

Social Media Addiction and Marital Adjustment: A Comparative Study among Male and Female Spouses

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Abstract—Social media overuse, which mostly turns into addiction, has been linked with enormous relational tension because of emotional abandonment, decreased face-to-face communication, and increased jealousy. In this research, an attempt was made to comparatively analyze the level of marital adjustment of male and female spouses of social media addicts and to inquire about the gender-specific consequences of such addiction on marital happiness. A convenience sample of 120 participants (60 couples) aged 25-45 years from Jaipur was taken. Couples were split into two groups depending on the gender of the spouse who was identified as a social media addict. The Problematic Internet Use Questionnaire (PIUQ) was used to measure levels of addiction, and the Marital Adjustment Questionnaire (MAQ) was used to measure marital satisfaction. Independent samples t-tests established statistically significant gender differences between marital adjustment. Particularly in Group A (female addicts), males indicated higher marital adjustment than females significantly ($t = 4.01$, $p = 0.00001$, Cohen's $d = 1.03$), and likewise in Group B (male addicts), males indicated greater marital adjustment than females ($t = 2.90$, $p = 0.005$, Cohen's $d = 0.74$), thereby substantiating the hypothesis. Results are consistent with previous work highlighting that women generally suffer more relational dissatisfaction and emotional distress because of their spouse's excessive social media use. Such findings highlight the need for gender-sensitive interventions to improve marital satisfaction and promote balanced social media use in marital settings.

Keywords: Social media addiction, Marital Adjustment, Gender Differences, Relationship Satisfaction, Internet Addiction

I. INTRODUCTION

In the era of digital technologies, social media has enormously transformed the manner in which people interact, communicate, and relate. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and WhatsApp have made direct communication possible, allowing people to remain connected despite geographical boundaries. Nevertheless, excessive social media use has also been linked with adverse psychological and relational effects, especially in romantic and marital relationships. Addiction to social media, which involves compulsive and excessive use of social networking websites (SNS) resulting in disturbances in day-to-day functioning (Andreassen et al., 2012), is emerging as a prevalent issue among couples. Problematic use of social media has been found to jeopardize relationship quality by promoting neglect, enhancing jealousy, and limiting face-to-face interactions, which are all necessary for a fulfilling and stable marital relationship (Clayton et al., 2013).

Problematic internet use (PIU) or internet addiction is defined as the lack of control over one's online activities that causes emotional distress and compromised social functioning (Demetrovics et al., 2016). This is especially problematic in marriage, where satisfaction with the relationship is highly contingent on emotional closeness, communication, and shared experiences. Research shows that excessively social media-active partners tend to manifest emotional detachment, secrecy, and withdrawal from the spouse, rendering them more dissatisfied in marriage (Abbasi, 2019; Han et al., 2025). In addition, the compulsive status of social media has been associated with "phubbing," a phenomenon where people disregard their partner in favor of their mobile phones, resulting in lower levels of relationship satisfaction and more conflict (Roberts & David, 2016).

Marital adjustment is an important predictor of relationship stability, which is the level of harmony, mutual satisfaction, and conflict resolution between partners (Kumar & Rohatgi, 1999). Partners who have high marital adjustment scores show improved emotional regulation, communication, and problem-solving skills, whereas those with low adjustment show greater levels of

distress and dissatisfaction. Previous studies indicate that excessive use of social media can disrupt marital adjustment by distracting from the relationship, promoting insecurity, and promoting online relationships that might undermine the exclusivity of a marriage (Elphinston & Noller, 2011; Valenzuela et al., 2014).

Gender differences are of great importance in determining the impact of social media addiction on marital relationships. It has been found in research that women are more emotionally attached to their relationships and could view their husband's overuse of social media as neglect or emotional distance (McDaniel & Coyne, 2016). Men might be more likely to utilize social media for leisure and networking, underestimating its influence on their marriage. Research also shows that social media addiction has varying responses to stress among men and women, with women showing more relational anxiety and emotional distress when their partner is excessively active online (Satici et al., 2023). Men, on the other hand, are likely to show fewer issues with their partner's use of social media unless it has a direct effect on physical intimacy or domestic duties (Iqbal & Jami, 2019).

