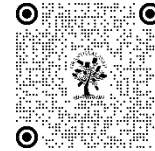


Original Article

VIRTUAL VS. REAL: THE CONSEQUENCES OF COMPARING SPOUSE TO ONLINE FRIENDS

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ABSTRACT

The study explores the influence of Facebook on marital dynamics, focusing on online interaction, social comparison, and relational satisfaction. The study draws on Social Comparison theory and Attachment theory to examine how the curated nature of social media, especially Facebook, alters perceptions of intimacy and fosters interpersonal conflict between spouses. A qualitative methodological framework was employed, utilising purposive sampling to recruit 20 married participants (aged 25–37) from diverse socio-economic backgrounds. Data were collected via a sequential process of structured questionnaires and semi-structured in-depth interviews, subsequently analysed through thematic analysis. The findings reveal that participants frequently engage in upward social comparison, evaluating their marriages against idealised representations of peers, which correlates significantly with relational discontent and jealousy, often triggered by ambiguous online interactions, and serves as a primary catalyst for Online Partner Surveillance and hyper-vigilant monitoring. The study also identifies distinct gendered patterns: male participants often frame platform restrictions as security measures. In contrast, female participants report frustration regarding their spouses' lack of relationship visibility or "single" self-presentation. These results contribute to a nuanced understanding of how sociocultural norms and digital behaviours converge to reshape contemporary marital maintenance.

Keywords: Facebook Usage, Marital Relationship, Conflicts, Online Friendship, Online Surveillance

INTRODUCTION

The rapid expansion of social networking sites, especially Facebook, has significantly transformed patterns of interpersonal communication, creating multidisciplinary scholarly attention. The shift in communication patterns has led to significant changes in how messages are disseminated. These platforms enable individuals to construct, curate, and publicly share aspects of their personal lives, thereby blurring the boundaries between private and public spheres [Dainton \(2013\)](#), [Marshall et al. \(2012\)](#). As a result, intimate relationships, including marriages, are increasingly shaped by digitally mediated interactions. Users also gather for social and civic purposes apart from connecting with their family and friends [Papacharissi \(2010\)](#). Also, researchers focus on how SNS usage influences psychological constructs such as self-esteem, privacy, and mental health, as well as the stability of romantic and marital relationships [Gonzales and Hancock \(2011\)](#), [Marshall et al. \(2012\)](#), [Gonzales and Hancock \(2010\)](#), [Marshall et al. \(2012\)](#). These dynamics suggest that social media is not merely a communication tool but an active space where relational meanings are constructed and negotiated.

In the context of romantic partnerships, Facebook serves a dual purpose: it can facilitate relationship maintenance through public displays of affection (PDA) and shared content through profiles, and it also presents unique threats [Dainton \(2013\)](#), [Emery et al. \(2014\)](#), [Dainton \(2013\)](#), [Emery et al. \(2014\)](#). Researchers indicate that the high visibility of social interactions on Facebook and

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related SNS platforms can lead to increased relationship-related jealousy and interpersonal surveillance [Marshall et al. \(2012\)](#), [Muise et al. \(2009\)](#), [Marshall et al. \(2012\)](#), [Muise et al. \(2009\)](#). Married and Romantic partners exhibit upward social comparison, i.e. individuals evaluating their own marital satisfaction against the idealised portrayals of other couples' lives they witness online [Lee et al. \(2020\)](#), [Zawada and Skurzyńska \(2021\)](#). [Lee et al. \(2020\)](#), [Zawada and Skurzyńska \(2021\)](#). These comparisons can lead to feelings of relative deprivation and diminished life satisfaction, as users often perceive others' highlight reels as an accurate reflection of their reality [Lee et al. \(2020\)](#). Recent research on Facebook usage has shown that high-intensity usage is linked to negative relationship outcomes and emotional disengagement [Abbasi et al. \(2019\)](#). Facebook and other SNSs provide a medium for communicating with potential romantic partners and engaging in secret friendships, which can weaken trust among partners [McDaniel et al. \(2016\)](#). Studies have shown that Facebook-related jealousy and online surveillance function as significant mediators between social media use and marital dissatisfaction [Iqbal and Jami \(2019\)](#). Most existing research has focused on undergraduate populations, leaving a gap in understanding the specific challenges faced by married couples across diverse cultural contexts. The current research explores the consequences of comparing one's spouse to online friends and their impact on marital harmony. By examining the connections between self-esteem, privacy concerns, and jealousy among spouses, this research provides an in-depth analysis of how virtual interactions influence real-world marital satisfaction and conflicts.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

