Excessive Use of Social Media, Infidelity, Spouse Conflict and Coping Strategies in Married People

Iqra Tariq

Department of Clinical Psychology, University of Management and Technology, Sialkot Campus

Dr. Saleem Abbas

saleemabbas.psy@tuf.edu.pk

Assistant Professor, Head of Department of Psychology, The University of Faisalabad

Corresponding Author: * Dr. Saleem Abbas saleemabbas.psy@tuf.edu.pk

ABSRTACT

This study explains the relationship between excessive use of social media, infidelity, spouse conflict and coping strategies in married people. Married people are excessively using mobile phones and social media apps and that is affecting their relationship with their spouses. This research highlight how excessive use of social media is playing role in infidelity and spouse conflict and how these people are managing and coping with these conflicts. In order to conduct this study total 300 married people as participants were selected for this through convenient sampling methods and cross-sectional correlational research design was used to conduct this study. The data of the current study were collected by using Romantic Partner Conflict Scale, The Infidelity Scale, Networking Addiction Scale and Brief Cope. Data was analyzed through SPSS- 23 version by applying Pearson correlation, and Linear regression analysis. The findings of the current's study have shown that both hypotheses were approved (P<.05). 1st hypothesis that there was a significant positive relationship among excessive use of social media, infidelity and spouse conflict. The p value is P< 0.5. The 2nd hypothesis also approved that social media predictive of infidelity and spouse conflict (P<05). This study investigates the intricate relationship between excessive use of social media, infidelity, spouse conflict, and coping strategies among married individuals. At the end of the research thesis limitation, implication of the current study, recommendation for the future were discussed.

Keywords: *Excessive use of social media, Infidelity, Spouse Conflict, Coping Strategies, Marital relationships, Communication breakdown*

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to examine how excessive usage of social media apps affects other issues, such as adultery, which might cause marital difficulties, and how married couples handle these conflicts. Another important aspect of this study the coping mechanisms couples use to solve their interpersonal conflicts. The social media usage had great impact on the lives of people, like level of trust spouse have on each other and their engagement within the family. Especially married people, they can be involved in infidelity just like the husbands or wives are constantly using social media apps and do not give proper attention towards their families. In this way the household task and responsibilities are delayed and the conflict between couples may start that would ultimately lead towards the infidelity between spouses and children (Clayton et al., 2013).

Moreover, there is always pros and cons of everything. Just like the positive impact of social media use as discussed above there is also the negative impact of excessive use of social media on the relationship in marriage because the misuse of everything would lead towards the destruction (Aydin et al., 2018). In fact, because excessive social media use decreases partner engagement, some married individuals who use social media extensively report having unhappy marriages (Alrashid, 2015). According to Gull et al. (2019), some wives worry about what their partners are doing online, feel neglected, and are

frequently agitated by how much time their partner spends online. Family relationships may suffer as a result of spending too much time online (Yu et al., 2018).

Additionally other study has also explained the issue that one out of every three divorces now begin as an internet affair. Married people make up a staggering 30% of Tinder users. Many websites even serve married individuals seeking extramarital affairs; each month, more than 130 million people worldwide. Married couples may grow apart because of utilizing social media facilities. Overuse of the internet might cause partners to miss out on in-person encounters. People may experience depersonalization as a result, feeling cut off from their connections and environment (Quiroz et al., 2021).

Hertlein and Stevenson (2010) suggested that social media has significantly influenced romantic relationships by altering the way couples communicate and maintain intimacy. The accessibility and anonymity provided by online platforms may increase opportunities for emotional and sexual infidelity. McDaniel and Coyne (2016) also found that technology interference in couple interactions, often referred to as "technoference," is associated with greater relationship conflict and lower relationship satisfaction.