While the increase in research work on social media addiction and its effects on relationship outcomes is quite evident, the specific influence of gender differences in the effect that social media addiction has on adjustment in marriage remains under-explored. In most previous works, relationship satisfaction is typically researched without factoring in comparative consequences for husbands or wives. This research seeks to fill this gap by examining whether male and female spouses feel differently about marital adjustment when their spouse is addicted to social media. By contrasting two groups, where the female partner is a social media addict and where the male partner is a social media addict, this study will be able to offer useful insights into how marital harmony is affected by digital behaviors and whether interventions have to be gender-specific.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The intersection of marital adjustment and social media addiction has received a lot of scholarly interest in recent times. It has been shown through research that excessive use of social media can negatively impact marital satisfaction, mostly by decreasing the time and energy spouses spend on each other. This has resulted in feelings of neglect, emotional distance, and low relationship quality (Sevilmiş & Ersanlı, 2022). Moreover, social media addiction has also been linked to more marital conflicts based on trust issues, online infidelity, and comparisons with idealized representations of relationships on social media sites (Utz & Beukeboom, 2011).

Gender is a central aspect in the process of social media addiction in marital relationships. It has been demonstrated that women are more likely to use social media intensively, which can develop into addictive patterns. This excess may lead to relationship conflicts in marriage, especially if it disrupts domestic chores and interactions with spouse (Muusses et al., 2014). On the other hand, men are most likely to experience internet gaming dependency, which might also have detrimental effects on marriage satisfaction (Pontes et al., 2015). Furthermore, men tend to use social media for networking and entertainment, while women use it more for emotional connection, which may explain differences in the relational impact of addiction (Kircaburun et al., 2020). The concept of "phubbing," where individuals ignore their partners in favor of smartphone use, has been identified as a significant factor affecting marital satisfaction. This occurs at the expense of both spouses, resulting in feelings of jealousy and neglect, hence lowering relationship quality (Roberts & David, 2016). Phubbing has also been linked to heightened conflict, decreased relationship commitment, and even psychopathological issues such as anxiety and depression among the neglected partner (Zhou, Xu & He, 2023). Research further shows that phubbing is more negatively viewed among women than men, attributed to the varying emotional expectations in marriage (Al-Saggaf & O'Donnell, 2019).

Cultural backgrounds also dictate the effects of social media addiction on marriage relationships. An example was seen in a study conducted on Palestinian couples, which uncovered that social media usage might either positively or negatively influence marital relationships, subject to usage patterns and cultural requirements (Jabali, Hamamra & Mahamid, 2024). In collectivist societies, where family and marital relationships are most important, excessive use of social media is usually taken as a threatening relational issue (Li et al., 2021). In individualistic societies, though, partners might be more tolerant of online activity, which can influence marital adjustment in another way (Przybylski & Weinstein, 2017).

Additionally, excessive use of short-video websites has been found to be correlated with lower marital satisfaction in older couples. The research established that overuse of these sites resulted in more negative feelings and less interaction with the spouse, thus decreasing marital satisfaction (Deng et al., 2024). In the same way, more use of social media has been associated with online jealousy, where partners feel threatened by their spouse's interactions with other people on the internet, which results in more insecurities and distrust in the relationship (Sidani et al., 2016). The contribution of the use of new media to marital satisfaction has also been investigated, with results showing that overuse has a negative effect on the satisfaction of married

women with the contribution of their spouses to household chores. The dissatisfaction can cause overall lower marital satisfaction and heightened depressive symptoms. Additionally, couples who are spending more time interacting online instead of face-to-face are also found to feel less intimacy and emotional closeness, which is paramount for long-term marital stability (Marshall, 2012).

Gender-specific studies have identified that women are also more prone to social media addiction, which has further implications for their marital role expectations and marital satisfaction. Research indicates that women who are socially media addicted are likely to perform comparison behaviors that contribute to dissatisfaction with their own marriages, which ultimately decreases marital adjustment (Fardouly et al., 2015). On the contrary, men who spend too much time on social media are usually condemned for shirking domestic chores and emotional involvement (McDaniel & Coyne, 2016).

III. OBJECTIVE

- To compare marital adjustment levels between male and female spouses of social media addicts.

III.I. HYPOTHESIS

- There would be a significant difference in marital adjustment between male and female spouses of social media addicts.

III.II. METHOD

Variables

- IV- Gender
- DV- Marital Adjustment with Social media addict spouse

III.III. RESEARCH DESIGN

The present research study will follow a quantitative research design with the aim of comparing how differently it impacts the lives of the spouse if the male is an addict or the female is an addict among couples.

