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Influence of Social Media on Marital Satisfaction: A Study of Couples in Enugu State

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Abstract

Background: In the current postmodern era, marriages are increasingly confronted by challenges stemming from digital integration. While social media serves as a modern technological tool for information and connectivity, its role as a determinant of marital stability remains a subject of critical inquiry.

Objective: This research sought to investigate the influence of social media engagements on marital satisfaction among couples in Enugu state, Nigeria. The study specifically examined the impact of usage duration, content types, and message formats, while also considering the moderating role of spousal communication.

Methodology: A survey-based descriptive design was adopted for the study. Using a multistage sampling technique, a sample size of 385 married couples was selected from the three senatorial districts of Enugu state. Data were collected through a structured four-point Likert scale questionnaire and analysed using simple percentages, mean deviation, and Chi-square statistical tools.

Results: Findings revealed that respondents spend a moderate duration of one to two hours daily on social media, which positively influences marital satisfaction to a high extent. Prank and comedy were identified as the most consumed content types, contributing to emotional relief and marital enlightenment. Furthermore, text-based posts were found to be the most preferred message format. Hypothesis testing indicated that family income significantly predicts the impact of social media on marital satisfaction, whereas marriage duration does not.

Conclusion: The study concludes that social media is an advantageous tool for marital satisfaction when used judiciously. Effective spousal communication and moderate online engagement help couples avert the negative consequences associated with social media addiction. It is recommended that couples maintain a balance between digital interactions and heart-to-heart discussions to foster long-term conjugal growth.

Keywords: Couples, Enugu State, Marital Satisfaction, Social Media, Spousal Communication.

Introduction

The institution of marriage has undergone a profound evolution from traditional structures to the complexities of the postmodern era. While historical marital frameworks were often defined by rigid social norms, contemporary unions face a unique array of challenges precipitated by rapid technological advancement. Central to this shift is the emergence of social media, which has fundamentally altered the landscape of interpersonal relationships. Social media platforms have transitioned from mere technological novelties to essential components of modern societal infrastructure, particularly among Millennials, Generation Y, and Generation Z (Bolton et al., 2013; James et al., 2025).

The shift toward digital interaction was significantly accelerated by the Covid-19 pandemic, during which online engagement increased by 59% (Kemp, 2023). With more than half the global population now active on social media, platforms such as TikTok and Facebook have reported unprecedented growth. This shift has redefined relational standards and societal norms, with the January 2023 Global Overview reporting a total of 4.76 billion users (Kemp, 2023). Consequently, when individuals experience emotional distress or isolation, they increasingly turn to the digital sphere for companionship and entertainment (Obiechina, 2023).

Empirical evidence suggests that regulated social media use can yield positive outcomes, including enhanced social well-being and improved mental health (The Big Three, 2020). By facilitating constant connectivity, these platforms can bolster emotional health and a sense of belonging (Graciyal & Viswam, 2021). However, significant concerns persist regarding the deleterious effects of digital platforms. As a channel for both information and misinformation, the outcome—whether it results in education or distress—is largely contingent upon the user's choices and patterns of engagement (Valkenburg et al., 2022; Naslund et al., 2020).

Despite the potential for connectivity, the mismanagement of social media by married individuals seeking self-gratification has been linked to marital instability and a decline in conjugal cohesion (Gull et al., 2019). Excessive usage often fosters an environment of suspicion, where jealousy and envy over digital interactions fuel domestic conflict. Furthermore, the risk of social media addiction presents a direct threat to marital functionality, distracting partners from their daily responsibilities and mutual commitments (Abbasi & Drouin, 2019).

In the Nigerian context, the right to digital engagement is underpinned by the freedom of expression guaranteed under Section 39 of the 1999 Constitution. However, the exercise of this right within the digital sphere requires careful assessment regarding its practical constraints and its impact on the private sphere of the home. True marital fulfilment is often found in the

communicative quality of the relationship rather than the fleeting gratification of online trends. Given these concerns, there is a critical need to investigate the influence of social media engagement on marital satisfaction among couples in Enugu State, as over-reliance on digital validation may lead to a decrease in genuine marital satisfaction (Ahmad et al., 2022).

