the wife did. For 5.2% of the couples, neither partner held an academic degree. Regarding employment, 60.8% of the couples were both actively working, while in 39.2% of cases, only the husband was employed. Social media usage varied, with 21.6% using platforms for less than two hours daily, 40.2% for two to four hours, 28.9% for four to six hours, and 9.3% spending more than seven hours daily. To be included in the study, participants were required to be 1) Palestinians, 2) not to have being previously diagnosed with mental health disorders, and 3) Native Arabic speakers. The study was approved by Institutional Review Board (IRB) of An-Najah National University before data collection was administered.

Measures
In order to examine the complex interactions between social media use and marital relationships among Palestinian couples living in the West Bank of Palestine, the research employed a self-constructed, extensive survey. Conducted in April 2023, this survey aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of how social media platforms affect various aspects of marital relationships. The target population for the study consisted of Palestinian couples residing in the West Bank. A total of 388 individuals participated in the study, including 268 women and 120 men. Online technologies facilitated the recruitment of participants, making data collection both convenient and accessible.

The survey began by collecting participants' basic demographic information. Participants provided details on a variety of elements, including gender, age, area of residence (urban, rural, or refugee camp), years of marriage, kinship ties between spouses, income levels, educational backgrounds, and employment status for both partners. This demographic data was essential for understanding the diverse backgrounds and situations of the participating couples.

Participants were asked about their social media usage patterns. They were also presented with a series of statements to gauge their perceptions of social media's impact on marital relationships. These statements included a range of topics, from the potential benefits of social media, such as enhancing relationships, improving communication, easing conflict resolution, encouraging emotional openness, aiding in understanding each other's interests, and helping couples stay connected when apart, to its challenges, like affecting privacy, trust, and intimacy. The study also explored potential negatives, including distractions, misunderstandings, jealousy, unfounded comparisons, and confrontations stemming from social media interactions. The social media interaction questionnaire consisted of 23 items developed by the authors to test knowledge, attitudes, and behavior relating to role of social media in couples' interaction. A committee of experts in psychology reviewed the items of the scale for content validity and comprehensiveness. The researchers used a score of 80% agreement between experts for the inclusion of each item. Accordingly, the researchers modified some items of the scale and changed the interpretation for others; minor modifications were also made on the basis of feedback from committee members. A 5-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) allowed participants to rate each item. The cut off score of the scale ranged from 1 to 2.33 (low), 2.34 to 3.67 (moderate), and 3.67 to 5 (high). In order to test the validity of the scale, the scale was distributed to (80) participants independent of the sample of the study (the validity sample). The scale indicated a high level of construct validity in assessing the role of social media in couples' interaction and correlations between items, with the total score of the scale ranging between $(0.41 − 0.62)$. Moreover, the results of an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) indicated a stable one factor construct of our scale. Finally, Cronbach's alpha coefficients indicated high internal consistency for the total scale (0.90).

Findings
To provide a comprehensive overview of participants' perceptions of the impact of social media on various aspects of marital interaction, descriptive statistics for all survey items and the total score, based on responses from 388 participants are calculated and shown in (Table 1). The data highlights areas where social media is perceived to have a significant influence on marital relationships, offering a detailed analysis of its effects.

The survey items that received high scores indicate significant negative impacts of social media on marital relationships. Specifically, participants reported that social media has affected the privacy and trust within their relationships (Q9, Mean: 3.53) and led to misunderstandings and miscommunication with their spouses (Q16, Mean: 3.43). Additionally, social media was perceived to increase jealousy and insecurity (Q17, Mean: 3.34), expose relationships to potential threats and temptations (Q18, Mean: 3.73), and negatively influence trust and privacy (Q21, Mean: 3.44). It also created a sense of distance and detachment (Q22, Mean: 3.52) and caused a decrease in emotional intimacy between partners (Q23, Mean: 3.43). These moderate and high scores suggest that participants perceive social media as having a detrimental effect on crucial aspects of their relationships, such as trust, communication, and emotional closeness.

Table 1 Descriptive statistics for all items and total score (N = 388).