IV. SAMPLE

For the present study, a sample of 120 participants was selected using a convenience sampling technique. Two groups were formed with a total of 60 couples belonging to the age group 25 to 45. Group A was composed of 30 couples in which the females were social media addicts and group B was composed of 30 couples in which the males were social media addicts.

IV.I. INCLUSION CRITERIA

- Only social media addict people were selected.
- Those couples were selected where only one of the spouses was an addict.
- Couples belonging to age group 25 to 45 were selected,
- Couples residing in Jaipur were selected.

IV.II. EXCLUSION CRITERIA

- Participants younger than 25 years of age were excluded from the study.
- Participants older than 45 years will be excluded from the study.
- Those couples where both the spouses were addicts were excluded from the study.
- Couples residing outside Jaipur were excluded from the study.

IV.III. PSYCHOLOGICAL MEASURES

1. **The Problematic Internet Use Questionnaire by Göktas S, Aygar H, Zencirci SA, et al. (2016)**

The Problematic Internet Use Questionnaire-Short Form-6 (PIUQ-SF-6) is a short yet efficient instrument to measure problematic internet use. Created by Demetrovics et al. (2016), it is a six-item measure that assesses three sub-dimensions: Obsession (preoccupation with internet usage), Neglect (neglecting responsibilities), and Control Disorder (inability to control usage). Ratings are made using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = "never" to 5 = "always"), on which total scores range from 6 to 30, the higher the better in terms of addiction level. The Turkish version by Göktaş et al. (2018) also verified robust psychometric properties with a content validity index (CVI) of 0.90, Cronbach's alpha of 0.82, and test-retest reliability of 0.82. Factor analysis confirmed its three-factor structure accounting for 53.42% of the variance. A cut-off score of 13 was determined to classify individuals at risk of problematic internet use.

2. Marital Adjustment Questionnaire (MAQ) (1999), originally developed and standardized by Parmod Kumar and Kanchana Rohatgi in 1985:

The MAQ is a widely used tool for assessing marital adjustment, consisting of yes-or-no response items designed to evaluate different dimensions of marital life. The reliability of the MAQ was determined using the Spearman-Brown formula, with a split-half reliability (correlating odd-even items) of 0.49 ($N = 60$) and a reliability index of 0.70. Test-retest reliability, calculated with a three-week interval, was found to be 0.71 ($N = 60$), with a reliability index of 0.84. The significant correlation values of 0.49 and 0.71 indicate that the questionnaire demonstrates both sequence stability and interval consistency, making it a reliable measure of marital adjustment. The face validity of the MAQ was established based on purposeful interviews with 100 couples, focusing on their conception of a happy marriage. Additionally, Singh's Marital Adjustment Inventory (Singh, 1972) was used for validation. A significant validity score of 0.84 was reported for a sample of twenty wives, confirming the MAQ's effectiveness in measuring marital adjustment. Responses were scored with a value of 1 for "YES" responses, except for items 4, 10, and 19, where reverse scoring was applied. The total marital adjustment score for each participant was determined by summing the individual item scores, providing a comprehensive assessment of their marital adjustment level.

V. PROCEDURE

A quantitative method of data analysis was used in this research, carried out in two different phases. At Phase I, the extent of social media addiction in couples was gauged. Only those couples whose one of the spouses was addicted to social media were chosen. Participants were divided into two groups: Group A comprised 30 couples whose female spouse was addicted to social media, whereas Group B comprised 30 couples whose male spouse was addicted. Phase II saw the spouses of the addicted ones in Group A and Group B measured through the Self-Constructed Adjustment with Spouse Scale to assess the level of their marital adjustment. A t-test was thereafter used to measure the adjustment levels of both groups and determine the group that suffered a higher negative effect as a result of having an addicted spouse.

