The Moderating Role of Interpersonal Mindfulness in the Relationship Between Social Media Use and Marital Satisfaction

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Objective: The present study aimed to investigate the moderating role of interpersonal mindfulness in the relationship between social media use and marital satisfaction.

Methods: This study was descriptive and correlational in terms of its objectives and the manner of data collection. The sample population consisted of married individuals who used social media and resided in Tehran, from whom 160 people were selected using a convenience sampling method. In this research, the Interpersonal Mindfulness Scale by Steven Puchter et al. (2018), the Social Networks Scale by Mojdeh et al. (2014), and the Marital Satisfaction Scale by Enrich were used. To evaluate the structural model of the study, the four-stage structural assessment model proposed by Hair et al. (2017) was utilized.

Findings: The results indicated a significant positive correlation between interpersonal mindfulness and marital satisfaction, and a significant negative correlation between the extent of social media use and marital satisfaction (P = 0.05).

Conclusion: Ultimately, the findings demonstrated that the moderating role of interpersonal mindfulness in the relationship between social media use and marital satisfaction is significant.

Keywords: Interpersonal mindfulness, social networks, marital satisfaction.

1. Introduction

Among all forms of suffering, marital and family relationships are perhaps the most complex and widespread. The emotions of romantic relationships often involve confusing moments of harm and anger. Experienced therapists in this field know that working with couples and families directly relates to the essence of being human (Tardast & Changi, 2021); humans in this process learn how to trust each other, feel secure together, forgive each other's mistakes, love more deeply and completely, and discover what is most important in their lives (Ghafurian ghahramani & Mahdavian, 2022; Rezapour et al., 2018). The role of the family as the smallest social unit can be very influential both

positively, in creating a peaceful environment, and negatively, in creating social harm (Parsakia et al., 2023).

Marital satisfaction is among the factors that play a very effective role in the stability of marriage and the stability of the family system. The marital relationship is the basis for the parental relationship. It is difficult for a couple to be good spouses and want to be competent parents (Fatehi et al., 2021; McDaniel & Drouin, 2019). Winch and colleagues (1974) believe that marital satisfaction is the alignment between the current situation and the expected situation. According to this definition, marital satisfaction is achieved when the current state in marital relationships matches the individual's expectations. In marital life, the issue of satisfaction is very important and noteworthy because if men and women recognize the correct path of their life, understand each other's characteristics, talents, abilities, limitations, and expectations, they can align their behavior and lifestyle accordingly, strive to achieve their valuable goals and purposes, and in doing so, they will attain such a sense of satisfaction and contentment with life that makes them more determined, stable, and hopeful in continuing life (Parto et al., 2017; Pourmeidani et al., 2015). In the matter of marriage and its continuity, marital compatibility and satisfaction from it are very important. In a scientific study, marital satisfaction was based on several principles. Agreement between the man and woman on important life issues, having common interests, having trust in each other, and less complaining are among these principles (McGill et al., 2016; Smith, 2015).

The present era is the era of the press, mass media, and communications. Our current world has entered a new era characterized by the prominence of information (Gallagher, 2017; Ghafurian ghahramani & Mahdavian, 2022). Many social science scholars believe that the combination and convergence of information and communication technologies and the restructuring of capitalist systems in recent decades have introduced us to a new era (Parsakia & Rostami, 2023). Social networks, as manifestations of modern communication technology in individual and social life, have a strong and powerful position and influence the personal and social lives of individuals and families. In recent years, the popularity of online social networks has increased unprecedentedly. So much so that the most popular ones have hundreds of millions of users (Parto et al., 2017; Rezapour et al., 2018). The variety and attractiveness of social networks have also increased the number of their users.

Today, with the spread of the Internet and virtual social networks with easy access to them for everyone, a new form of interpersonal communication has emerged and due to its high penetration rate, it has become part of people's daily lives, necessitating the examination of its effects on couples' relationships and their satisfaction (Gallagher, 2017; Sharifi & Shahrestani, 2017). According to the results of the Statistical Center of Iran in 2017, the Internet penetration rate in the country was 64%, compared to the penetration rate of 45.3% in 2015, showing a growth of 18.7%, and out of the total population of the country, 47.9 million people were Internet users, indicating that 59.7% of the population used the Internet. Researchers have predicted both positive functions of these networks, such as information exchange and relationship maintenance, as well as the provision of goods and services and job creation, and negative functions as well (Rezapour et al., 2018). When couples become dependent on the Internet and especially social networks, their motivation to interact with others, especially their spouses, decreases, which has negative effects on their relationship with each other and their social interactions (Parsakia & Rostami, 2023; Rezapour et al., 2018). In fact, social networks are among the factors that can play an effective role in guiding, educating, and enhancing social consciousness of individuals, and because of them, marital satisfaction can be achieved, and conversely, it can lead to corruption, pollution, and sometimes criminality and marital conflicts (Parsakia & Rostami, 2023).

