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The Relationship Between Social Media Usage and Adherence to Religious Beliefs with Marital Satisfaction Among Married Students of Payame Noor Universities in Gilan Province

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Abstract

Background and Aim: The present study aims to determine the amount of use of Cyberspace and practicing religious beliefs with marital satisfaction among married students of Payam Noor University in Guilan Province in 2023.

Materials and Methods: This study was descriptive-correlational. The statistical population consisted of 400 married students of Payam Noor University in Guilan Province, of whom 196 were determined using the Cochran formula and selected using a random cluster sampling method. Data were collected using the Religious Beliefs Questionnaire (Golzar, 2018), the Enrich Marital Satisfaction Questionnaire (Olson, 1998), and the Social Media Use Questionnaire (Sahraei, 2012). The data were analyzed using SPSS version 22 software. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used to examine the normality of the data. Pearson correlation analysis, bivariate regression, and multivariate regression were used to test the research hypotheses.

Results: The results indicated a positive and direct relationship between adherence to religious beliefs and marital satisfaction among the students ($\beta = 0.528$, $t = 9.98$, $p < 0.001$). Overall, these variables predicted 42.2% of the variance in students' marital satisfaction ($R^2 = 0.422$, adjusted $R^2 = 0.416$, $F (2, 193) = 70.316$, $p < 0.001$). Furthermore, the negative coefficient between social media usage and marital satisfaction indicates an inverse relationship ($\beta = -0.240$, $t = -4.133$, $p < 0.001$). between social media usage and marital satisfaction.

Conclusion: Greater adherence to religious beliefs increases marital satisfaction, whereas excessive use of cyberspace decreases it. Strengthening religious values and managing time spent online can help improve the quality of married life. The findings demonstrate that both social media usage and adherence to religious beliefs are significantly related to marital satisfaction among married students of Payame Noor University in Gilan Province.

Keywords: Social Media, Religion, Personal Satisfaction.

Introduction

In recent decades, Iranian families have faced various changes and transformations, such that in recent years, the patterns of the "traditional family" and the "new family" have emerged. Marriage is no longer merely a long-term structure with the sole purpose of raising children; rather, couples form a life together in the hope of warm interactions, and as long as they feel their presence meets each other's needs, they experience full satisfaction from their marital life (1). As a result of the cultural and social changes that have occurred, women's presence in society has become more prominent due to the increased use of online social networking sites. This widespread presence of virtual spaces in the lives of couples—as an essential pillar of the family—spending time with goals such as maintaining friendships, family connections, and kinship ties, has gradually created qualitative changes in the functioning of families, of which marital satisfaction is one aspect (2). Modern societies face numerous social issues and challenges. However, in every society, some problems carry greater importance due to the degree of harm they inflict on the social structure. Undoubtedly, one of the most significant of these challenges is the phenomenon of

"divorce, marital relationships, and the degree of marital satisfaction," since the damage caused by this issue directly affects the family, which is considered the cornerstone of society (3). As we know, the family is the first and most fundamental social institution within society, ensuring both its health and continuity. Moreover, children's personalities are shaped within the family, enabling them to align and adapt to societal norms (4). Yet, the family is not always capable of preserving cohesion and guiding its members toward a unified goal. At times, it suffers disintegration among its members, which can eventually lead to the collapse of this crucial institution. In the past decade, social networks and the virtual world have expanded rapidly, to the extent that they have influenced individuals' relationships and the family institution. The satisfaction of husbands and wives with their marital life—and their mutual connection and healthy relationship—is regarded as one of the core foundations of a family. It plays a vital role in strengthening families, protecting them from harm, and fostering their growth and flourishing (5). In this regard, Alain Girard emphasizes that among all the essential ceremonies, customs, and events of human life, marriage holds fundamental importance—from the perspective of the individual, biology, and society. No other institution is as universal, stable, and enduring in its purpose as marriage (6). Therefore, no institution is as influenced by social transformations as marriage itself. In today's world, when discussing social interactions within families, the concept of virtual social networks has become one of the most influential and important factors, as they have found a strong place in couples' lives. These platforms have not only functioned as tools but also as perspectives, creating changes in family life. Social networking sites, in addition to enabling virtual networking, allow individuals to use various online opportunities such as searching, reading and sharing news, uploading photos and videos, writing notes, and joining groups. This has attracted particular attention from internet users (7).