No.	Items	M	SD	%	Degree
Q1	Social media platforms have positively influenced communication between me and my spouse.	2.72	1.01	0.54	Moderate
Q2	I believe that social media has strengthened the bond between me and my spouse.	2.36	0.87	0.47	Moderate
Q3	Social media has increased the frequency of interactions between me and my spouse.	2.55	1.01	0.51	Moderate
Q4	Social media has helped me and my spouse share our thoughts and feelings more openly.	2.46	1.09	0.49	Moderate
Q5	I feel that social media has made it easier for me and my spouse to resolve conflicts.	2.27	1.06	0.45	Low
Q6	Social media has provided opportunities for me and my spouse to express our love and affection.	2.45	1.08	0.49	Moderate
Q7	Social media has improved our understanding of each other's interests and hobbies.	2.63	1.08	0.52	Moderate
Q8	Social media has allowed me and my spouse to stay connected during times of physical separation.	3.16	1.25	0.63	Moderate
Q9	Social media has affected the privacy and trust within our relationship.	3.53	1.11	0.70	Moderate
Q10	Social media has facilitated emotional support and encouragement between me and my spouse.	2.73	1.02	0.54	Moderate
Q11	Social media has enabled us to celebrate and share milestones and achievements together.	2.92	1.13	0.58	Moderate
Q12	Social media has influenced our decisions and choices as a couple.	2.63	0.97	0.52	Moderate
Q13	Social media has provided us with a platform to seek advice and guidance for our relationship.	2.36	1.06	0.47	Low
Q14	Social media has influenced our perception of what a successful relationship should look like.	2.60	1.10	0.52	Moderate
Q15*	Social media has created distractions and reduced the quality of our face-to-face interactions.	3.06	1.20	0.61	Moderate
Q16	Social media has led to misunderstandings and miscommunication between me and my spouse.	3.43	1.20	0.68	Moderate
Q17*	Social media has increased jealousy and insecurity in our relationship.	3.34	1.26	0.66	Moderate
Q18*	Social media has exposed me and my spouse to potential relationship threats and temptations.	3.73	1.14	0.74	High
Q19*	Social media has led to comparisons and unrealistic expectations within our relationship.	3.24	1.24	0.64	Moderate
Q20*	Social media has caused disagreements and conflicts between me and my spouse.	3.34	1.19	0.66	Moderate
Q21*	Social media has negatively influenced trust and privacy in our relationship.	3.44	1.27	0.68	Moderate
Q22	Social media has created a sense of distance and detachment in our relationship.	3.52	1.218	0.70	Moderate
Q23*	Social media has caused a decrease in emotional intimacy between me and my spouse.	3.43	1.28	0.68	Moderate
Total score		2.98	0.53	0.60	Moderate

*Reversed items.
*M Means, SD Standard Deviations, *% Percentage.
The results in Table 1 showed that Participants reported moderate score on the effect of social media on marital interaction.

The survey items that received moderate scores reflect a mixed impact of social media on marital relationships, indicating both positive and negative influences. Participants noted that social media platforms have positively influenced communication between them and their spouses (Q1, Mean: 2.72) and increased the frequency of their interactions (Q3, Mean: 2.55). Social media was also seen to improve understanding of each other's interests and hobbies (Q7, Mean: 2.63) and help couples stay connected during times of physical separation (Q8, Mean: 3.16). It facilitated emotional support and encouragement (Q10, Mean: 2.73) and influenced their decisions and choices as a couple (Q12, Mean: 2.63). However, social media also led to comparisons and unrealistic expectations (Q19, Mean: 3.24) and caused disagreements and conflicts (Q20, Mean: 3.34). These moderate scores reflect that while social media offers benefits like enhanced communication and connectivity, it also brings challenges such as increased comparisons and conflicts within relationships.

The survey items that received low scores indicate less perceived impact of social media on certain positive aspects of marital relationships. Participants reported that social media has not significantly strengthened the bond between them and their spouses (Q2, Mean: 2.36) or helped them share thoughts and feelings more openly (Q4, Mean: 2.46). Additionally, social media was not seen to make it easier to resolve conflicts (Q5, Mean: 2.27), provide opportunities to express love and affection (Q6, Mean: 2.45), or offer a platform to seek advice and guidance for their relationship (Q13, Mean: 2.36). These low scores suggest that participants do not perceive substantial benefits from social media in these areas, indicating that it may not play a significant role in strengthening bonds or resolving conflicts in their relationships.