Given the importance of balanced family functioning and the importance of preventing its disintegration, understanding the factors related to marital satisfaction, which forms the basis of family life stability, seems necessary. It can be expected that with increased marital satisfaction, many psychological, emotional, and social problems of families and society as a whole will decrease. Especially at the present time, the extent of use of social networks is one of these factors (Pourmeidani et al., 2015). Social networks and the virtual world have grown and progressed significantly in the last decade in such a way that they have impacted the relationships of individuals and the institution of the family (Gallagher, 2017; Parto et al., 2017). Social networks have always been used by many users, but with the emergence and start of restrictions due to the outbreak of the coronavirus, they have become an integral part of life. Despite the widespread use of virtual social networks, limited research has been done on their comprehensive effects on home and family-related components, which greatly necessitates research in this area

in order to be able to guide and advise family members, especially women who are the main pillar of the family, in preserving the foundation of the family and providing them with the necessary support and security (Duradoni et al., 2020).

Mindfulness is a deep reflection on current and ongoing events and is defined as a type of receptive and non-judgmental awareness of what is currently happening. Although the basis of mindfulness is to increase the capacity for attention and intelligent awareness beyond thinking, its goal encompasses greater awareness of moment-to-moment emotions, thoughts, and bodily sensations, and being in the moment, paying attention to emotions and thoughts, and expanding and accepting your own thoughts and those of family, friends, and acquaintances in order to enhance the sense of conscience and nurture the inner conscience, that mighty call that helps us recognize the right from the wrong, performed under the term 'true self' or 'self-monitoring', and choosing not to act based on impulsive thinking, i.e., achieving self-control and treating others in a way that we would like to be treated (Smith, 2015; Tardast & Changi, 2021). Jon Kabat-Zinn (2023) used the example of ocean waves to explain mindfulness. Thoughts in your mind are like the surface of a lake or ocean, there are always waves on the water's surface, sometimes big waves, sometimes small, and sometimes almost unnoticeable. Waves of water rise and fall and change direction by the wind, just as the wind does. You can't prevent waves, but you can learn to stroll on the seashore. There are several feasible methods that show that mindfulness may influence marital satisfaction (Kabat-Zinn, 2023). One of the most beneficial effects of mindfulness is reducing automatic and impulsive reactions from spouses. Another impact that mindfulness has on relationships is that it creates a sense of well-being and happiness within the individual (Smith, 2015). People with higher mindfulness tend to express more feelings of joy, satisfaction, and health in their lives (Mandal & Lip, 2022; McGill et al., 2016), and these feelings generally extend to their marital life as well. Research shows that mindfulness is correlated with greater skill in couple interactions, acceptance of the spouse, more empathy, and higher marital satisfaction (Abooie Mehrizi et al., 2020; Ezadi & Nemat Tavosi, 2016; Fatehi et al., 2021; Gazder & Stanton, 2023; Harvey et al., 2019; Hosseinnezhad Hallaji et al., 2021; Karremans et al., 2017; Khaddouma et al., 2017; Leavitt et al., 2021; Rajabi et al., 2022). Given the issues raised, the main question of the current research is whether interpersonal mindfulness plays a mediating role in the

relationship between the use of social networks and marital satisfaction?

2. Methods

2.1. Study design and Participant

This study was fundamental in its objectives and descriptive and correlational in the method of data collection. The statistical population included married individuals using social media and residing in Tehran, from which 160 participants were selected using a convenience sampling method. To estimate the sample size, the formula proposed by Tabachnick and Fidell (2007) was used. According to this formula, the minimum sample size in correlation studies is calculated using the formula $N > 50 + 8M$, where N is the minimum sample size and M is the number of independent (predictor) variables. With the number of predictor variables in this study being 7 variables (three dimensions of social networks and four dimensions of mindfulness), the required sample size was 106. Considering that a larger sample size reduces the margin of error and the possibility that some questionnaires might be damaged or incomplete, 160 questionnaires were distributed and used.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Interpersonal Mindfulness

The Interpersonal Mindfulness Questionnaire by Puchter et al. (2018) is a 27-item self-assessment scale. Participants must express their agreement or disagreement with each statement on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (never) to 5 (always). The range of scores on this scale is 27-135. A total score is obtained from the sum of the scores of each subscale, indicating that higher scores reflect greater interpersonal mindfulness. In 2020, Dr. Abbas Abdollahi validated and verified the reliability of the questionnaire among couples. The Cronbach's alpha obtained for this questionnaire is 0.84. The items of this questionnaire measure subscales including presence, non-judgmental acceptance, non-reactivity, self-awareness, and others (Gazder & Stanton, 2023).