Marital life continues and holds validity as long as the relationship between spouses contains marital satisfaction. Marital satisfaction is one of the concepts through which the presence or absence of marital problems can be identified. Marital dissatisfaction is a concept directly related to conflict and incompatibility in marriage. In other words, as conflicts increase in couples' relationships, incompatibility rises, resulting in greater dissatisfaction (8). Satisfaction within a relationship is defined as an individual's subjective evaluation of that relationship. Schumacher (2005) introduces compatibility between spouses as the most important factor in marital satisfaction. Winch (1974) defines marital satisfaction as the alignment between the current state of marital life and the expected state envisioned by the spouses (9). According to Ellis, marital satisfaction refers to the objective feeling of happiness, contentment, and pleasure experienced by husband and wife when considering all aspects of their shared life. Therefore, marital satisfaction is having a positive and enjoyable attitude toward all dimensions of the marital relationship. Bradbury (2000) defines marital satisfaction as the general attitudes or feelings an individual holds toward their spouse and marital relationship (10). Similarly, Gordon (1999) considers marital satisfaction to be both internal and external compatibility between husband and wife, such that in various life situations, a mutual understanding is established between them. Social networks are forms of media in which video, audio, text, or multimedia content is produced by users and then shared within a social environment among peers (11). The extent of internet and virtual network usage has grown to such an extent that the current generation is referred to as Generation Z, the internet generation, or the network generation—those born from the mid-1990s onward (12). There are notable differences between different generations in how they use social networks and in their motivations for joining virtual spaces. For example, research has shown that mothers use Facebook more than fathers, and most of

mothers' Facebook friends are family members and relatives. Fathers, however, are more likely to interact with Facebook friends outside the platform itself (13). Recent studies show that more than 95% of undergraduate students in England use social networking sites regularly (14). In recent years, the popularity of online social networks has increased to an unprecedented level, with the most popular ones hosting hundreds of millions of users. This success has generated benefits within these networked communities and has also increased the number of studies aimed at understanding them. However, their vastness and the limited access to all users of large social networks have made it difficult to obtain sufficient information about users' perspectives and the nature of their relationships (15). Among other factors that may influence marital satisfaction is adherence to religious beliefs. We highlight this because we believe it is one of the driving forces of marital satisfaction among married individuals. Nonetheless, some studies show that religious values can predict marital success and longevity (16). It is widely accepted that humans are social beings; our existence derives meaning from being among others(17). In this regard, social networks and the virtual world are among the best achievements of humanity, bringing the world closer to us. Social networks are platforms where user-generated content—whether video, audio, text, or multimedia—is published and shared among peers in a social environment. Social networks and the virtual world have become inseparable from our lives: we connect with friends near and far, stay informed about the latest news and events, follow groups and organizations we are interested in, play games, shop, learn, make new friends, and, in essence, remain connected to the entire world. Among modern media, social networks can be considered one of the most widely used worldwide—especially with the rise of smartphones and easier access to these platforms, which have rapidly increased their penetration rates. With the advent of virtual social networks, a new form of life emerged

in cyberspace, distinct from traditional relationships. While their benefits and unique features cannot be denied, they also bring challenges—among them issues affecting couples' marital life. Any subject can potentially become a source of conflict and challenge in couples' relationships. Providing a complete list of problematic issues between spouses is neither possible nor necessary. However, attempts have been made to identify and categorize conflict-inducing factors among couples. Accordingly, dimensions and domains of marital adjustment have been described in different ways. Olson (1997) and Fowers & Olson (1993), after summarizing and analyzing all proposed dimensions, identified the following: personality issues, dyadic communication, conflict resolution, financial management, leisure activities, sexual relationship, parenting, relationships with relatives and friends, and religious orientation. Handler and Ganjavi also believe that religious orientation can influence marital relationships since religion provides guidelines for life and offers a system of beliefs and values that can affect marital life. However, as most of the aforementioned studies have been conducted in other countries—mostly Arab nations—and often relied on single indicators (e.g., church attendance) to measure religiosity, or involved populations with high levels of education, conducting such research in Muslim societies, with a comprehensive perspective on religiosity and in more educated samples, seems necessary. It is said that religion gives individuals principles and purpose in life, and within marriage, religion can serve as a central meaning for the union (18). Due to the lack of strong religious values, many couples often approach marriage as a sacred contract separate from all religious relationships. Based on the insights of various scholars, we hypothesize that there may be a relationship between the use of virtual space, adherence to religious beliefs, and marital satisfaction (19).