EMERGENCE AND NATURE OF SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES (SNS)

The emergence of social networking sites (SNSs), especially Facebook, has changed how people relate to one another. This has been achieved by creating platforms for users to selectively present aspects of their lives in a public space. In contrast to physical conversations, online interaction offers selective self-presentation, allowing people to present their best selves. Evidence shows that selective self-presentation on SNSs influences self-image and consequently self-esteem. For example, some research has shown that Facebook profile complimenting can temporarily boost self-esteem [Gonzales and Hancock \(2011\)](#).

FACEBOOK AND MARITAL/ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

Studies have shown that engaging in online communication is associated with greater loneliness and a greater desire for affection. Facebook plays an important role in initiating and maintaining relationships [Dainton \(2013\)](#). Recently, several studies have examined Facebook use and Romantic relationships. These studies resulted in providing implications of Facebook usage and increased or decreased romantic life, Facebook-related jealousy among partners, and monitoring partners' activity through Facebook [Emery et al. \(2014\)](#), [Hand et al. \(2013\)](#), [Marshall et al. \(2013\)](#). Facebook status, posts and pictures are a public representation of the self, and they provide an opportunity to represent one's better self [Saslow et al. \(2012\)](#). When it comes to couple online engagement, people use Facebook as a self-representation strategy to appear happy [Wilson et al. \(2012\)](#). Some studies argue that people who are less satisfied with their relationships tend to share more dyadic pictures on Facebook [Ovies et al. \(2009\)](#), [Back et al. \(2010\)](#). It allows public communication (posts, pictures, etc.) between partners, which is useful in relationship maintenance [Tong and Walther \(2011\)](#), [Jiang et al. \(2013\)](#). [Cherrie et al. \(2015\)](#) in their study discussed the role SNS play in maintaining romantic relationships, especially partners who were living far away from each other, i.e. Long-Distance Romantic Relationships (LDRR), use SNS relatively more to maintain their romantic life than partners living together, i.e. Geographically Close Romantic Relationships (GCRR). [Clayton et al. \(2013\)](#) conducted an online survey among Facebook users and found that high levels of Facebook usage predicted negative relationship outcomes, and that these relationships were mediated by Facebook-related conflicts. Information gathering through Facebook posts, updates, profile pictures, and videos, either directly or indirectly, has been measured by the partner to estimate and understand the depth of the relationship [Muise et al. \(2009\)](#). Interactions with others, or with former partners/romantic partners, may kindle jealousy and bring conflict to the present relationship [Muise et al. \(2009\)](#).

When two individuals meet and try to develop a relationship, they initially disclose personal information to know each other. The relationship progresses if the individuals like the personal details shared by each other or breaks up if the conversations lead to a lot of misunderstandings. [Young \(1982\)](#) defined loneliness as chronic, situational, and transient forms, describing chronic loneliness as long-term and persistent feelings of being alone, situational loneliness as feelings of isolation and restlessness which occurs during major life evolution like getting into a new life, migrating to a new city or death or breakup of a relationship), and transient loneliness as shorter session of being alone commonly experienced throughout daily life, like quarrel with loved ones.

FACEBOOK RELATIONSHIPS AND SOCIAL CONNECTIONS

[Wilson et al. \(2012\)](#) said about two types of Facebook relationships. They are offline friends and online friends. Strong ties (offline friends) are visible on Facebook for direct communication, chat, messages and post comments. Facebook helps form two types of friendships. They are relationships with offline and online friends, with strong ties and weak ties, respectively. The former paves the way for direct communication, chat and in-person communication, while the latter does not. Suggested that two types of relationships can be found on Facebook: relationships with offline friends with strong ties, and relationships with online and offline

acquaintances with weak ties. Strong ties manifest on Facebook through direct communication, chat, and direct messaging, while weak ties are more passive behaviour (browsing profiles, viewing photos or posts, or looking at the news feed).