2.2.2. Social Networks Usage

The Social Networks Questionnaire by Khajeh Ahmadi et al. (2016) consists of 19 questions. This questionnaire includes three dimensions (extent of use, type of use, and trust in users). The reliability of this questionnaire was also

found to be 0.86. This questionnaire is based on a 5-point Likert scale (Rezapour et al., 2018).

2.2.3. Marital Satisfaction

The Enrich Marital Satisfaction Questionnaire was used to assess the level of marital satisfaction. This questionnaire is recognized as a valid research tool used in multiple studies for marital satisfaction. Each item of this questionnaire examines one of the important aspects of marital life. Evaluating these areas within a marital relationship can describe potential problems of couples or identify their strengths. The calculated score for this questionnaire is a T-scale where the mean is 50 and the standard deviation is 10. Scores less than 30 indicate severe dissatisfaction, scores between 30 and 40 indicate dissatisfaction, scores between 40 and 60 indicate relative and average satisfaction, scores between 60 and 70 indicate high satisfaction, and scores above 70 indicate exceptional satisfaction with marital relations (Ghafurian ghahramani & Mahdavian, 2022).

2.3. Data Analysis

In this study, data analysis was performed using the SPSS software version 20 and PLS software. Descriptive and inferential analysis methods and indicators were examined, using minimum score, maximum score, percentage, frequency, mean, and standard deviation for the descriptive analysis of participants' scores and to evaluate the structural model of the study, the four-stage structural assessment model proposed by Hair and colleagues (2017) was used.

3. Findings and Results

The demographic data of the participants (160 individuals) include gender, age, and education. The results from the examination of descriptive statistical indices for demographic characteristics indicate that the participants were aged between 17 to 64 years, with an average age of 34.42 and a standard deviation of 9.73, and the majority of them were female (77.5%). The highest frequency regarding the education variable was for those with a bachelor's degree (52 participants), and the lowest was for those below a high school diploma (6 participants).

Table 1

Descriptive Indices for Research Variables

Variable	Maximum Scale Score	Minimum Score	Maximum Score	Mean	Standard Deviation
Social Network (19 items)	95	19	95	57.26	12.51
Interpersonal Mindfulness (27 items)	135	27	114	79.6	12.15
Marital Satisfaction (47 items)	235	106	235	136.32	16.77

The results of the path significance coefficients for each of the assumed direct relationships are presented in Table 2 and Figure 2. The results indicate that all these direct relationships are significant.

Table 2

Evaluation of Path Significance Coefficients for Direct Relationships Between Variables

Hypothesis	Path Coefficients	t-Statistic	Significance Level
Hypothesis 1: Interpersonal Mindfulness → Marital Satisfaction	0.351	9.22	0.001
Hypothesis 2: Social Network → Marital Satisfaction	-0.456	13.52	0.001

Coefficient of determination values of 0.19, 0.33, and 0.67 indicate weak, moderate, and strong determination, respectively. As observed in Figure 2, the determination coefficient of 0.803 for the endogenous variable indicates that interpersonal mindfulness and social network explain 80.3% of the variance in marital satisfaction.

The results demonstrate that interpersonal mindfulness plays a more significant role in explaining marital satisfaction, and its removal from the model would significantly reduce the determination coefficient (R^2) for marital satisfaction. The Q^2 values for the endogenous variables for interpersonal mindfulness and social network were 0.68 and 0.59, respectively, indicating both are strong predictors of marital satisfaction, although the predictive power is greater for interpersonal mindfulness.