Materials and Methods

The statistical population consisted of 400 married students of Payame Noor University in Gilan Province. The study was conducted in 2023. The sample size was determined using Cochran's formula, resulting in 196 students selected. Through random cluster sampling, Payam Noor universities were placed in 4 clusters and samples were randomly selected from each cluster. After obtaining the consent of the samples, the questionnaire was provided to them online. The inclusion criteria for the study included the following: being a student at Payam Noor University in Guilan Province. Not having a chronic disease or a mental illness for which they are receiving medication. The exclusion criterion for the study was failure to complete the questionnaires. Data were collected using the following standard questionnaires: Social Media Usage Questionnaire (Collinder et al., 2005), Religious Belief Practice Questionnaire (Golzar, 2018), and Enrich Marital Satisfaction Questionnaire (Olson, 1998). To ensure the validity of the instrument, face and content validity methods were used. The questionnaires were provided to 10 expert professors and their corrective comments were applied. To determine the reliability, the questionnaires were provided to 20 married students, and the reliability of each instrument was determined by determining Cronbach's alpha above 0.7, and their reliability was confirmed in this way. For data analysis, descriptive statistics (mean, variance, standard deviation) were used in the descriptive section, and Pearson's correlation coefficient, stepwise regression, and multiple regression were used in the inferential section using SPSS software. Ethical considerations were strictly observed: participants were assured of confidentiality, no personal identifiers (name or surname) were required, and written informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their participation in the study.

Findings

The study sample consisted of 196 participants. Regarding gender, 104 participants (53.06%) were women, 83 participants (42.35%) were men, and 9 participants (4.59%) did not report their gender. In terms of age, 53 participants (27.04%) were under 23 years old, 112 participants (57.14%) were between 23 and 26 years old, 26 participants (13.27%) were above 26 years old, and 5 participants (2.55%) did not report their age. Regarding educational level, the majority of participants held a bachelor's degree (130 participants, 66.33%), followed by a master's degree (58 participants, 29.59%), and 8 participants (4.08%) did not report their education level. Overall, the sample consisted predominantly of young adults with a bachelor's degree, and the gender distribution was relatively balanced (Table 1).

Table1: Demographic Table

Demographic Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Gender	Woman	104	53.06%	53.06%
	Man	83	42.35%	95.41%
	No Response	9	4059%	100%
Age	Under23	53	27.4%	27.4%
	26-23	112	57.14%	84.18%
	Above26	26	13.27%	97.45%
	No Response	5	2.55%	100%
Education	Bachelors	130	66.33%	66.33%
	Masters	58	29.59%	95.92%
	No Response	8	4.08%	100%

To examine the status of the study variables, the one-sample Kolmogorov–Smirnov test was first conducted to assess the normality of the data for the research indicators, including the level of social media use, adherence to religious beliefs, and marital satisfaction. The results indicated that the significance level for all indicators was greater than 0.05; therefore, the data exhibited a normal distribution, allowing the use of parametric tests (Table 2).

Table 2: One-Sample Kolmogorov–Smirnov Test for Research Variables

Variable	Test Statistic	Significance Level (p-value)	Test Result

Use of Social Media	0/095	0/172	Normal
Religious Belief Practice	0/076	0/208	Normal
Marital Satisfaction	0/070	0/214	Normal

The analysis of Pearson correlation coefficients between the variables showed a positive and significant relationship between adherence to religious beliefs and marital satisfaction, indicating that higher adherence to religious beliefs was associated with greater marital satisfaction. A negative and significant relationship was also observed between social media use and marital satisfaction, suggesting that higher levels of social media use were associated with lower marital satisfaction. In addition, a negative and significant relationship was found between social media use and adherence to religious beliefs, indicating that increased social media use was associated with lower adherence to religious beliefs (Table 3).

The results of multiple regression analysis using the enter method revealed that social media use and adherence to religious beliefs jointly accounted for 42.2% of the variance in marital satisfaction (R = 0.649, R² = 0.422). The analysis of variance confirmed the adequacy of the model (F = 70.316, p < 0.001). Standardized coefficients indicated that adherence to religious beliefs had the strongest positive effect on marital satisfaction (β = 0.528, p < 0.001), whereas social media use had a negative effect on marital satisfaction (β = −0.240, p <

0.001). Overall, these findings suggest that greater adherence to religious beliefs is associated with higher marital satisfaction, while increased social media use is associated with lower marital satisfaction. Moreover, social media use is negatively related to adherence to religious beliefs (Table 4).