Infidelity is defined as the act of dishonesty or disloyalty in a committed relationship, especially in marriage or romantic unions. Usually, one spouse has a romantic, emotional, or sexual involvement with someone unrelated to their committed partnership without the other partner's knowledge or consent. Infidelity is frequently regarded as a betrayal of trust and can have serious emotional, interpersonal, and societal repercussions (Asma & Waqar, 2020). Research indicates that infidelity is one of the leading causes of marital dissatisfaction and divorce, as it severely damages trust and emotional security within the relationship (Drigotas & Barta, 2001).

Spouse conflict refers to the disagreements, miscommunications, or arguments between spouses in a married or committed relationship. A variety of factors, including poor communication, financial strain, conflicting goals or ideals, or emotional detachment, can lead to these conflicts (Drummet et al., 2003). Persistent or unresolved conflicts that compromise intimacy, trust, and the enjoyment of a relationship can lead to emotional distance or even adultery. Marital dynamics have been significantly impacted by social media's rise, which frequently intensifies arguments and promotes adultery.

Coping strategies play a critical role in managing conflict and emotional distress in relationships, particularly when addressing issues like marital conflict and infidelity. Effective coping mechanisms can mediate or reduce the negative impact of stressors in a marriage, such as disputes or betrayal, and contribute to the health and stability of the relationship (Diener, 2000). According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), coping involves cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person.

Rational of Study

The advance and rapid growth of social media have significantly transformed human interactions, including romantic and marital relationships. While these platforms offer avenues for communication and connection, they also present new challenges to marital stability and satisfaction. One such issue is excessive social media use, which has been linked to a number of detrimental consequences in close relationships, such as jealousy, emotional and physical adultery, and relationship strife (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

Social media's widespread use in recent years has drastically changed how people interact with one another and communicate. Social media provides connectivity and convenience, but excessive use has been connected to detrimental effects in love relationships, such as emotional distancing, jealously, and suspicions of adultery. According to this study, social media sites like Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp may make it easier for people to communicate covertly with others, which may result in emotional or physical adultery as well as breaches of trust.

Much of the current research focuses on adolescents, young adults, or individuals in dating relationships (Muise et al., 2009). In this study married people was taken because married individuals may experience different dynamics and stakes, particularly with regard to trust, financial interdependence, and familial obligations, yet are underrepresented in the literature. Studies often overlook the distinction between emotional and physical infidelity, especially in the context of social media. Emotional infidelity such as forming intimate online relationships can be just as damaging but is less frequently examined (HenlineLamke, & Howard, 2007). Most available research has been conducted in Western societies, with minimal attention to how cultural norms and values influence perceptions of social media use, infidelity, and conflict (Ogolsky & Bowers, 2013).

In conclusion, whereas previous studies have looked at the consequences of infidelity, marital conflict, and social media accessibility independently, less focus has been placed on how these factors combine in the context of married life. Prior research has mostly concentrated on the detrimental effects of excessive social media use or on coping mechanisms alone. However, there aren't many integrated frameworks that explain how social media accessibility simultaneously raises the risk of infidelity, exacerbates marital disputes, and affects the coping mechanisms that couples use.

Objectives of the Study

This study will investigate the following:

- To analyze the impact of excessive social media use on the quality of marital relationships.

- To explore the association between social media use and the emergence of spousal conflicts.

- To determine the coping mechanisms married people employ when confronted with disputes or adultery that are impacted by social media use.

- To investigate gender disparities in the patterns of social networking, conflict, infidelity, and coping strategies and see if men and women cope with social media related marital problems in different ways.

Hypotheses

The present research sets out to explore the following hypotheses:

H1: There would be a significant positive relationship between excessive use of social media, infidelity, spousal conflict and coping strategies in married people.

H2: Social media addiction would be a significant predictor of infidelity, spousal conflict and coping strategies in married people.

