

Relationship between Facebook Use and Marital Stability Among Married Individuals in Embakasi West Constituency, Nairobi County, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Marriage remains a key societal institution, with marital stability crucial for couples and child-rearing. Despite rising interest, especially in the era of social media, limited research examines Facebook use and marital stability among married individuals. This study investigated this relationship in Embakasi West Constituency, guided by Social Exchange and Social Comparison Theories. Using a quantitative correlational survey design, 300 respondents completed structured questionnaires, including the Facebook Intensity Scale and ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale. Findings revealed that Facebook use has both positive and negative effects, with excessive use undermining trust, intimacy, and quality time. Recommendations include awareness programs by counselors, curricular revisions in educational institutions, and policymaker engagement.

Materials and Methods

The study employed a quantitative correlational survey design to examine the relationship between Facebook use and marital stability among married individuals in Embakasi West Constituency, Nairobi County. The target population comprised 930 married members of Deliverance Church and GCI Central Assembly, from which a proportionate random sample of 300 respondents was drawn using the Yamane (1967) formula. The pre-testing sample of 30 respondents (10% of the total sample) was conducted at the International Christian Church (ICC) to assess the validity and reliability of the Facebook Intensity Scale and ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale. Data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics via SPSS version 26. Ethical considerations were observed throughout, ensuring confidentiality and voluntary participation, and the methodology ensured robust, representative, and generalisable findings.

Results

The study captured diverse demographic characteristics of respondents. Females constituted the majority at 62.6% (n = 127), while males accounted for 37.4% (n = 76). Most participants were aged between 31 and 40 years (41.4%, n = 84), followed by those 30 years and below (28.1%, n = 57). Participants aged 41–50 years represented 18.7% (n = 38), 51–60 years 8.4% (n = 17), and over 60 years 3.4% (n = 7). In terms of education, 31.5% (n = 64) held a degree, 18.7% (n = 38) a master's, and 17.2% (n = 35) a diploma. Regarding marital duration, 30% (n = 61) had been married less than five years, while 10.3% (n = 23) had been married over 20 years. These demographics provided insights into how Facebook use influences marital stability in Embakasi West Constituency, Nairobi County.

Conclusion

The study indicates a significant relationship between Facebook use and marital stability among married individuals in Embakasi West Constituency, with excessive use undermining trust, intimacy, and quality time, while moderate use may support communication and connection.

Keyword: Levels, Facebook Use, Marital Satisfaction, Married individuals, Embakasi West Constituency, Nairobi.

INTRODUCTION

Globally, human communication has always been central to social interaction, enabling people to share thoughts, emotions, and intentions (Servaes, 2020). From verbal language to non-verbal cues, human beings have consistently sought ways to express themselves effectively. Historical accounts, such as those in the Bible, illustrate that communication has always been fundamental; God's conversations with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden exemplify the earliest known forms of interpersonal communication (Effa & Nwogu, 2019). With technological advancement, Facebook usage has undergone significant transformation (Deloitte, 2016). Facebook usage has expanded opportunities for connection across distances, influencing marital relationship. Among these, Facebook has become a dominant platform, allowing users to maintain social networks, share personal updates, and communicate globally. Facebook was created in 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg, originally targeting Harvard University students, but it quickly expanded worldwide, becoming the most widely used Facebook usage site by 2009 (Kim et al., 2015).

Facebook currently has an estimated 2.934 billion active users worldwide. This rapid expansion highlights the platform's ability to facilitate connections, yet it has also raised concerns regarding privacy, addiction, and marital relationship dynamics (Ibrahim et al., 2012). In the United States, excessive Facebook use has been linked to increased divorce rates and decreased marital satisfaction. Specifically, a correlation of $r = -0.45$ has been reported between Facebook use and marital stability, indicating that higher engagement often coincides with marital discord (Lee, 2021). Clayton et al., (2013) found that Facebook encourages secretive behaviors, jealousy, and infidelity, which destabilize marriages. Despite these risks, Facebook also offers benefits, particularly for long-distance couples. Hertlein & Chan, (2020) observed that social networks allow geographically separated partners to maintain communication, emotional closeness, and relationship satisfaction. Fryer et al., (2017) further emphasized that social media can enhance a couple's sense of togetherness, as partners can interact regardless of physical separation. Globally, therefore, Facebook's impact on marital stability is dual-natured: it provides opportunities for connection and relationship maintenance but simultaneously creates avenues for distrust, jealousy, and emotional detachment.