Objectives of the Study

The primary aim of this study is to assess the influence of social media on marital satisfaction. The specific objectives are:

1. To determine the influence of the duration of social media use on married couples in Enugu State.
2. To examine the influence of the type of content consumed on social media by married couples in Enugu State.
3. To evaluate the impact of different social media message formats on marital interactions.
4. To examine the relationship between marital satisfaction and divorce propensity among couples in Enugu State.
5. To determine the moderating role of spousal communication on the relationship between social media use and marital satisfaction.

Study Hypotheses

- **H1:** The income of families will significantly predict the influence of social media on marital satisfaction.
- **H2:** The age of marriage will significantly predict the influence of happiness derived from social media on marital satisfaction.

Literature Review

The Evolution of Social Media

Social media is defined as a suite of online communication channels focused on community-based input, interaction, and content exchange (Rouse, 2013). As a byproduct of Web 2.0, it facilitates collaborative environments where users transition from passive consumers to active creators of interactive content (Sajithra & Patil, 2013). Platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, X, and WhatsApp have come to dominate the interpersonal landscape, serving diverse purposes ranging from entertainment and academic collaboration to personal gratification (Aksoy, 2018). Currently, social media users comprise approximately 40% of the global internet-using population, a figure that saw significant growth following the Covid-19 pandemic (Cinar, 2023).

Dominant Social Media Platforms

The digital revolution has reshaped the family unit, which is the foundational institution of society (Singh, 2023). Several platforms have emerged as primary drivers of this change:

- *Facebook*: Founded in 2004, it remains a premier tool for establishing cordial relationships and disseminating information, boasting over 2.9 billion monthly active users (Statista, 2023).
- *YouTube*: Launched in 2005, it serves as the second-largest social network, prioritising video-based interaction and educational content (Statista, 2023).
- *X (formerly Twitter)*: A micro-blogging site used for real-time updates, news, and celebrity engagement, with over 528 million monthly users (Statista, 2023).
- *WhatsApp*: A messaging application prioritising privacy through end-to-end encryption. It has become a primary tool for virtual networking and SMS substitution in Nigeria (Rahayu & Amri, 2023).
- *TikTok*: A short-form video platform that leverages music, filters, and special effects to drive high levels of engagement among both adults and children (Widodo et al., 2023).

The Dual Nature of Digital Engagement

Social media offers significant merits, including non-physical intimacy, virtual social openings for simultaneous conversation, and informal learning environments (Ziha et al., 2021). However, these benefits are often overshadowed by demerits such as cyber-bullying, information overload, and a reduction in traditional family values. Within marriages, social media can subvert conjugal fidelity and trigger jealousy, particularly when one spouse perceives a neglect of real-life interaction in favour of digital engagement (Gull et al., 2019). The ease of online communication may also facilitate infidelity-related behaviours, which McDaniel et al. (2017) link to a lack of existing marital satisfaction and devotion negligence.

Social Media, Happiness, and Marital Satisfaction

Happiness on social media is relative and often dependent on content formats that align with personal values and ideological leanings (Miller et al., 2016). However, relying on digital platforms for marital satisfaction is problematic, as these tools often provide only transient mood lifts rather than sustainable relational health. Scholars argue that ideal marital satisfaction should be grounded in interpersonal effort within the family confines rather than external technological variables.

Duration of Use and the Mechanics of Addiction

The time spent on digital platforms is a significant predictor of social and psychological deficiencies. Social media addiction is characterised by an over-dependency on virtual space at the expense of real-life responsibilities (Andreassen & Pallesen, 2014). This is often driven by the Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), where individuals remain tethered to their devices to stay abreast of online trends (Przybylski et al., 2013). In the African context, Nigerians record the highest daily usage, averaging approximately 3 hours and 44 minutes, which heightens the risk of lifestyle afflictions and domestic isolation (Statista, 2023).