Figure 1

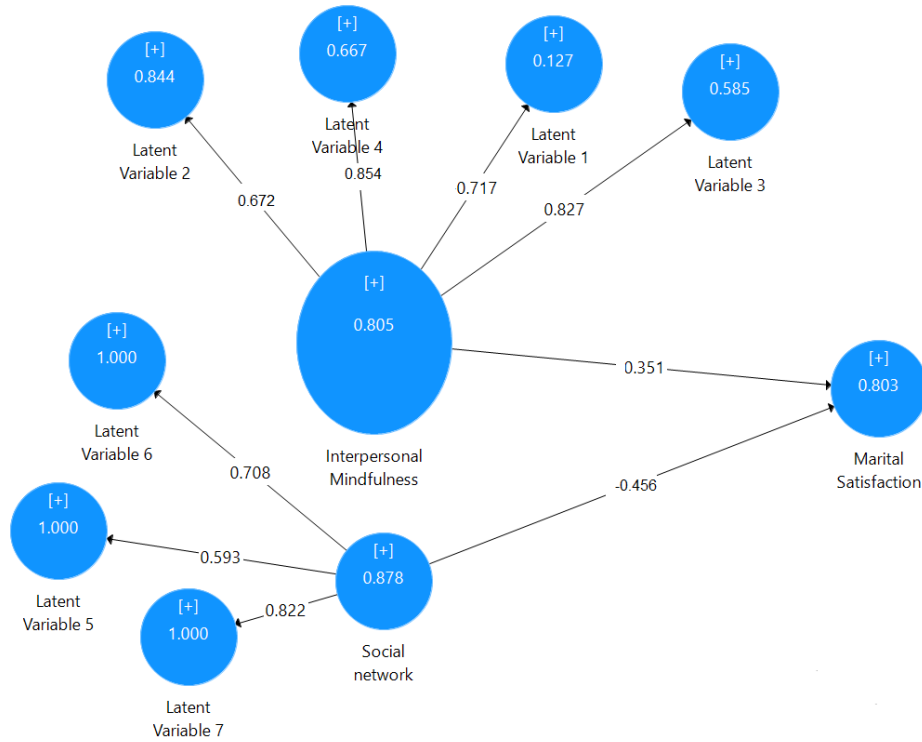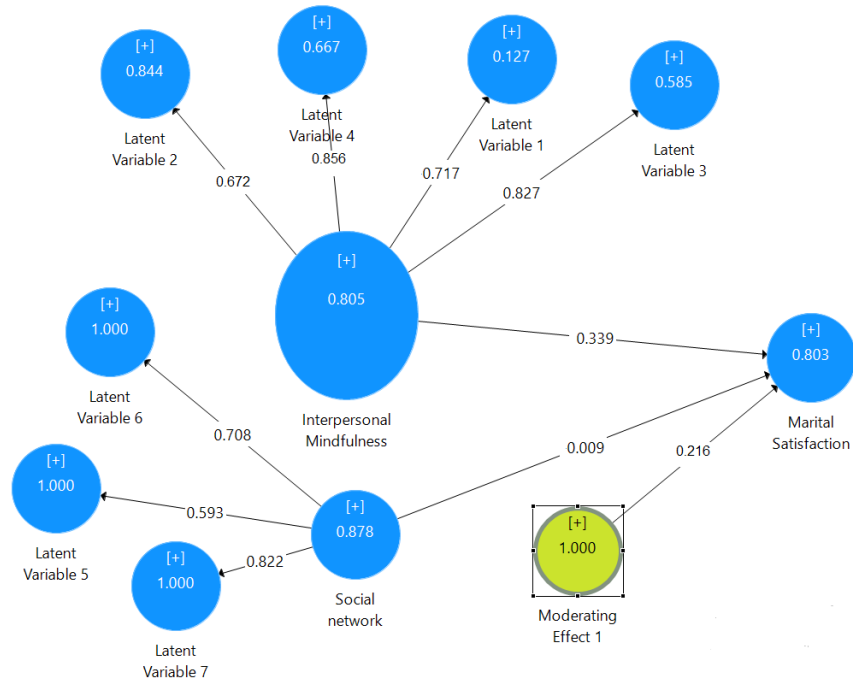*Model with Beta Coefficients (Without Moderating Effect)*

Figure 2

Model with Beta Coefficients (With Moderating Effect)