METHODOLOGY

The research methodology chapter outlines the overall approach, techniques, and procedures used to gather and analyze data for this study. As an essential component, it explains how the study was conducted systematically to examine the relationships between excessive social media use, infidelity, spousal conflict, and coping strategies among married individuals. By detailing these processes, the chapter provides a structured framework for identifying, collecting, and analyzing relevant information, ensuring that the study addresses its research objectives effectively (Creswell, 2014).

Research methodology forms the backbone of a rigorous and reliable study. It guides the research design, helping the researcher select appropriate instruments and strategies to achieve accurate and valid results. Key elements of methodology include the choice of research design, sampling techniques,

methods of data collection, analytical strategies, and the organizational framework within which the study operates. A sound methodological approach ensures that findings are trustworthy and that conclusions are drawn systematically and objectively (Bryman, 2016).

Research Design

This study examined the association between excessive social media use, infidelity, marital conflict, and coping strategies in married individuals using a cross-sectional correlational research approach. Convenient sampling has been used to gather data. The population of married individuals was evaluated for the indiscretion of excessive social media use, its impact on infidelity leading to spouse conflict, and coping mechanisms.

Convenient sampling is a non-probability sampling technique in which participants are selected based on their easy accessibility, proximity, and willingness to take part in the research (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016). In this method, the researcher chooses individuals who are readily available rather than selecting participants through random procedures. According to Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2019), convenience sampling allows researchers to collect data quickly and efficiently when time, budget, or logistical constraints limit access to a broader population

This study will be conducted among 300 married people from Sialkot. The sample of the population will be consisted of 150 males and 150 females. The data were be collected from married peoples in different areas. They were belonging to rural and urban areas. Their family structure, birth order, social economic status, and marital status will also be recorded. The age range were 20-45 years.

Standardized and translated tools were administered, including The Social Network Addiction (SNA) Scale, developed by Shahnawaz and Rehman (2020), is a standardized self-report measure designed to assess the extent of addictive behaviors associated with social networking site usage. The Infidelity Scale developed by Drigotas et al. (1999) is a self-report instrument designed to evaluate individuals' perceptions of physical and emotional closeness within extradyadic relationships. Romantic Partner Conflict Scale (Farooq et al., 2024), developed by Farooq, Z., Akhtar, N., and Zacchilli, T. in 2024. The Urdu-translated version of the Brief-COPE, developed by Asma Nisa and Salma Siddiqui in 2020, was used to ensure cultural relevance and linguistic appropriateness for the target population.

Procedure

The study procedure began with the selection of an appropriate research topic. The topic was approved by the Research Committee of the Department of Psychology at the University of Management and Technology (UMT), Sialkot. Following approval, official permission to conduct the study was obtained from the university. Subsequently, a comprehensive review of the relevant literature was conducted to identify key variables of interest, including excessive use of social media, infidelity, spousal conflict, and coping strategies among married individuals. The breadth of the literature review facilitated the identification of appropriate geographic locations and research settings. Demographic characteristics relevant to the research objectives were also identified.

After providing informed consent, participants were asked to complete a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire began with demographic information and was followed by items measuring the primary study variables, including excessive social media use and its effects on married individuals. Data were primarily collected through paper-based surveys, with some responses obtained online to facilitate efficient distribution and completion.

Upon completion of the questionnaires, participants were given a brief debriefing session in which they were thanked for their participation and informed about the relevance and potential implications of the study. Finally, the collected data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics were used to identify overall trends and prevalence related to social media

use, infidelity, spousal conflict, and coping strategies among married individuals. Inferential statistical techniques were employed to test the study hypotheses and examine the relationships among the main variables.