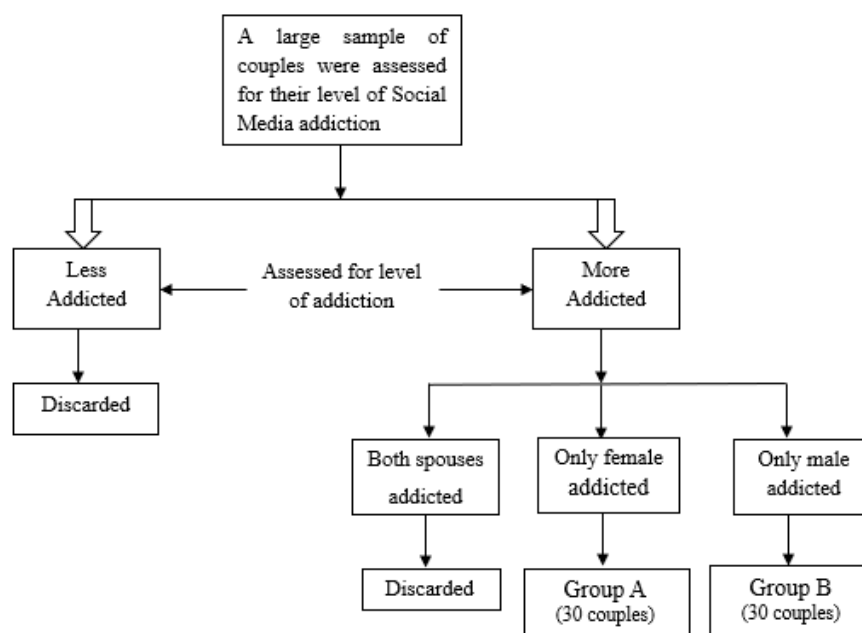


Fig1. Schematic diagram depicting the Phase I of the study

VI. STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

Descriptive measures such as mean, standard deviation, and variance were derived for Group A and Group B in order to condense the data. The two groups were compared to assess whether there was a statistically significant difference between them by performing an independent samples t-test. The effect size, that is, the magnitude of difference between the two group means, was measured and quantified through the calculation of Cohen's d.

VII. RESULTS

Table 1: Descriptive statistics (Mean and SD) of PIUQ of groups A and B

PIUQ	Group A			Group B		
	Male (30)	Female (30)	Total (60)	Male (30)	Female (30)	Total (60)
MEAN	14.73	26.37	20.55	26.7	12.67	19.68
SD	3.39	2.11	6.5	2.63	3.19	7.65

The descriptive statistics for the **Problematic Internet Use Questionnaire (PIUQ)** indicated significant differences between males and females across both groups. In Group A, females exhibited notably higher levels of problematic internet use (Mean = 26.37, SD = 2.11) compared to males (Mean = 14.73, SD = 3.39). Conversely, in Group B, males demonstrated higher problematic internet use (Mean = 26.7, SD = 2.63) compared to females (Mean = 12.67, SD = 3.19). Overall, total scores showed that both groups had similar average problematic internet use (Group A Mean = 20.55, SD = 6.5; Group B Mean = 19.68, SD = 7.65), reflecting the targeted selection of couples based on one spouse being significantly more addicted to social media.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics (Mean and SD) of MAQ of groups A and B

MAQ	Group A			Group B		
	Male (30)	Female (30)	Total (60)	Male (30)	Female (30)	Total (60)
MEAN	17.4	14.6	16	16	13.9	14.9
SD	2.7	2.7	3.1	2.9	2.7	3

Analysis of the Marital Adjustment Questionnaire (MAQ) scores revealed gender disparities in marital adjustment within both groups. In Group A, males reported higher marital adjustment (Mean = 17.4, SD = 2.7) compared to females (Mean = 14.6, SD = 2.7). Likewise, in Group B, males again reported higher marital adjustment scores (Mean = 16, SD = 2.9) relative to females (Mean = 13.9, SD = 2.7). The overall average marital adjustment was slightly higher in Group A (Mean = 16, SD = 3.1) compared to Group B (Mean = 14.9, SD = 3), suggesting nuanced differences in adjustment depending on which partner was addicted to social media.

Table 3: Gender Differences in Marital Adjustment (MAQ) among Groups A and B (t-value, p-value, and Cohen's d)

	t-value	p-value	Cohen's d
Group A (Males vs Females)	4.01	0.00001	1.03
Group B (Males vs Females)	2.90	0.005	0.74

Independent samples t-tests also supported significant gender differences in marital adjustment in both groups. In Group A, the difference between males and females was statistically significant ($t = 4.01$, $p = 0.00001$), at the 0.01 level, with a large effect size (Cohen's $d = 1.03$). Also, in Group B, the difference was significant ($t = 2.90$, $p = 0.005$), once again at the 0.01 level, with a moderate to large effect size (Cohen's $d = 0.74$). These findings explicitly suggest that male spouses reported significantly higher marital adjustment than females throughout, highlighting the greater detrimental effect of a spouse's social media addiction on women's marital satisfaction.