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The current study was conducted to determine the moderating role of interpersonal mindfulness in the relationship between social media use and marital satisfaction. Hypothesis one posited a relationship between interpersonal mindfulness and marital satisfaction. The findings from the first hypothesis indicated that there is a significant positive correlation between interpersonal mindfulness and marital satisfaction. These results are consistent with the prior findings (Abooie Mehrizi et al., 2020; Ezadi & Nemat Tavosi, 2016; Fatehi et al., 2021; Hosseinnezhad Hallaji et al., 2021; Rajabi et al., 2022; Smith, 2015; Tardast & Changi, 2021). Lambie's (2008) framework of emotional awareness helps us interpret these findings. Our findings align with this theoretical framework, suggesting that individuals who act consultatively may feel more connected. Previous research has shown that mindfulness allows individuals to act more purposefully and enhance emotional awareness (Tardast & Changi, 2021). Acceptance of emotions and greater intentionality encouraged by mindfulness may create a greater capacity for satisfaction in life and lead to positive relationship outcomes. Moreover, mindfulness may enable individuals to disrupt rumination and encourage them to adopt their partner's perspective (Rajabi et al., 2022; Smith, 2015). Mindfulness might assist one spouse to consider the other's perspective, allowing for a reduction in negative emotions and an increase in positive emotions, likely strengthening the relationship environment and any couple interactions (Abooie Mehrizi et al., 2020; Ezadi & Nemat Tavosi, 2016; Fatehi et al., 2021). According to Burstein (1996), mindfulness enhances individuals' ability to observe their thoughts and emotions without reacting destructively or abruptly. The relationship between couples is undoubtedly not devoid of thoughts and emotions, and here, mindfulness helps couples to have necessary control over their own thoughts and emotions. In this direction, Kabat-Zinn (1993) has stated that mindfulness aids individuals in managing stressful events, which enables couples to solve life's problems more easily and, consequently, experience greater satisfaction (Tardast & Changi, 2021).

The capacity of being mindful to stay in the present moment and being non-judgmental can accelerate a person's ability to choose more helpful and effective responses to interpersonal interactions by preventing automatic and hasty or thoughtless reactions. This type of deep and measured thought process can help enhance communication and acceptance in interpersonal relationships by preventing bold, rash, and thoughtless communication that is often characteristic of interpersonal conflicts. Ultimately, since mindfulness can not only enhance awareness of inner experiences but also foster greater appreciation and kindness towards those experiences (Ezadi & Nemat Tavosi, 2016), previous supportive evidence also suggests that mindfulness could lead to relationship satisfaction in various ways. It reveals the need for attention in the relationship. Being present in the current moment and engaging mentally with a partner enables couples to fully provide supportive emotions and also shape a relationship through empathy (Ezadi & Nemat Tavosi, 2016; Fatehi et al., 2021; Hosseinnezhad Hallaji et al., 2021; Rajabi et al., 2022; Smith, 2015). On the other hand, self-regulation appears to be another core mechanism of mindfulness, as repeated focus on maintaining attention on a neutral stimulus or a physiological sign like breathing creates a suitable environment for overall increased focus and reduced interfering stimuli, including stress. In other words, increased mindfulness elevates individuals' ability to perceive bodily signals, which can significantly improve the quality of sexual relationships and increase satisfaction (Fatehi et al., 2021; Tardast & Changi, 2021). Ultimately, a highly mindful individual is aware of every thought, emotion, and feeling and can experience their thoughts and emotions without emotional disturbance. Having high mindfulness in relationships allows couples to regulate their emotions and engage in more purposeful behaviors, leading to increased marital satisfaction.

Hypothesis Two: There is a relationship between the extent of social media use and marital satisfaction. The findings from the second hypothesis indicated that there is a significant negative correlation between the extent of social media use and marital satisfaction. These results are consistent with the research prior findings (Ezadi & Nemat Tavosi, 2016; Gazder & Stanton, 2023; Karremans et al., 2017; Parto et al., 2017).

In explaining this issue, it can be inferred that married individuals who spend more hours on social media networks become occupied, leaving their spouse feeling isolated. This engagement of either or both spouses in online social networks can lead to a reduction in family bonds (Gazder & Stanton, 2023; Parto et al., 2017). Media and technology disrupt or interfere with the quality of interpersonal interactions (McDaniel & Coyne, 2016; McDaniel & Drouin, 2019). A common example in our modern world is

one person browsing their social networks while their partner attempts to communicate with them, resulting in a one-sided interaction and less positive face-to-face interactions (McDaniel & Drouin, 2019). When couples become dependent on the internet and especially social networks, their motivation to interact with others, particularly their spouse, decreases, which negatively affects their relationship and social interactions (Rezapour et al., 2018). Furthermore, many researchers have acknowledged that excessive use of the internet and social networks may limit the development of interpersonal skills, and dependency on virtual networks for communication and reduced face-to-face interaction can lead to a diminished ability to manage disputes and life challenges (Parto et al., 2017).