SOCIAL MEDIA USE AND MARITAL SATISFACTION

Research from Pakistan reveals a significant negative correlation between the intensity of Facebook use and marriage satisfaction [Iqbal and Jami \(2019\)](#). This is usually through weakened relational trust and online stalking [Iqbal and Jami \(2019\)](#). The omnipresence of technological gadgets has also led to the emergence of the "partner phubbing" (phone snubbing) phenomenon, which is associated with lower levels of marriage satisfaction and depressive symptoms [Arshad and Imran \(2023\)](#). In certain cases, technology affects marriage to such an extent that about 33% of divorce proceedings have mentioned Facebook use [Benti et al. \(2019\)](#). A primary driver of relational decline on social platforms is the emergence of intrusive behaviours. "Facebook intrusion," characterised by addictive patterns of usage, is linked to relationship dissatisfaction through the mechanisms of jealous cognitions and "spying efforts" or surveillance [Arshad and Imran \(2023\)](#), [Elphinston and Noller \(2011\)](#).

SNS impacts relationships by mediating Conflicts among partners. Similar patterns are observed across various SNS platforms; for instance, active usage leads to platform-related conflict, which subsequently predicts higher rates of infidelity and divorce [Clayton \(2014\)](#). Social media provides a vehicle for communicating with alternative partners and engaging in covert behaviours [McDaniel et al. \(2016\)](#). While only a small percentage of married individuals may engage in online infidelity-related behaviours, those who do report significantly higher relationship ambivalence and lower satisfaction [McDaniel et al. \(2016\)](#).

SOCIAL COMPARISON AND SELF-ESTEEM

Social comparison theory provides a framework for understanding how viewing others' content affects individual well-being and marital perception. Upward social comparison—comparing oneself or one's relationship to those perceived as superior—is a common byproduct of SNS usage [Lee et al. \(2020\)](#). Upward comparisons are positively related to the boastful information presented by others, which is associated with lower self-esteem and reduced life satisfaction [Lee et al. \(2020\)](#), [Wang et al. \(2017\)](#), [Lee et al. \(2020\)](#), [Wang et al. \(2017\)](#). The positivity bias inherent in social media can fuel a sense of relative deprivation, where users feel discontented with their own lives compared to the "highlight reels" of others [Lilly et al. \(2023\)](#). Interestingly, interactions with photos and videos have a stronger negative impact on perceived happiness than text-based interactions, likely because visual content intensifies the social comparison process [Vigil and Wu \(2015\)](#).

DEMOGRAPHIC AND CULTURAL VARIATIONS

The impact of social media on marital conflict varies across different demographic and cultural landscapes. Studies have found that women may experience higher levels of Facebook-related jealousy and engage in more frequent surveillance of their spouses than men [Iqbal and Jami \(2019\)](#). In contrast, some data suggest that men may report higher levels of trust and satisfaction despite their wives' online activities [Iqbal and Jami \(2019\)](#). Recent research from Nigeria indicates that Facebook and WhatsApp are the primary tools influencing marital conflict, with high usage rates notably prevalent among couples aged 40 and above [Omokhabi et al. \(2025\)](#). Similarly, in Bangladesh, internet usage is negatively associated with both marital satisfaction and relational commitment [Ziha et al. \(2021\)](#). Household income and the extent to which a partner is "friended" on the platform also influence satisfaction levels; for example, high-income households report higher satisfaction when partners are part of their digital peer group [Augar et al. \(2018\)](#).