Content Formats and User Participation

The transition of users from viewers to co-manufacturers of content has been driven by specific formats (Dolan et al., 2019):

- *Short-form Videos*: Including TikToks and Reels, these provide immediate gratification through concise, high-impact visuals (Macready, 2023).
- *Skits and Pranks*: Brief dramas or jests intended to entertain, though some formats like cloutlighting can create ethical concerns regarding trickery and consent (Nagesh, 2018).
- *Visual and Textual Media*: Images remain the most valued content, leading to what Anders (2016) terms iconomania, while text-based posts continue to serve as the primary method for communicating brand and personal identity.

Defining Marital Satisfaction

Marital satisfaction is a primary predictor of overall well-being. A stable union provides companionship and emotional support, which improve psychological health (Li, Liu & Guo, 2015). Successful marriages often correlate with the support of a spouse's self-attainment goals and a high standard of relationship alignment (Parry, 2016).

Empirical Review

Global and regional studies provide varied perspectives on this phenomenon. In Ghana, Obeng et al. (2023) found that while social media can trigger jealousy, it also serves as a tool for demonstrating love and care when used scrupulously. Similarly, Okwudiri et al. (2021) noted that 44% of participants felt social media improved interaction with their partners, suggesting that its influence is largely determined by individual aims.

Conversely, several studies highlight a detrimental impact. Mankani (2022) argues that manmade gadgets cannot replace the interpersonal activities required to cement relational ties, suggesting that extreme usage leads to dissolution. This is supported by Ziha et al. (2021) in Bangladesh, where irresponsible social media use was found to be dangerous for interpersonal relating. In Turkey, Konyar and Ersanli (2022) discovered that younger couples and those with higher educational backgrounds were more prone to social media addiction, which negatively altered their happiness.

In the Middle East and Saudi Arabia, research by Gull et al. (2019) and Alanazi (2021) identifies social media as a primary cause of marital predicaments including lack of trust and irresponsibility. Furthermore, Virk (2017) links excessive usage to anxiety, depression, and suicidal thoughts among urban couples. These findings collectively suggest a statistically significant negative correlation between social media addiction and marital quality, particularly when digital engagement interferes with domestic responsibilities and trust (Zhou, Xu & He, 2023).

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundation of this study is built upon two complementary perspectives: Technological Determinism Theory and the Uses and Gratifications Theory. Together, these

frameworks provide a balanced view of how digital tools shape human behaviour and how individuals actively select media to satisfy personal needs.

Technological Determinism Theory

The concept of Technological Determinism, originally coined by Thorstein Veblen, suggests that technology is a primary catalyst for historical and social change. The core tenet of this theory is that technology drives societal evolution rather than being driven by consumer demand; it determines and regulates the development of social systems, cultural norms, and values (Ukonu, 2022).

Marshall McLuhan furthered this discourse in 1962, asserting that the medium itself is a transformative force. McLuhan argued that the emergence of electronic media has fundamentally altered how individuals think, feel, and act, creating a revolutionary process of social reconfiguration (Griffin, 2004, as cited in Asak & Ohiagu, 2013).

This theory is highly relevant to the current study as it provides a lens through which we can understand how social media platforms—as technological artefacts—dictate the pace and direction of modern marital interactions. It posits that the structural features of social media can induce behavioural shifts and marital abnormalities by imposing new patterns of communication that couples must navigate. From this perspective, the technology itself acts as an external force that reshapes the conjugal bond, often leading to detrimental outcomes if the technological influence overrides traditional relational maintenance.

Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT)

While Technological Determinism focuses on the power of the medium, the Uses and Gratifications Theory, propounded by Elihu Katz, Jay Blumler, and Michael Gurevitch, shifts the focus to the agency of the audience. UGT suggests that individuals are not passive recipients but active users who purposefully select media to fulfil specific social and psychological needs (Katz et al., 1974).