Our findings indicate that participants report a moderate effect of social media on marital interaction, balancing both positive and negative influences. While social media fosters communication and connection, it also presents challenges that can
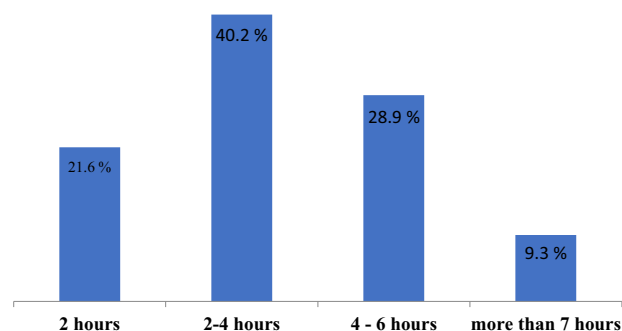

Fig. 1 Social media usage per day. Regarding social media usage (see Figure 1), (21.6%) of participant reported they use social media for two hours per day, (40.2%) for two to four hours, (28.9%)for four to six hours, and (9.3%) for more than seven hours.

undermine trust and intimacy. By addressing these nuances, we hope to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of social media on marital relationships.

Regarding social media usage (see Figure 1), (21.6%) of participant reported they use social media for two hours per day, (40.2%) for two to four hours, (28.9%)for four to six hours, and (9.3%) for more than seven hours.

Results from the UNIVARIATE test (Table 2) revealed significant differences in participants' perspectives on the role of social media in couples' interaction. Specifically, females showed a more favorable view compared to males (F (2, 98) = 15.52, p <0.001). There was a small effect of the Least Significant Difference (LSD) that favored village residents in terms of residency (F (2, 99) = 11.66, $p < 0.001$). When considering the years married, the small effect of LSD favored those couples married for less than five years (F (3.07) = 7.19, $p < 0.001$). In terms of education, couples where both partners have an academic degree were

Table 2 Results of UNIVARIATE test for study variables (N = 388).

Dependent variable	Independent variables	SS	DF	MS	F	Sig.
Social media usage and marital interaction	Gender	3.673	1	3.673	15.525	0.001
	Residence	2.760	1	2.760	11.665	0.001
	Years of married	5.105	3	1.702	7.194	0.001
	Couples' education	10.380	3	3.460	14.626	0.001
	Couples' work	4.859	1	4.859	20.541	0.001
	Social media usage	2.849	3	0.950	4.014	0.008

SS (Sum of Squares), DF (Degrees of Freedom), MS (Mean Square), F (F-statistic), Sig. (Significance).
Results of chi-test (Table 3) showed significant differences in the level of social media usage due to years of married and in favor less than five years category ($\chi^2 = 38.79$, p <0.001).

Table 3 Results of Chi-square for social media usage based on years of marriage (N = 388).

Variable		Years of marriage					
		Less than 5 years	6-10 years	11- 15 years	More than 15 years	Total	Sig.
1. Social media usage	2 hours	24	36	0	24	84	0.001
	2–4 hours	56	24	28	48	156	
	4–6 hours	36	32	16	28	112	
	More than 7 hours	12	12	0	12	36	
	Total	128	104	44	112	388	

favored by a small effect of LSD (F (3.03) = 14.62, p < 0.001). Regarding employment status, the small effect of LSD favored couples where both partners are employed (F (3.01) = 20.54, p < 0.001). Lastly, for social media usage, the small effect of LSD favored the category of two-hour usage (F (3.00) = 4.01, p < 0.001).

Table 3 illustrates the relationship between years of marriage and social media usage among a sample of 388 individuals. The chi-square analysis, with a significant value of 38.79 and a p-value of less than 0.001, indicates a significant association between these two variables. However, the relationship is more nuanced than a simple increase in social media usage for shorter marriages. For instance, individuals married for less than 5 years do not consistently show the highest social media usage across all categories. While this group has higher proportions in the 2–4 hour and 4–6 hour ranges, there is a notable increase in the 4–6 hours category among those married for 6–10 years, and the 11–15 year group also shows significant engagement. This suggests that the connection between marriage length and social media use may vary based on other factors, rather than being a direct reflection of younger couples' technological competence.