RESULTS

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of the demographic data

Variable	Category	M	n	%
Age (years)		34.00		
Gender	Male	—	150	50.0
	Female	—	150	50.0
Area of Residence	Urban	—	135	45.0
	Rural	—	165	55.0
Religion	Muslim	—	219	73.0
	Non-Muslim	—	81	27.0
Family System	Nuclear	—	145	48.3
	Joint	—	155	51.7
Socioeconomic Status (SES)	Low	—	86	28.7
	Middle	—	130	43.3
	High	—	84	28.0
Years Married	—	9.00	—	—

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics of the demographic characteristics of the study participants. The mean age of the participants was 34 years, indicating that the sample largely comprised individuals in early to middle adulthood, a life stage commonly associated with marital responsibilities and relational challenges. The gender distribution of the sample was relatively balanced, with 150 male participants (53.6%) and 150 female participants (53.6%), ensuring representation of both genders in examining marital dynamics.

With respect to geographic location, 165 participants (55.8%) resided in rural areas, while 135 participants (48.2%) were from urban settings, reflecting an approximately comparable representation of rural and urban populations. This distribution allows for consideration of contextual differences in marital relationships and social media use across living environments. In terms of religious affiliation, the majority of participants identified as Muslim (78.2%), whereas 21.8% were classified as non-Muslim, reflecting the religious composition of the broader population.

H1: There would be a significant positive relationship between excessive use of social media, infidelity, spousal conflict and coping strategies in married people.

Table 2: Correlation between the variables Excessive Social Media Use, Infidelity, Spousal Conflict and Coping Strategies

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Excessive Social Media Use	1						
Infidelity	.473**	1					
Spousal Conflict	.345**	.577**	1				
Problem Focused Coping	-.134*	-.305**	-.595**	1			
Emotion Focused Coping	.167**	.274**	.586**	-.446**	1		
Avoidant Coping	.259**	.398**	.683**	-.419**	.441**	1	
Overall Coping	.220**	.294**	.539**	-0.034	.720**	.769**	1

Table 2 presents the Pearson correlation coefficients among excessive social media use, infidelity, spousal conflict, and coping strategies. Excessive social media use was significantly and positively correlated with infidelity (r = .47, p < .01) and spousal conflict (r = .35, p < .01), indicating that higher levels of social media use were associated with greater infidelity and increased marital conflict. Excessive social media use was also positively related to emotion-focused coping (r = .17, p < .01), avoidant coping (r = .26, p < .01), and overall coping (r = .22, p < .01), while showing a small negative association with problem-focused coping (r = −.13, p < .05). Spousal conflict and infidelity showed a strong positive correlation (r =.58, p <.01), indicating that higher rates of infidelity were associated with larger marital conflict. Infidelity was also positively correlated with emotion-focused coping (r = .27, p < .01), avoidant coping (r = .40, p < .01), and overall coping (r = .29, p < .01), and negatively related to problem-focused coping (r = −.31, p < .01). Spousal conflict exhibited a strong positive correlation with emotion-focused coping (r = .59, p < .01), avoidant coping (r = .68, p < .01), and overall coping (r = .54, p < .01), indicating that more conflict was connected to increased dependence on maladaptive coping techniques. Conversely, there was a strong negative correlation (r = −.60, p <.01) between spousal conflict and problem-focused coping, indicating a decreased use of adaptive coping mechanisms in high conflict situations. Additionally, problem-focused coping was negatively associated with emotion-focused coping (r = −.45, p < .01) and avoidant coping (r = −.42, p < .01). Overall coping was strongly correlated with emotion-focused coping (r = .72, p < .01) and avoidant coping (r = .77, p < .01), indicating that overall coping scores were primarily driven by these coping styles.

H2: Social media addiction would be a significant predictor of infidelity, spousal conflict and coping strategies in married people.