In Africa, Facebook usage has grown substantially, with varying impacts on marital stability depending on urbanization, socioeconomic status, and cultural norms (Karanja, 2023). In Nigeria, urban married couples frequently report marital discord linked to Facebook, including infidelity and mistrust (Adegoke & Esere, 2020). South Africa has witnessed similar patterns, particularly among young couples, who cite Facebook as a source of tension and arguments (Posel & Rudwick, 2019). In contrast, in Tanzania and Uganda, lower Facebook adoption has limited its disruptive effects on marriages; however, increasing platform penetration is raising concerns for the future ((Mugisha & Odiwuor, 2018)

In Zimbabwe, household internet use has been associated with communication breakdowns, with 90% of surveyed respondents acknowledging its disruptive impact and 50% explicitly citing Facebook as contributing to family conflicts (Kodzai, 2015). Across Africa, the negative impacts of Facebook on marital relationships often stem from emotional detachment, reduced communication, and virtual infidelity. Social networking platforms have reshaped traditional relationship norms, challenging marital stability in societies where cultural expectations historically dictated the boundaries of marital engagement (Muthoni, 2021).

Kenya has emerged as a leading user of Facebook in East Africa due to widespread mobile and internet access (Özad & Uygurer, 2014)). Improved connectivity over the past decade has facilitated increased engagement with social media platforms, including Facebook (Odhiambo & Maito, 2013). As of February 2022, Kenya had approximately 9.95 million Facebook users, the largest number in East Africa (Mugisha & Odiwuor, 2018)). This growth reflects both urbanization and shifts in social norms, particularly in Nairobi, Mombasa, Kisumu, and other major cities.

Facebook use in Kenya has been linked to relational challenges among married couples, particularly in urban areas. Excessive engagement on the platform has been associated with jealousy, infidelity, and diminished communication between spouses (Odhiambo & Kimani, 2021). Specifically, 65% of Kenyan couples reported that Facebook facilitated inappropriate relationships, while 72% noted that it enabled reconnecting with former

partners. Additionally, 58% acknowledged reduced spousal communication due to social media distractions (Muturi & Kinyua, 2019). Despite these concerns, Facebook also serves as a tool for maintaining social connections, emotional support, and coordination of long-distance interactions, illustrating its dual role in marital dynamics.

Traditional values and cultural practices continue to shape marital relationships in Kenya, yet the pervasive influence of social media challenges these norms (Omoro, 2018). Urbanization, modernity, and exposure to global communication trends have altered expectations within marriages, increasing the likelihood of conflicts associated with social networking platforms. Consequently, understanding Facebook's role in Kenyan marital relationships is critical for promoting awareness, marital counseling, and informed digital practices among couples.

Married individuals in Embakasi West increasingly use Facebook to maintain social connections, engage with friends and extended family, and manage long-distance interactions. However, excessive or inappropriate use has been linked to reduced spousal communication, mistrust, jealousy, and virtual infidelity. While moderate use can foster communication and emotional closeness, overuse is associated with relational strain. Facebook's dual impact is evident in both the maintenance and disruption of marital relationships, reflecting trends observed globally and nationally (Mutiso, 2020).

The rise of Facebook usage in Embakasi West has implications for counseling interventions, public awareness campaigns, and educational programs. Raising awareness about responsible social media use, emphasizing communication strategies, and promoting digital literacy can enhance marital stability. The influence of Facebook on marital dynamics underscores the need for empirical investigation within the constituency to inform locally tailored strategies for sustaining healthy marriages (Karanja, 2023). The findings contribute to better marital counseling practices, improved family communication, and sustained relational health among married individuals in Nairobi County and beyond.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Social Exchange Theory

Social Exchange Theory, developed in the 1950s, provides a framework for understanding human social behavior and relational dynamics. Advanced by scholars such as John Thibaut, George Homans, Peter Blau, and Harold Kelley, SET integrates sociological, economic, and psychological perspectives to explain why individuals engage in social interactions. Central to the theory is the notion that behaviors in social groups are exchanges in which participants seek rewards and aim to minimize costs, thereby influencing the stability of relationships (Gaucher et al., 2021).

SET has a broad interdisciplinary application across management, psychology, and anthropology. Rather than a single model, it encompasses a family of conceptual approaches that examine social life as a network of exchanges between individuals. The theory emphasizes how interactions, dependencies, and relational patterns shape both short- and long-term social outcomes (Mitchell et al., 2012). The theory identifies resources, including love, status, information, and services, as key motivators in exchanges. These resources allow individuals to provide rewards to others, generating positive outcomes—termed “prizes”—that encourage continued engagement and reciprocal cooperation. In marital relationships, such rewards reinforce trust, emotional support, and mutual satisfaction, which are crucial for stability (Gottman & Silver, 2019).