Upon further examination, distinct trends in social media usage based on the duration of marriage were observed. For shorter marriages (less than 5 years), there is notably higher social media usage, with a significant proportion of respondents (56 out of 128) using social media for 2–4 hours daily. In intermediate marriages (6–10 years), social media usage varies more, though a noticeable number (36 out of 104) report minimal usage (2 hours). Mid-term marriages (11-15 years) generally exhibit lower social media usage, with no respondents reporting more than 7 hours and a significant portion (28 out of 44) using it for 2-4 hours. Longer marriages (more than 15 years) display a balanced distribution of social media usage, with 48 out of 112 respondents using it for 2-4 hours, while some maintain higher usage patterns (more than 7 hours).

These findings suggest that shorter marriages tend to have higher social media engagement, possibly due to younger couples being more technologically competent. Conversely, couples married for 11-15 years show lower social media usage, potentially reflecting a shift in priorities or adaptation to different interaction forms. Interestingly, those married for more than 15 years exhibit varied usage, indicating that while some have embraced social media, others may use it minimally or not at all.

Discussion

The participants in this study indicated a modest impact of social media on marital interaction, as evidenced by the results of the descriptive statistics (Table 1). The mean scores and percentages for various items suggest that the influence of social media is perceived to be significant. This is consistent with several studies in the reviewed literature that explore the multifaceted effects of social media on marital relationships.

For instance, Adegboyega's (2022) research corroborates the findings of this study, revealing that social media often results in rifts, disputes, and even adultery in marriages. Bouffard et al. (2021) noted that excessive use of social media platforms, like Instagram, might adversely affect marriages. However, personal sacrifices within the relationship can mitigate these negative impacts. Aljasir, 2022 findings on how "phubbing" due to social media leads to increased relationship satisfaction offer an interesting perspective related to this study's exploration of communication dynamics.

Restya's (2019) study, which highlights the significant role of social media in facilitating infidelity tied to dissatisfaction and conflict, resonates with our findings on evolving communication patterns. Similarly, Bahri and Widhyharto's (2021) research delves into both the positive and negative effects of social media on marital quality.

The broader implications are also discussed in the literature. Ghanim and Al-Muhadeen (2021) link increased divorce rates to social media and underscore the need for establishing norms for home usage and educating children about its impacts. Building on the study's emphasis on changing communication dynamics over time, McDaniel et al. (2017) and Trotter et al. (2019) probe the potential repercussions of online activities and perceived intrusiveness on relationships. Peerzade and Shaikh (2022), meanwhile, offer a unique view, indicating no negative correlation between marital satisfaction and social media addiction, thereby enriching our understanding of this intricate interplay.

In conclusion, the findings of this study resonate with the Social Exchange Theory (SET), which elucidates the intricate dynamics of social media's bearing on marital relationships. The participants' perception of a moderate impact on marital communication mirrors the theory's focus on maximizing rewards while minimizing costs. The varied responses align with SET's idea of differing benefits and detriments within relationships. The study underscores couples' need for negotiation, boundary-setting, and candid communication in light of social media's influence, emphasizing equitable exchanges and ensuring perceived advantages outweigh potential disadvantages. This research offers a glimpse into contemporary marital relationships and underscores the pivotal role of balanced and open communication in today's digital age.

Conclusion

This study analyzed the impact of social media use on marital communication and relations among 388 participants. Results showed a moderate impact of social media on communication, with 40.2% of users using it for 2-4 hours a day. Women had a more positive view than men, suggesting different communication preferences or usage habits. Villagers also displayed a more optimistic outlook, possibly related to shared social norms and beliefs. Studies have shown that social media can enhance creativity among rural women, leading to knowledge changes, increased resilience, and improved market awareness (Miconi, 2020). Additionally, social media has been found to have a positive influence on the attitudes towards services in rural areas, with increased social media use correlating with more positive perceptions of telehealth services (Khamis, 2016). Furthermore, social networks are seen as valuable tools for enhancing ethical values and societal solidarity among Palestinian youth, emphasizing the importance of interaction, participation, and the promotion of social values (Wafi, 2017).