The primary assumptions of UGT are that the audience is goal-directed and takes the initiative to link need gratification to specific media choices (DeFleur & DeFleur, 2016). In the context of the 21st century, social media has provided a vast marketplace of content where users can satisfy diverse needs, from entertainment and information to emotional support and escapism (Oh et al., 2017).

Applied to this research, UGT explains why married couples engage with social media in the first place. Couples are seen as diligent actors who utilise digital platforms for self-gratification. The consequences of this usage—whether positive or negative—are viewed as a result of the specific content selected and the prioritisation of personal desires over the traditional essence of marital engagement. This theory allows the study to investigate how the pursuit of individual gratification through social media may conflict with or enhance collective marital satisfaction.

Integration of Theories

The synthesis of these two theories provides a robust framework: Technological Determinism accounts for the overwhelming influence of the digital environment on the modern couple, while Uses and Gratifications acknowledges the role of personal choice in how those digital tools are handled. Together, they allow for a comprehensive analysis of social media's impact on couples in Enugu State.

Methodology

Research Design

A survey-based descriptive research design was adopted for this study. This approach is instrumental in documenting a specific state of affairs regarding the opinions, actions, or characteristics of a population at a specific point in time (Ihejirika & Omego, 2013). Given that the primary data were derived from a sample representative of the adult population in Enugu State, this design was deemed the most appropriate to provide empirical answers to the stated research questions.

Population of the Study

The population of this study comprised all married couples residing in Enugu State, which consists of 17 Local Government Areas (LGAs). Based on the 2006 National Population Commission Census, the state population was 3,267,837. Applying a projected annual growth rate of 2.3% over an eighteen-year interval (2006–2024), the current estimated population stands at 4,920,642. Married couples were purposively identified as the target population because they best meet the specific criteria required to examine marital satisfaction and social media usage within a domestic context.

Sample Size and Sampling Procedure

To ensure the sample was both manageable and representative, the researcher utilised the Sample Size Calculator provided by the National Statistical Service of Australia. Using a population of 4,920,642, a 95% confidence level, a standard error of 0.02551, and a proportion of 0.5, a sample size of 385 was determined as statistically sufficient.

A multistage sampling technique was employed to select respondents. Initially, the state was divided into three senatorial districts: Enugu North, Enugu East, and Enugu West, following the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) political structure. Through simple random sampling, one LGA was selected from each district: Nsukka (North), Enugu North (East), and Udi (West). A further stage of random sampling was used to select specific districts and villages: Obukpa/Ejuona in Nsukka, Ogui/Amaigbo in Enugu North, and Abor/Ozalla in Udi. Finally, the sample size of 385 was distributed proportionately across the LGAs using the formula $nh = (Nh / N) \times n$, resulting in 151 respondents for Nsukka, 118 for Enugu North, and 116 for Udi.

Table 1: Projected Population and Sample Distribution (2024)

Senatorial District	Selected LGA	2006 Population	2024 Projection	Sample Size
Enugu North	Nsukka	309,448	465,960	151
Enugu East	Enugu North	242,140	364,609	118
Enugu West	Udi	238,305	358,834	116
Total		789,893	1,189,404	385

Source: National Population Commission (2006) and Researcher's Projections.

Instrument for Data Collection

The primary instrument was a structured questionnaire containing both open and closed-ended questions. It was divided into two sections: Section A (Demographics), covering variables such as gender, age, education, and marriage duration; and Section B (Psychographics), featuring items specifically aligned with the research objectives regarding social media usage and marital satisfaction.

Validity and Reliability

To ensure face validity, the instrument was reviewed by two communication scholars and the research supervisor. For reliability, a pilot study was conducted using 20 respondents in Nsukka. The data were analysed using SPSS (Version 16.0) to calculate the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient. The resulting coefficient of 0.709 for the 74 items indicates a high level of internal consistency, rendering the instrument reliable for the final study.