RESEARCH GAP

Most of the studies on Facebook and relationships rely on individuals offering a one-sided perspective. Scholars highlight a dyadic gap that enables multimethod studies to collect data from both partners simultaneously [Denecker et al. \(2024\)](#). Using objective data, smartphone logging alongside subjective surveys from both spouses would provide a more accurate picture of how partner phubbing and surveillance manifest in daily life [Arshad and Imran \(2023\)](#), [Denecker et al. \(2024\)](#) [Arshad and Imran \(2023\)](#), [Denecker et al. \(2024\)](#). Most early research into Social Networking Sites and relationship dynamics has primarily focused on undergraduate students and dating couples [Dainton \(2013\)](#), [Marshall et al. \(2012\)](#). These studies were conducted in Western countries; there is a vast cultural difference, and a comprehensive cross-cultural framework is lacking. While these studies provide valuable insights into attachment styles and jealousy, they often fail to account for the unique complexities of legal marriage, such as long-term commitment, shared domestic responsibilities, and co-parenting. There is a pressing need for more research specifically targeting long-term married individuals to understand how digital interactions affect established marital bonds [Iqbal and Jami \(2019\)](#).

RESEARCH METHOD

The current study adopts a qualitative research design, primarily using semi-structured in-depth interviews to obtain detailed, specific information from the selected sample. This method was selected to capture subjective perceptions, emotional responses, and complex interpersonal dynamics, which are difficult to collect through quantitative methods. Initially, the participants were given a structured questionnaire to gather baseline data and establish an understanding of the research. After a brief orientation, those who have shown interest in participating in an in-depth interview have been asked questions about privacy issues on Facebook, self-disclosure, and relationship difficulties among married couples. Using purposive sampling, 20 participants aged 25-37 years with diverse educational backgrounds, including Arts, Engineering, Professional degrees, and Higher Secondary. Which includes two couples, eight men and eight women whose partners/spouses use Facebook, were selected for interview.

Education and Socio-Economic status: They worked in various occupations, including private employees, government employees, IT professionals, homemakers, and business owners. Their annual income ranged from ₹2 lakhs to ₹8 lakhs (INR).

Family and Marriage structure: They lived in various family setups, including nuclear, joint, and living separately. Their marriages were categorised as arranged, love, or a combination of both. Four individuals had children, while others had none.

RESULTS

This section presents the key findings from the in-depth interviews with 20 participants, which were organised into four primary themes that emerged from the data analysis.

THEME 1: SPOUSAL COMPARISON THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA

Comparison can kill the liveliness of any relationship. People always compare their lives with others and lose their identity trying to behave like others. Marriage and romantic relationships become more miserable when spouses compare their levels of satisfaction with others'. Participants of this study say they compare the lifestyles, romances, and happiness of significant others in their Facebook friends list. The level of happiness in the couple is measured by public displays of affection on Facebook, which participants often note. Users compare the Pictures, dyadic pictures, romantic posts, updates on dinner, vacations, etc., with their own marriage life. Participants differentiate the elements considered when comparing their online friends with their spouse: care, affection, attention, and emotional support. Individuals disclose personal information to online friends over time, thereby building trust and developing a close relationship. Individuals seek friendship and support from online friends, just as they do from offline friends. Anonymity influences disclosure of true emotions in online settings. Individuals don't have to worry about physical attractiveness while communicating with online friends in private messenger. It reduces anxiety in communicating with strangers and acquaintances. One participant articulated this comparative process as follows,

"One of my online friends shares her family life experiences. She seems to be an ideal wife, but her husband finds faults with her. From her revelation, sometimes I thought that my wife is not like her, maintaining rapport with my family and me" (27, M6)

The data revealed that participants perceived online friends as having developed trust-based relationships through gradual disclosure of personal information over time. Anonymity in online communication was identified as a mediator of emotional disclosure, as participants noted reduced anxiety about physical attractiveness when communicating through private messaging.

THEME 2: JEALOUSY

Facebook is a well-known social media network and is an integral part of everyday life, especially for couples. Jealousy emerged as a prominent emotional response to spouses' Facebook activities. Participants reported feeling jealous when their spouses maintained large networks of opposite-gender friends, received attention from other users, or spent prolonged periods on the platform. This jealousy frequently manifests in electronic partner surveillance behaviours. Participants feel jealous of their spouse's Facebook popularity, online friendships, etc. Few male participants described their surveillance practices:

"I felt more jealous when I found my partner's Facebook friends list had a lot of opposite-gender friends" (33, F1).