Individuals are assumed to act rationally, weighing expected rewards against potential costs before engaging in interactions. In the context of social media, such as Facebook, individuals evaluate interactions online—including communication with friends, former partners, or potential romantic interests—to maximize personal benefits while mitigating risks to their marital relationship. These online exchanges can either strengthen or undermine marital trust, depending on the nature and frequency of interactions (Grieve et al., 2013). Trust and commitment develop through repeated exchanges, contributing to long-term relationship stability. The balance of dependence and attraction between partners determines relational durability. Within Facebook-mediated interactions, excessive or inappropriate online engagement may reduce quality time, increase jealousy, or

facilitate virtual infidelity, thereby destabilizing marriages (Ellison et al., 2021). SET is therefore highly relevant in understanding the relationship between Facebook use and marital stability. It highlights that individuals engage in online social exchanges driven by potential rewards, while also considering relational costs. This theoretical lens allows the study to assess whether Facebook interactions enhance marital closeness or create vulnerabilities that erode trust, ultimately shaping marital stability among married individuals in Embakasi West Constituency.

Social Comparison Theory

Social Comparison Theory (SCT), developed by Leon Festinger in 1954, explains that individuals evaluate themselves by comparing their opinions, abilities, and emotional states to those of others. When objective standards are unavailable, people seek out similar others to make comparisons, helping them assess self-worth and understand their place in a social context. This innate drive to compare oneself with others shapes personal judgments and social behavior, influencing both cognitive and emotional outcomes (Festinger, 1954).

A key assumption of SCT is that social comparisons can create cognitive dissonance when inconsistencies arise between oneself and others. Such comparisons influence self-perception, emotional well-being, and behavior. Human actions occur within a social context, and self-assessment can trigger feelings of jealousy, regret, or guilt, particularly when individuals frequently measure themselves against others. Environmental and social factors play a critical role in shaping these comparative processes (Kendall, 2011).

The rise of Facebook has intensified opportunities for social comparison. Facebook allows individuals to curate idealized self-presentations, leading others to make upward comparisons with those perceived as better off. These upward comparisons have been linked to negative psychological outcomes, including decreased self-esteem, increased depression, and lower overall well-being. Chronic exposure to these comparisons can distort self-evaluations and influence daily emotional states (Iqbal & Jami, 2019).

Facebook often amplifies perceptions that others are leading better lives. Users post selectively positive aspects of their lives, such as photos of social gatherings or achievements, which creates unrealistic benchmarks for comparison. Viewing these profiles becomes a predominant social activity, shaping self-perception through biased comparisons and reinforcing social pressures to achieve similar successes or appearances (Pinto, 2018).

SCT is particularly relevant to marital stability in the context of Facebook use. Time spent on Facebook, particularly observing others' profiles, can influence an individual's perceived social value and self-worth. Positive online interactions may strengthen emotional connections between spouses, while jealousy, envy, or negative comparisons arising from social media exposure can generate conflict, reduce trust, and destabilize marriages. This theoretical framework supports the study's focus on evaluating how Facebook usage impacts marital stability among married individuals.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a correlational survey design to examine the relationship between Facebook use and marital stability among married individuals in Embakasi West Constituency, Nairobi County, Kenya. The target population comprised 930 married individuals from Deliverance Church (410) and Gospel Church International (GCI) Central Assembly (520). Proportionate sampling ensured representation from both congregations, and participants were randomly selected using a computer-based number generator. The initial sample of 273 participants was increased by 10% to 300 to account for potential attrition (Eisner et al., 2019). Data was collected using the Facebook Intensity Scale (23 items) to measure engagement and emotional attachment to Facebook, and the ENRICH Marital Satisfaction (EMS) Scale (15 items) to assess communication, intimacy, conflict resolution, and overall marital quality. Both instruments used a five-point Likert scale, with higher scores indicating greater Facebook use or marital satisfaction. Validity was ensured through expert evaluation, and reliability was confirmed via Cronbach's Alpha coefficients above 0.70 (Creswell, 2012; Olayinka & Abideen, 2023). Findings revealed that females constituted 62.6% ($n = 127$) of participants, while males accounted for 37.4% ($n = 76$). Most participants were aged 31–40 years (41.4%, $n = 84$), followed by 30 years and below (28.1%, $n = 57$), 41–50 years (18.7%, $n = 38$), 51–60 years (8.4%, $n = 17$), and over 60 years (3.4%, $n = 7$). In

terms of education, 31.5% ($n = 64$) held a degree, 18.7% ($n = 38$) a master's, and 17.2% ($n = 35$) a diploma. About 30% ($n = 61$) had been married less than five years, while 10.3% ($n = 23$) had been married over 20 years. Ethical procedures included obtaining informed consent, ensuring voluntary participation, and maintaining confidentiality. Data analysis was performed using SPSS Version 26.0, employing descriptive statistics and Pearson's correlation coefficient. Findings were presented in summary tables illustrating demographics, Facebook use, marital stability, and relationships between variables (Gill, 2020).