Discussion

The findings of the present study indicated that adherence to religious beliefs has a significant positive relationship with marital satisfaction, whereas the extent of social media use has a significant negative relationship with this variable. These results can be explained with reference to Stephen Marsh's systems theory, which views the family as a system composed of the individual's internal dimensions, spousal interaction, and other life domains such as children, work, and leisure (20). When balance is maintained among these dimensions, couples experience higher levels of satisfaction and happiness; however, excessive emphasis on any one dimension— particularly external domains such as extensive social media use—can weaken emotional bonds and reduce marital satisfaction. High social media use limits face-to-face interaction, reduces opportunities for dialogue, expressions of affection, and conflict resolution, and over time can lead to emotional and even physical distancing between spouses. Moreover, the findings showed that religious beliefs play a crucial role in enhancing the quality of marital life by fostering traits such as forgiveness, patience, commitment, tolerance, and kindness (21). Religiosity serves not only as a spiritual resource for resolving conflicts but also as a normative framework that discourages incompatibility and marital discord while reinforcing values such as loyalty, courteous interaction, and avoidance of unnecessary disputes. A reduction in these beliefs—potentially

resulting from exposure to secular or anti-religious content on social media—can indirectly negatively affect marital satisfaction. The researcher believes that these results, while observed in the cultural and social context of Iran, are likely applicable to other family-oriented societies. These findings are consistent with previous studies. For example, religiosity strengthens marital commitment and stability, which supports the current result that religious beliefs enhance patience, tolerance, and loyalty within marital relationships (22). Similarly, excessive social media use can intensify marital conflicts and weaken emotional intimacy, aligning with the present study's finding that social media use undermines spousal bonds (23). In addition, external demands and distractions—such as work or digital engagement—reduce the time couples spend together, thereby lowering relationship satisfaction (24). Taken together, these converging findings reinforce the interpretation that religiosity acts as a protective factor, while social media overuse represents a risk factor for marital satisfaction. The findings are consistent with previous studies, which have confirmed that religiosity enhances compatibility, reduces marital conflicts, and increases marital satisfaction, whereas excessive social media use is associated with weakened family cohesion and lower quality of spousal relationships. Nonetheless, the study has some overarching limitations, including the restricted sample, reliance on self-report measures, and the cross-sectional design, which limits the generalizability of the findings and the ability to draw causal inferences. Considering these limitations, future research is recommended to employ more diverse samples and longitudinal or mixed-method approaches (quantitative and qualitative) to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of the relationships between religious beliefs, social media use, and marital satisfaction. Additionally, educational and counseling programs focusing on communication skills, time management in social media, and strengthening religious values could contribute to improving the quality of couples' marital life.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that increased adherence to religious beliefs can enhance marital satisfaction, while excessive use of cyberspace has the opposite effect on this variable. Therefore, strengthening religious values and managing the time spent on cyberspace can play an effective role in improving the quality of married life.

Acknowledgements

Conflict of Interest

There were no conflicts of interest in this study.

Sponsorship and Ethical Considerations

This study had no sponsor.

Table 3: Results of the Correlation Test Between Research Variables

Variable	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
Use of Social Media	-0.334**	-0.269**	-0.364**	-0.317**	-0.264**	-0.290**	-0.323**	-0.281**	-0.309**	-0.352**	-0.339**	3632**	-0.263**	-0.416**
Religious Belief Practice	1	0.494**	0.537**	0.343**	0.421**	0.446**	0.466**	0.452**	0.432**	0.482**	0.511**	0.405**	0.406**	0.609**
Conventional Response		1	0.486**	0.320**	0.278**	0.212**	0.443**	0.381**	0.385**	0.349**	0.404**	0.318**	0.349**	0.554**
Marital Satisfaction			1	0.737**	0.564**	0.567**	0.574**	0.545**	0.487**	0.486**	0.510**	0.439**	0.411**	0.794**
Personal Matters				1	0.579**	0.564**	0.555**	0.511**	0.505**	0.529**	0.450**	0.331**	0.360**	0.731**
Marital Communication					1	0.649**	0.493**	0.453**	0.460**	0.414**	0.386**	0.318**	0.263**	0.649**
Conflict Resolution						1	0.689**	0.567**	0.584**	0.528**	0.555**	0.398**	0.369**	0.767**
Financial Management							1	0.728**	0.718**	0.610**	0.609**	0.492**	0.484**	0.826**
Leisure Activities								1	0.780**	0.660**	0.611**	0.545**	0.531**	0.818**
Sexual Relations									1	0.699**	0.588**	0.475**	0.513**	0.801**
Marriage and Children										1	0.683**	0.516**	0.584**	0.789**
Relatives and Friends											1	0.707**	0.694**	0.799**
Gender Equality Roles												1	0.665**	0.673**
Ideological Orientation													1	0.696**
Marital Satisfaction														1

Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level.*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level.**

Table4: Regression Path Coefficients and Significance Test of Coefficients

Variable	Coefficients Unstandardized		Standardized Coefficient (β)	t-Statistic	Significance Level
	β	Standard Error			
Constant	140/370	10/753		13/054	0/001
Use of Social Media	-1/176	0/285	-0/240	-4/113	0/001
Religious Belief Practice	0/952	0/105	0/528	9/098	0/001

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