"Whenever I come across my partners' Facebook posts, I used to go through the comments section. If someone commented inappropriately or praised my partner's beauty and charm, I used to check the specific person's complete profile. Sometimes I bring this into arguments. Posting pictures in public is like inviting harassers to your home, so I usually advise her to be careful with online friends". (37, M3)

The usage pattern of Facebook differs from individual to individual. Disclosing personal information may feel like a threat to a spouse; in some cases, it can strengthen intimacy and understanding between a couple. Participants feel gratified when their spouse shares dyadic pictures. Dyadic pictures increase understanding between couples. Hiding details such as marriage and romantic relationships indicates that the individual is not available here for romantic encounters. One Female participant expressed

jealousy regarding her spouse's self-presentation strategies, particularly when partners posted pictures that excluded marital status or presented themselves as single:

"My partner usually spends more time on Facebook, posts pictures excluding me as a portrait of himself as unmarried or single online. I do not encourage this, as we are living apart, and I want him to be very loyal to me. He has so many girls in his friends list, so I kind of feel possessive over him. I want him to post our pictures rather than his, so everyone knows that he is married to me" (33, F10)

THEME 3: ONLINE FRIENDSHIP DEVELOPMENT AND MEETING ONLINE FRIENDS

Participants reported that they don't initiate private chat after adding a person to their friends list, monitoring them for at least a few days to get to know their similarities in interests and dislikes, and to study them from the available profile information. A gradual process of relationship development with online friends, characterised by cautious progression from profile information before they initiate private messaging. The initial phase involved monitoring potential friends' profiles to assess compatibility of interests and values before initiating communication.

One participant explained his cautious approach:

"I won't say hi to my online friend until they say something. Don't want to look like a womaniser" (30, M8).

Some individuals fear being misinterpreted on social media; commenting with emoticons and sending private messages are seen as signs of closeness among online members. A few reported responding to private messages with a single word. Answering yes or no to questions on Facebook Messenger might look like not being very interested in chatting. Female respondents (F7, F4, F9) feel meeting online friends is as normal as meeting an acquaintance. Online relationships don't have to be romantic, but the exchange of secrets happens when the relationship grows. Closed groups are formed by users with similar interests in literature, hobbies, discussion forums, and information sharing. Members of the group frequently organise face-to-face meetings and develop close ties among themselves.

Hesitation about meeting an online friend arises when the individual is not sure about the state of the relationship. The ideal self presented in profile information, public posts, and notes might differ from the real self expressed through private messages. The transition from online to offline interaction revealed significant gender differences. Female participants expressed greater hesitation about meeting opposite-gender online friends, citing concerns about misinterpretation and spousal restrictions.

A female participant captured this ambivalence:

"We have known each other for 3 years (on Facebook). We have talked about various issues, such as politics, women's empowerment, literature, and even our family problems. But I feel perplexed and emotional when he asks for a Face-to-face meeting. I am comfortable only with online chatting" (33, F1)

Meeting friends of the opposite gender is less practical than meeting friends of the same gender. Participants face restrictions from their spouses and family in meeting online with opposite-gender friends. Some participants said that they introduce their online friends to their spouses to avoid jealousy and suspicion. Face-to-face interaction

I saw one of my online friends at a book festival. She came with her family, so I didn't want to make a scene by saying hi. An online friend is a stranger in the eyes of family members" (30, M8).

Get-togethers are arranged by a group of friends on Facebook. Details of the get-together are shared on a Facebook events page. An individual who has created the page invites friends on their list, allowing members to invite their friends. A participant (M7) who is a regular guest of such get-togethers explains, "Facebook meets are arranged to meet online friends offline. The meetings are arranged at any suitable venue, with food, entertainment, and sightseeing. It is more like a high-school reunion. Curiosity of knowing a person personally pulls users to meet their online friend. Male participants reported more frequent face-to-face meetings with same-gender online friends, particularly when residing abroad. Some participants introduced online friends to their spouses to mitigate jealousy and suspicion.

THEME 4: GENDERED CONFLICT PATTERNS

Conflicts arising from Facebook usage exhibited distinct gendered patterns. Male participants expressed irritation regarding their spouses' public posting behaviours, particularly when photographs were shared publicly or when spouses maintained extensive networks of opposite-gender friends. Male participants framed their concerns in terms of security and protection, citing risks of online harassment and stalking.