Table 3: Impact of Social Media and Infidelity on Spousal Conflict and Coping Styles

Model	B	β	SE	R	R²
Model 1 (Spousal Conflict)					
Constant	31.25***	-	2.92		
Excessive Social Media Use (SNAS)	.324***	.345***	.053	.345	.119
Infidelity (IS)	.806***	.577***	.068	.577	.333
Model 2 (Overall Coping)					
Constant	66.58***	-	1.37		
Excessive Social Media Use (SNAS)	.083***	.220***	.022	.220	.048
Infidelity (IS)	.164***	.294***	.032	.294	.086

The results of multiple regression models examining the effects of infidelity and excessive social media use on marital conflict and general coping strategies are displayed in Table 3. Spousal conflict was regressed on infidelity and excessive social media use in Model 1. The total model explained 33.3% of the variance in spousal conflict (R2 =.333) and was statistically significant (F(2, 277) = 69.40, p <.001). Overuse of social media was found to be a significant positive exploiter of spousal conflict (β =.35, p <.001), suggesting that higher levels of social media use were linked to more marital conflict. Infidelity was also a significant positive predictor (β = .58, p < .001) and demonstrated a stronger association with spousal conflict compared to social media use. In Model 2, overall coping strategies were regressed on excessive social media use and infidelity. The model was statistically significant, F(2, 277) = 13.11, p < .001, explaining 8.6% of the variance in coping strategies (R² = .086). Excessive social media use significantly predicted overall coping (β = .22, p < .001), suggesting that greater social media use was associated with increased engagement in coping behaviors. Infidelity also significantly predicted overall coping strategies (β = .29, p < .001), indicating that higher levels of infidelity-related stress were linked to greater reliance on coping mechanisms.

DISCUSSION

This study aimed to explore how excessive social media use, infidelity, spousal conflict, and coping strategies interact within married relationships. The findings support all the hypotheses, providing a clear picture of how digital behavior can influence marital dynamics. Specifically, high levels of social media use are linked to a greater likelihood of infidelity, which in turn intensifies spousal conflicts and promotes maladaptive coping strategies (Drouin et al., 2014).

Individuals who engage heavily with social media are more prone to emotional or physical affairs. This aligns with prior research showing that social media facilitates easy connection, emotional disclosure, and intimacy with people outside the marriage (McDaniel et al., 2017). Features such as privacy, instant communication, and constant exposure to new contacts make crossing relational boundaries simpler than in pre-digital contexts.

Social Exchange Theory (Thibaut & Kelley, 2017) helps explain this phenomenon. Being highly active online increases awareness of alternative social options, which can appear more rewarding than one's current marital situation. If individuals feel more appreciated or validated by online connections than by their spouse, the temptation to engage in infidelity grows.

Attachment theory further explains these dynamics. Partners with anxious or avoidant attachment styles often turn to social media to seek reassurance or maintain emotional distance (Oldmeadow et al., 2013). Such online behaviors can escalate into emotional affairs, which compromise trust and marital stability in ways comparable to physical infidelity (Fincham & May, 2017). Hence, excessive social media use is not merely a trivial habit; it functions as both a trigger and a warning signal for potential marital challenges.

Coping strategies were strongly influenced by the presence of conflict. When faced with disputes especially those arising from infidelity couples were more likely to rely on avoidant or emotion-focused coping and less likely to engage in problem-focused approaches. According to Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) model, coping behaviors are shaped by individuals' perceptions of the stressor and their available resources. Marital conflict can feel overwhelming, prompting partners to withdraw, ruminate, or deny the problem, which exacerbates emotional strain and negatively affects both relationship satisfaction and individual well-being (Carver et al., 1989; Bodenmann et al., 2016).

The study further demonstrates that persistent marital conflict diminishes partners' capacity for collaborative problem-solving. As a result, maladaptive coping habits are reinforced, creating a cyclical pattern of conflict and dissatisfaction. This underscores the importance of addressing not only the source of conflict but also the strategies couples use to manage it.

Overall, the study reveals a sequential relationship: excessive social media use promotes infidelity, which then fuels spousal conflict and encourages maladaptive coping. Digital behaviors do not exist in isolation; they significantly affect marital trust, communication, and emotional regulation. By integrating Social Exchange Theory, Attachment Theory, Family Systems Theory, and stress-coping frameworks, this research illustrates how trust, conflict, and digital habits are intertwined in modern marriages. The findings emphasize that understanding and discussing technology use is essential for maintaining healthy relationships in the digital age.