FINDINGS

Levels of Facebook Use among Married Individuals Embakasi West Constituency

The objective of the study was to assess levels of Facebook use among married individuals in Embakasi West Constituency and its relation to marital stability. A descriptive statistics was run and the findings are presented in table 1.

Table 1; Levels of Facebook Use among Married Individuals Embakasi West Constituency

Variables	Total	Percentage (%)
Low level	18	8.90%
Moderate	55	27.10%
High level	130	64.00%
Total	203	100%

As seen in Table 1, the descriptive analysis revealed the levels of Facebook use among married individuals in Embakasi West Constituency. The results indicated that 8.9% of respondents reported a low level of Facebook use, 27.1% had a moderate level, while the majority, 64%, exhibited a high level of engagement. These outcomes indicate that most married individuals in the constituency actively use Facebook, with a substantial proportion demonstrating high intensity in platform usage. The findings further indicate that higher levels of Facebook engagement may influence social interactions and potentially impact marital dynamics within this population.

DISCUSSION

The objective of this study was to measure the levels of Facebook use among married individuals in Embakasi West Constituency. The findings of the current study pointed out that Facebook use was predominantly high. Most participants reported that Facebook formed part of their daily activities, had become routine, and provided a sense of belonging to a larger online community. High levels of engagement were also observed in browsing others' profiles, trusting a partner's online activity, and liking posts related to their relationship. These findings confirm that the highest level of agreement was recorded for the statement, "I like seeing other people's relationship updates on Facebook" ($n = 134$, 66.0%).

At the moderate level, participants indicated that they sometimes felt disconnected if they had not logged in for some time, acknowledged that Facebook could cause drama or problems in relationships, and did not necessarily believe that relationship status should be publicly displayed. Moderate use was also reported in monitoring a partner's profile or the activities of their friends. Low levels of Facebook use were evident in statements such as feeling sorry if Facebook were to shut down, using Facebook mainly to meet new people, and believing that couples should display their happiness online. The lowest level of agreement was recorded for the statement, "Couples should demonstrate their happiness online" ($n = 45$, 22.2%).

These findings are consistent with previous studies. Putri & Aminatun, (2021) found that high engagement on social media could both enhance and challenge marital interactions, depending on the context of use. Kulu & Hannemann, (2019) in a study on levels of marital stability among married individuals in the United Kingdom, noted that frequent social media use may influence perceptions of relational satisfaction. Fox & Warber,

(2013)observed in Europe and North America that online interaction impacts marital dynamics by affecting trust and communication patterns. Furthermore,Nisar et al., (2019)reported in England that Facebook use significantly affects marital stability, supporting the current study's observation that high Facebook engagement may pose risks to marital harmony while fostering connectedness.

CONCLUSION

The study established that Facebook use is deeply integrated into the daily lives of married individuals, serving as a tool for maintaining social connections and fostering a sense of community. At the same time, the study highlighted potential negative implications, including jealousy, misunderstandings, and conflicts that can strain marital relationships. These findings underscore the dual nature of social media as both a facilitator of connection and a potential source of tension in intimate relationships. Facebook's influence on relational dynamics was particularly evident. For some couples, the platform strengthened bonds through shared experiences, communication, and expressions of affection. Conversely, behaviors such as monitoring a partner, interactions with ex-partners, and disagreements over content shared online emerged as sources of tension. This duality demonstrates that the impact of Facebook on marital stability largely depends on how couples navigate its use. The study emphasizes the need for establishing boundaries, fostering open communication, and practicing mindful engagement to mitigate potential negative effects while enhancing the benefits of social media in supporting healthy marital relationships.

RECOMMENDATION

Counselling professionals in Embakasi Sub-County should incorporate discussions on Facebook use into therapy, guiding couples on boundaries, trust, and communication regarding Facebook activity. The counselling profession should include training and guidelines to address issues such as jealousy, misunderstandings, and reduced intimacy. Educational institutions should equip future counsellors with skills to assess Facebook's impact on marital stability. Church leaders in Embakasi Sub-County should provide guidance to married couples on responsible Facebook use, promote healthy communication, and encourage face-to-face interactions. Married individuals are encouraged to manage their Facebook use, maintain open dialogue, and strengthen trust and marital harmony.

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