Method of Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected via self-administration by the researcher and two trained assistants. The study utilised primary data from the questionnaires and secondary data from relevant academic literature. For analysis, the data were processed using simple percentages and mean deviation. The instrument utilised dichotomous scales, multiple rating matrices, and a four-point Likert scale to quantify respondent attitudes.

Results

This study examined the influence of social media engagements on marital satisfaction among couples in Enugu State. Out of 385 distributed questionnaires, 366 were retrieved and analysed, representing a 95.1% response rate.

Demographic Profile of Respondents

The demographic data (see Table 1) reveals a balanced gender distribution (49.7% male, 50.3% female). The majority of respondents fall within the 34–41 age bracket (49.5%) and hold a

bachelor's degree (54.9%). Occupationally, business owners constitute the largest group (50.5%), with 29.8% of the total sample earning above N121,000 monthly. Notably, 38.3% of the couples have been married for 2 to 4 years.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N=366)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	182	49.7
	Female	184	50.3
Age	34 – 41 years	181	49.5
Education	Bachelor Degree	201	54.9
Occupation	Business Owner	185	50.5
Income	N121,000 and above	109	29.8
Duration	2 – 4 years	140	38.3

Social Media Usage Patterns

All 366 respondents (100%) confirmed active use of social media. WhatsApp (49.2%) and Facebook (47%) are the dominant platforms. The primary motivations for use include interacting with friends (35.8%) and reading news or articles (26.7%).

Table 2: Social Media Platforms and Purpose of Use

Category	Option	Frequency	Percentage
Main Platform	WhatsApp	180	49.2
	Facebook	172	47
	TikTok	14	3.8
Primary Purpose	Interaction with friends	131	35.8
	News and articles	98	26.7
	Interaction with family	79	21.6

Influence on Marital Satisfaction

The psychographic analysis employed a four-point Likert scale with a criterion mean of 2.5.

- *Duration and Addiction:* With an average mean of 2.5, respondents indicated they spend moderate time online (typically 1–3 hours) and generally disagreed with statements suggesting social media addiction or negative marital influence (Mean = 1.6).

- *Content and Format:* Respondents highly consume short-form videos, skits, and comedy (Average Mean = 2.7). Text-based posts (Mean = 3.4) and live videos (Mean = 2.6) are the preferred formats. Qualitative themes suggest these engagements fill communication gaps and provide stress relief.
- *Spousal Communication:* A high average mean of 3.2 confirms that social media serves as a tool for moderate, quality communication that enhances marital satisfaction.

Table 3: Influence of Social Media Metrics on Marital Satisfaction

Research Variable	Average Mean	Decision
Duration of use and importance	2.5	Accepted
Content consumption (Videos/Skits)	2.7	Accepted
Message formats (Text/Images/Live)	2.6	Accepted
Spousal communication enhancement	3.2	Accepted

Marital Satisfaction and Divorce Propensity

Analysis shows that social media use does not significantly threaten marital stability. Respondents overwhelmingly agreed they are happy and satisfied in their marriages (Mean = 3.9), suggesting that social media is used for self-gratification rather than as a tool for marital disruption.

Table 4: Marital Satisfaction and Divorce Propensity

Items	Mean	Decision
Social media use threatened divorce	1	Disagree
Decreased divorce threats	2.5	Agree
General happiness in marriage	3.9	Agree
General satisfaction in marriage	3.9	Agree

Hypothesis Testing

Two hypotheses were tested using Chi-square (X^2) analysis at a 0.05 significance level.

1. *Family Income:* The calculated X^2 (114.898) exceeded the critical value (7.815). Thus, family income significantly predicts the impact of social media on marital satisfaction.
2. *Marriage Duration:* The calculated X^2 (2.353) was lower than the critical value (3.841). Therefore, the duration of marriage does not significantly predict the impact of social media-derived happiness on satisfaction.