VIII. DISCUSSION

In modern society, online social networking sites like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and WhatsApp have remarkably transformed interpersonal communication patterns. Whereas the sites support relations over distance, overconsumption may induce social media dependence, negatively influencing marital relationships through promoting emotional deprivation, secrecy, and decreased face-to-face conversation. Marital adjustment, including concordance, mutual contentment, and satisfactory conflict handling, becomes highly tense in the given situations. The main goal of this study was to find out and compare the levels of marital adjustment among male and female spouses of social media-addicted individuals. This comparative approach helps to understand gender-specific differences in marital satisfaction when a partner is struggling with problematic social media use.

Descriptive statistics (as shown in Table 1) reveal significant gender-specific trends in problematic internet use between the two groups being compared. To be specific, within the group in which females were labeled as social media addicts, these females had significantly higher rates of problematic internet use than their male counterparts. Within the group that consisted of male social media addicts, the males had significantly higher rates of problematic internet use than their female counterparts. This distinct segregation of the genders within each group attests to the efficacy of the participant selection process, confirming the classification of individuals as social media addicts according to their self-reported usage patterns.

In addition, descriptive analysis of marital adjustment scores (Table 2) also points to notable gender differences. Male husbands always reported greater marital adjustment than female spouses across both groups, regardless of the gender of the addicted spouse. This general trend indicates that women are feeling more dissatisfaction and emotional distress in their marital relationship when faced with their partner's social media addiction. These results indicate that women might be more reactive or sensitive to such perceived neglect and emotional closeness deficits resulting from their partner's unhealthy social media activities.

Independent samples t-tests (Table 3) also supported these findings by showing statistically significant differences between male and female spouses' marital adjustment levels in both situations of social media addiction (male-addict and female-addict groups). Particularly, male spouses exhibited considerably greater marital adjustment than female spouses, revealing that women's marital satisfaction is more negatively influenced by a spouse's social media addiction, whether it is the male or female spouse who is addicted. The above results clearly affirm and verify the research hypothesis, stressing women's greater susceptibility and emotional sensitivity within marital relationships under the negative influence of overusing social media.

Confirming the findings, earlier research conducted by Abbasi (2019) has also revealed a gendered relational strain pattern, as it observed women usually feel more emotional neglect and dissatisfaction because of their partner's compulsive use of social media. Likewise, Coyne et al. (2011) have also demonstrated a gender difference in which women felt increased dissatisfaction and emotional distance because of their spouse's excessive digital engagement, which is found to be strongly in line with the current research. The "phubbing" phenomenon has also confirmed these findings. Roberts and David (2016) reported that women are more negatively impacted by partners giving precedence to smartphone interactions over face-to-face marital communication, resulting in increased emotional distress and relationship dissatisfaction.

Further research confirms these results, noting repeated gendered effects. For example, Hunt et al. (2021) discovered that marital satisfaction among women significantly reduced as partner social media use increased, leading to feelings of insecurity and relational neglect. Similarly, a study by Murray and Campbell (2021) illustrated how women are disproportionately affected by adverse emotional consequences, such as insecurity and relational anxiety, due to their partners' overuse of social media.

IX. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This research had a number of limitations. First, the convenience sampling within Jaipur constrains generalizability. Larger, more diverse samples from various geographical locations should be used in future research. Second, the cross-sectional design

limits causal inferences; longitudinal designs could offer more powerful evidence about the causal effects of social media addiction on marital adjustment. Moreover, the reliance on self-report measures can be problematic; adding qualitative methods or observational data could provide a richer view.

X. IMPLICATIONS

The results have important implications for marital counseling and intervention programs. Practitioners need to take into account gender-specific methods in addressing relational conflicts that arise from social media addiction. Raising awareness regarding the relational consequences of excessive use of social media might promote more effective communication and emotional closeness between spouses. Couples' education and prevention programs must also incorporate strategies for the safe use of digital media.

XI. CONCLUSION

In summary, this study underscores strong gender differences in marital adjustment involving spouses' social media addiction, with women being more negatively affected. Insights into such gendered experiences are of great importance for tailored therapeutic interventions on the improvement of marital satisfaction and reinforcement of healthier relationship patterns in the era of the internet.

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