Male partners in this in-depth interview express their opinion following

- They feel irritated when their spouse posts pictures in public.
- Having many online friends, especially of the opposite Gender.
- Disclosing personal information to online friends.

They feel more irritated when their spouse or partner checks comments from Female participants reported frustration with their husbands' self-presentation practices, including frequent posting of personal and family updates without spousal consent. One female participant described this dynamic:

"My husband frequently posts pictures, i.e. office party, selfie, get together with friends, relatives, etc. The frequency can be the number of senders uploading their pictures in a day. Normally, Indian married women restrict themselves from enjoying or having a fulfilled social life. It may become frustrating. (32, F4)

Online friends may disappear at any time, so it's dangerous to share too much about oneself. One should not share their inner secrets with online friends because it's not possible to always trust those friendships. If the online friend lives nearby, you can meet (especially not alone); if they are far, you cannot meet them. Addiction to mobile phones and computers leads to the loss of real life, friends

My husband posts our everyday life updates, and usually my cooking, the way I shop, and he also pretends that I control him. This always irritates me, and I asked him not to update such things, as they can easily be misinterpreted, since we do not have a normal, happy couple life. (29, F6)

The participants answered that most of them feel frustrated when they see a picture of their partner with an opposite-gender friend. Both male and female participants reported that conflicts often escalated when spouses monitored comments from opposite-gender friends and brought these observations into arguments. The reason can be fear that infidelity or an extramarital affair can break the relationship.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study contribute to the growing body of literature on social media's impact on romantic relationships by examining how Facebook marital dynamics operate within the Indian cultural context. The discussion interprets these findings through established theoretical frameworks and relates them to existing research.

SOCIAL COMPARISON AND RELATIONSHIP DISSATISFACTION

The finding that participants engage in upward social comparison with idealised representations of other couples on Facebook aligns with social comparison theory [Morry and Sucharyna \(2018\)](#). Participants' tendency to evaluate their marriages against curated online content creates unrealistic benchmarks for relationship satisfaction. This process is particularly significant on Facebook, where users selectively present positive aspects of their relationships while concealing conflicts and challenges. Research by Morry et al. demonstrates that how individuals interpret social comparisons in relationships significantly mediates the relationship between comparison direction and relationship outcomes [Morry and Sucharyna \(2018\)](#). In this study, participants' interpretations of online friends' relationships as "ideal" led to diminished satisfaction with their own marriages. The systematic literature review by Tandon et al. further supports this finding, noting that comparisons with peers on social media platforms can induce jealousy and conflict [Tandon et al. \(2021\)](#). The gendered nature of these comparisons warrants attention. Female participants' focus on care, affection, and emotional support as comparison criteria may reflect culturally prescribed gender roles in Indian marriages, where women are often socialised to prioritise relational maintenance and emotional labour.

ATTACHMENT THEORY AND ELECTRONIC SURVEILLANCE

The prevalence of jealousy and surveillance behaviours among participants can be understood through attachment theory. Marshall et al. found that attachment anxiety was associated with higher Facebook jealousy and increased surveillance behaviours [Marshall et al. \(2013\)](#). The current study's findings extend this research by demonstrating how these patterns manifest in marital relationships within a collectivist cultural context. Recent longitudinal research by [Métellus et al. \(2025\)](#) provides empirical support for the mediating role of social media jealousy and electronic surveillance in the relationship between attachment anxiety and relationship satisfaction [Métellus et al. \(2025\)](#). Their findings indicate that social media jealousy is associated with more electronic partner surveillance and lower relationship satisfaction over time. The participants in the current study, who engaged in systematic monitoring of their spouses' Facebook activity, exemplify these surveillance behaviours.

The qualitative data reveal that participants used surveillance as a strategy to manage perceived threats to their relationships. This aligns with Sullivan's observation that individuals with attachment anxiety are more likely to experience negative emotions such as fear, worry, and jealousy in response to ambiguous Facebook content [Sullivan \(2021\)](#). The participant who checked comment sections and investigated profiles of individuals who interacted with his partner demonstrates this hyper-vigilant pattern.