Table 5: Summary of Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	X2 Calculated	X2 Critical	df	Result
H1: Family Income Influence	114.898	7.815	3	Significant
H2: Marriage Duration Influence	2.353	3.841	1	Not Significant

Discussion of Findings

The findings for research question one reveal that respondents spend between 1 and 2 hours daily on social media. This duration is notably lower than the Nigerian national average of 3 hours and 58 minutes reported by Ruth (2023). This moderate usage suggests that social media addiction lacks potency among the sampled couples, allowing for more frequent involvement in real-life marital affairs and higher conjugal satisfaction. These results align with Okwudiri et al. (2021), who found that while 94% of couples have new media access, the majority approve of their partners usage, with 44% maintaining that it improves interaction. Conversely, these findings contrast with Gull et al. (2019), whose study in the Middle East identified new media as a primary source of negative influence on marital behavior. Regarding research question two, the data indicates that prank and comedy content are the most consumed formats. Engagement with such entertainment enhances marital fulfilment by fostering happiness and satisfaction.

The results for research question three show a preference for text-based posts over other formats like images, live videos, and GIFs. Crucially, respondents demonstrated significant control, ensuring these formats do not exert an inappropriate or negative effect on their unions. This finding again differs from Gull et al. (2019), who argued that social media is a main driver of negative marital influence. Furthermore, while literature suggests that misinterpreting digital communication with strangers can pose threats (e.g., using romantic language outside the marriage), the current respondents appear to have avoided these pitfalls.

The analysis for research question four indicates that social media use does not threaten divorce among couples in Enugu State; rather, it appears to reduce divorce propensities. This applauds social media as a tool for strengthening marriages, resonating with Obeng et al. (2023), who found that while social media can trigger jealousy, it also helps couples demonstrate love and care. In contrast, Virk (2017) maintains that excessive use leads to behavioural changes, anxiety, and a lack of trust, which can eventually culminate in divorce.

Finally, research question five demonstrates that respondents communicate moderately and maintain a good rapport with their spouses via social media. This quality interaction has a positive influence on marital satisfaction. By engaging with social media consciously, couples in this study avert the dissatisfaction noted in other cultures. For instance, these results contradict Alanazi (2021) and Zihad et al. (2021), whose studies in Saudi Arabia and Bangladesh respectively found that immoderate and irresponsible social media use ferment marital predicaments such as jealousy, irresponsibility, and a decline in interpersonal dedication.

Conclusion

The findings of this study lead to the conclusion that social media is a dual-edged tool whose impact is largely determined by the user's intent and level of discipline. Data from married couples in Enugu State indicates that these platforms are predominantly used as an advantageous resource that enhances marital satisfaction. Despite the pervasive nature of digital engagement, couples in this region maintain a high degree of transparency and truthfulness regarding their online activities. While personal privacy remains respected, it does not supersede the fundamental commitment to marital trust. Ultimately, when utilised judiciously, social media serves as a constructive medium for personal gratification and the strengthening of the conjugal bond.

Recommendations

In light of the research findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Married couples should avoid using romantically oriented or intimate language when communicating with strangers on digital platforms. Maintaining clear boundaries in message formats is essential to prevent emotional discomfort or the unintended stimulation of erotic emotions that could undermine marital stability and induce divorce threats.
2. Although social media has become an integral part of daily routine, couples should purposefully limit their duration of engagement. Adhering to moderate usage schedules helps to avert social media addiction and ensures that digital activities do not displace essential physical interactions.
3. Couples should be intentional about consuming social media content that exerts a positive influence. Prioritising educational, entertaining, and uplifting content can serve as a continuous catalyst for boosting marital satisfaction and emotional well-being.
4. It is imperative for couples to balance digital interactions with direct, interpersonal spousal communication. Creating dedicated time for heart-to-heart discussions allows partners to address challenges hindering their conjugal growth and fosters a deeper emotional connection that digital platforms cannot replicate.

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