Early-stage relationships were more integrated with social media, facilitating communication and connection-building. Social media in Palestine revealed how social media played a crucial role in extending networks and balancing interest-driven and friendship-driven motivations among Palestinian (Miconi, 2020). Education and employment status also influenced social media usage. The chi-square analysis revealed a strong correlation between marriage length and social media usage patterns, highlighting how spousal communication changes over time. Studies show that social media, particularly Facebook, plays a significant role in long-distance marriage relationships, serving as a platform for seeking attention and responses from partners (Wafi, 2017). The absence of social media users in couples aged 11-15 raises the possibility that communication patterns may change as marriages progress (Wafi, 2017).

Social Exchange Theory (SET) posits that human interactions are based on a cost-benefit analysis, where individuals seek to maximize rewards while minimizing costs. This theory can be connected to the study's findings on the impact of social media on marital communication and relations.

In the context of marital relationships, social media can be seen as a tool that facilitates exchanges of attention, communication, and emotional support. The study reveals that social media usage, particularly in early-stage relationships and long-distance marriages, serves as a platform for partners to seek attention and responses. This aligns with SET, as social media offers low-cost communication channels that enhance connectivity and strengthen bonds between partners, thus maximizing the perceived rewards of interaction.

Moreover, the differences in social media perceptions between genders and rural/urban participants highlight varying expectations and benefits within relationships. For example, women and rural villagers, who have a more optimistic view of social media, may perceive the platform as a valuable resource for emotional exchanges and support, which strengthens marital ties in line with the theory's notion of reward-seeking behavior. Conversely, as marriages progress, the study suggests that social media usage may decrease, perhaps because the perceived rewards of online communication diminish over time, or because couples develop other communication patterns that balance out costs and benefits in their relationship.

Such findings can be leveraged by relationship counsellors to help couples navigate the opportunities and difficulties presented by social media and provide them with practical management techniques for the ever-changing digital world. Individuals can be further empowered to take full advantage of social media while minimizing any drawbacks by participating in educational projects and workshops focused on digital well-being. In the end, this study integrates theoretical knowledge with real-world application and provides a road map for creating resilient, satisfying marital relationships in the digital age.

Study limitations and future research directions

Although this study offers insightful information, there are several important limitations. The generalizability of the findings may be compromised by the sample's size. Longitudinal studies are likely to be better since the cross-sectional design makes it difficult to show causal relationships between social media use and marital communication. Furthermore, a lack of cultural diversity raises questions about a study's universal applicability.

Research should employ longitudinal studies, embrace cultural comparisons, design digital intervention strategies, incorporate digital ethnography, explore generational differences, compare social media platforms, and look into the implications for long-term marital satisfaction in the future.

Furthermore, future research should focus on exploring effective strategies for minimizing the detrimental effects of social media on relationships. This could include investigating interventions that promote healthy communication practices, establish boundaries, and foster mutual understanding among partners regarding social media usage. Additionally, studies could examine the role of digital literacy and coping mechanisms in mitigating negative impacts, particularly in diverse cultural contexts. By addressing these areas, future research can contribute to a deeper understanding of how couples can leverage social media positively while reducing its potential harms.

Data availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon special request.

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Author contributions

OJ: Background, Literature Review, Conceptual Clarity, Manuscript Drafting and Final Drafting and Approval. BH: Theoretical Framework Development, Drafting, Citation Management, Manuscript Review. FM: Data collection, data analysis, methodological expertise and results interpretation, Conceptualization.

Competing interests

The authors declare no competing interests.

Ethics approval

Ethical approval was not required for this study as it involved only minimal risk activities, specifically the completion of an anonymous online survey. Ethics approval for this study was obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of An-Najah National University (Ref: Intr. 2023/80) in early April 2023. The approval encompassed all aspects of participant recruitment, data collection, and analysis. All research procedures adhered to the principles outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki.

Informed consent

Since this article involves an online questionnaire for data collection and does not include studies with human participants, informed consent was obtained from all participants who completed the questionnaire. Participants were provided with clear information about the study's purpose and their role, ensuring that their participation was voluntary and based on their informed decision. No sensitive or personally identifiable information was collected. The study implemented an oral informed consent procedure due to the sensitivity of the topic and the related comfort level of the participants.

Additional information

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