SELF-DISCLOSURE AND SOCIAL PENETRATION THEORY

The gradual progression of online friendships from superficial profile information to deeper personal disclosure supports the applicability of social penetration theory to computer-mediated communication [Tang and Wang \(2012\)](#). Altman and Taylor's onion

metaphor, which describes the movement from external to internal layers of disclosure, was evident in participants' descriptions of relationship development with online friends. Research by Tang and Wang found that social penetration theory appropriately explains online relationship development, with bloggers disclosing their thoughts and feelings to best friends in the real world most deeply and widely [Tang and Wang \(2012\)](#). The current study extends this finding by demonstrating how married individuals navigate disclosure boundaries with online friends while maintaining marital commitments.

The tension participants experienced between online intimacy and reluctance to meet in person reflects the unique challenges of computer-mediated communication. Orben et al. note that although social penetration theory was conceptualised for offline behaviour, it offers important insights into how interpersonal attraction develops in social media contexts [Orben et al. \(2018\)](#). Participants' comfort with online chatting but hesitation about face-to-face meetings illustrates the complexity of translating digital intimacy into physical interaction.

RELATIONSHIP VISIBILITY AND MARITAL IDENTITY

The finding that participants valued dyadic pictures and public acknowledgement of marital status aligns with research on relationship visibility on Facebook. Emery et al. found that individuals with attachment anxiety were more likely to use Facebook to increase relationship visibility, such as reporting relationship status [Emery et al. \(2014\)](#). The current study's female participants, who wanted their husbands to post pictures indicating marital status, reflect this desire for public validation of their relationships.

Dainton's research on relationship maintenance on Facebook provides additional context for understanding these dynamics [Dainton \(2013\)](#). The study found that Facebook-related maintenance behaviours were associated with relationship satisfaction. However, the current study reveals that when one partner engages in self-presentation that excludes the other (e.g., posting pictures without the spouse), this can create conflict rather than enhance relationship maintenance.

CULTURAL CONTEXT AND GENDERED PATTERNS

The gendered conflict patterns observed in this study must be interpreted within the Indian cultural context. Male participants' framing of their concerns in terms of security and protection reflects broader sociocultural paradigms in which men perceive themselves as guardians of their partners' reputations. This aligns with research by McDaniel et al., who found that infidelity-related behaviours on social media sites were associated with lower marital satisfaction [McDaniel et al. \(2016\)](#).

The systematic literature review by Tandon et al. notes that social media-induced jealousy is influenced by cultural factors [Tandon et al. \(2021\)](#). The current study's findings suggest that Indian cultural norms regarding gender roles, family honour, and appropriate spousal behaviour shape how Facebook activities are interpreted and negotiated within marriages.

CONCLUSION

The study reveals Facebook usage and its impact on marital and romantic relationships with the complex dynamics of the present virtual world. Social media has become a part of daily life, exerting a strong influence on relationships, particularly by fostering jealousy among partners. Participants of this study highlighted the challenges of comparing their spouses to online friends and how PDA created jealousy and dissatisfaction in one's life. Online interaction between spouses and others is generally seen as a threat to the relationship. Access to personal information on Facebook can lead to privacy breaches and misunderstandings between married partners. Perceptions of Facebook usage differ by gender and profession, with male participants expressing discomfort with their partner's online activities. Existing cultural norms and masculine ideologies can be reasons for the male's perception of their spouse's online activity. [Bhardwaj et al. \(2025\)](#)

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

This research was conducted in strict adherence to established ethical principles. Prior to participating in this research, the individuals were informed about the study's purpose, the voluntary nature of their involvement and their right to withdraw at any stage of the interview process. To protect the participants' privacy, strict confidentiality and anonymity were maintained. During the interview, the participants were identified as M1 (Male first respondent) and F2 (Female second respondent), and no personally identifiable information was included in the final report. Understanding the sensitive nature of the marital conflict and privacy, the researcher employed an empathetic interviewing approach to prioritise the emotional well-being of the participants throughout the data collection process.

FURTHER RESEARCH

Future research can examine the current scenario of newly married individuals, as Gen Z perceptions of marital relationships and infidelity differ from those of Millennials and Generation X.

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