The findings of this study provide strong evidence that excessive social media use significantly influences marital dynamics, primarily by increasing the risk of infidelity, which then triggers spousal conflict. Rather than acting as a direct source of discord, heavy social media engagement appears to facilitate behaviors associated with infidelity, which serve as the primary mechanism driving conflict within marriages.

The study also highlights how heightened spousal conflict, particularly when associated with infidelity, impacts coping mechanisms within marriage. In line with stress and coping theories, higher levels of conflict were linked to increased reliance on avoidant and emotion-focused coping, coupled with a reduction in problem-focused strategies. Marital stress appears to diminish individuals' confidence or capacity to engage in constructive problem-solving, often leading to withdrawal, rumination, denial, or emotional venting. These coping responses may offer temporary emotional relief but ultimately fail to address underlying relational issues, thereby reinforcing cycles of conflict and dissatisfaction (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Overall, the results reveal a clear chain reaction: excessive social media use elevates the likelihood of infidelity, infidelity drives spousal conflict, and ongoing conflict promotes maladaptive coping patterns. By integrating multiple theoretical perspectives, this study emphasizes the importance of managing digital behaviors, establishing healthy relational boundaries, and developing effective coping skills within marriages. These findings underscore that responsible social media use is not merely an individual concern but a relational one, with significant implications for marital functioning.

The practical implications of these findings are particularly relevant for marital counseling and psycho-educational interventions. Therapists and counselors may benefit from explicitly addressing digital boundaries, online transparency, and expectations around social media use within marriage. Interventions that focus on strengthening communication skills, rebuilding trust following infidelity, and promoting problem-focused coping strategies may help couples navigate digital stressors more effectively. Additionally, fostering awareness about the psychological impact of online interactions may empower couples to make more intentional choices that protect relational well-being.

In conclusion, this study highlights the complex interplay between digital behavior, infidelity, conflict, and coping in modern marriages. As social media becomes increasingly embedded in daily life, understanding its indirect yet powerful influence on marital relationships is essential. Promoting adaptive coping strategies, clear relational boundaries, and open communication can play a critical role in preserving marital satisfaction and emotional well-being in the digital age (Thibaut & Kelley, 2017).

LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATION:

This study has certain limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the research used a cross-sectional design, which limits the ability to determine causal relationships. While the mediation analysis provides insight into potential pathways, a longitudinal approach would offer a clearer understanding of how excessive social media use, infidelity, and spousal conflict unfold over time. Second, the study relied on self-reported data, which may be influenced by social desirability, particularly for sensitive topics such as infidelity. This means that actual behaviors and experiences could vary somewhat from the reported data. Additionally, data were collected from individual participants rather than both partners in a marriage. Gathering information from both spouses would provide a more comprehensive view of the reciprocal influences within the relationship and how differences in perception affect marital dynamics.

Finally, cultural and contextual factors may affect the generalizability of the results, as norms regarding marriage, fidelity, and social media use differ across societies.

Future research could address these limitations by employing longitudinal and dyadic study designs, allowing researchers to observe couples over time and capture the dynamic interactions between partners. Including factors such as attachment styles, marital satisfaction, communication quality, shared values, and agreed-upon digital boundaries could further clarify which individuals are more susceptible to technology-related stressors in marriage. Additionally, studies could explore interventions designed to strengthen marital relationships in the context of digital challenges, such as programs focused on digital literacy, boundary setting, collaborative problem-solving, and couple communication training. Such efforts would help couples manage social media use effectively, reduce

the risk of infidelity, and improve coping strategies, thereby promoting long-term relationship satisfaction and emotional well-being (Karaman & Arslan, 2024). By integrating preventive and therapeutic approaches, future research can help translate theoretical findings into real-world solutions, ultimately supporting couples in developing healthier relationships with both technology and each other.

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