It can also be said that expressing affection and declaring love and interest in one another is one of the prerequisites for establishing and maintaining warm and intimate relationships between spouses. With excessive immersion in the world of social networks, the amount of time that might otherwise be devoted to expressing affection and love between partners is reduced, which in turn causes an emotional and affectionate rift among spouses with many adverse consequences. Moreover, since most people spend their time in social networks, including places where it is possible to connect with different people, including the opposite sex, these interactions may extend into the real world. Therefore, this type of engagement and connection is viewed with suspicion and doubt by either spouse, which can weaken mutual affection and create conditions for marital discord and reduced marital satisfaction (Gallagher, 2017; Ghafurian ghahramani & Mahdavian, 2022). Individuals who actively use social media tend to present themselves and their life situations better than they are. This situation negatively affects the life satisfaction of social media users and makes them feel inadequate and inferior (Gallagher, 2017). While the reckless use of social media causes social and psychological problems in individuals, it can also be used to escape from psychological issues such as loneliness, stress, anxiety, negative self-perception, and depression (Duradoni et al., 2020).

Ultimately, it must be said that despite the useful applications it has, the increased use of the internet and social networks, along with the prolonged employment of spouses, has created circumstances that distance family members from one another. Even though they are physically close and under the same roof within the family, they often experience significant emotional and spiritual distances

from each other, and family members have the least empathetic conversations with each other (Trojak et al., 2017). When the use of virtual space becomes addictive, it can lead to problems for individuals. In fact, some people suffer from a lack of control over internet use, which causes personal disorder, dependency syndrome, and various negative consequences (Trojak et al., 2017). As spouses engage in social networks, the amount of time they spend together decreases and, on the other hand, the manner and type of each individual's activity in the virtual space can have various consequences that may be significantly different from their expected situation. Thus, the level of presence and activity in virtual space can affect the satisfaction of spouses. Engagement in social networks (regardless of the type of activity) removes or significantly limits the opportunity to engage in joint activities in the real world, which itself can create conditions for weakening couple cohesion and emergence or intensification of marital discord. In virtual space, on the one hand, due to the attractiveness and great diversity present on various websites and social networks, and on the other hand, due to the very large volume of information that a person receives in a short time, they will experience confusion and a kind of cognitive crisis that can challenge and transform the previous standards of marital agreement, and therefore, cause a reduction in satisfaction in marital relationships.

Hypothesis Three: Interpersonal mindfulness moderates the relationship between social media use and marital satisfaction. The findings from the third hypothesis revealed that interpersonal mindfulness plays a more significant role in explaining marital satisfaction, and its removal from the model would result in a substantial decrease in the R2 value for marital satisfaction. Both variables are considered strong predictors for marital satisfaction, but the numerical value of the predictive power metric is greater for interpersonal mindfulness than for social media. Ultimately, the results demonstrated that the moderating role of interpersonal mindfulness in the relationship between social media use (predictor variable) and marital satisfaction is significant. It was observed that few studies have investigated this topic; however, it aligns with the prior results showing that mindfulness plays a mediating role in relationships between emotional regulation difficulties, defense mechanisms, and alexithymia. For example, study by Fatehi et al. (2021) reported the mediating role of mindfulness in the relationship between emotional schemas and marital satisfaction among married female students at Yazd University (Fatehi et al., 2021).

In explicating the mediating role of mindfulness, it should be noted that spouses who were able to identify and describe their own behavioral thoughts and feelings found it easier to express their emotions. It facilitates communication and mutual understanding in romantic relationships. Additionally, couples who can refrain from immediate reactions find it easier to delay their responses, especially in difficult situations, and feel more compatible with their partner in a romantic relationship. Acting mindfully, with a focus on experiencing the present moments and situations in the relationship, concentrating on the present and not reverting to past situations, can aid in relationship satisfaction (Mandal & Lip, 2022). Studies have shown that an individual's ability to be present in the moment, aware of and able to describe emotions, distinguishing between emotional situations, and becoming conscious of others' perspectives in the relationship enhances emotional intelligence, emotional regulation skills, and ultimately increases the level of satisfaction in a marital relationship (McGill et al., 2016).

Individuals with higher levels of mindfulness can perceive details that others may overlook. The concept of mindfulness is understood as a particular state, a technique, and a quality of life attribute. It may arise from an individual's talent or the use of focused attention training (Duradoni et al., 2020). It has been proven that mindfulness has a positive effect on individual performance. A positive relationship between mindfulness and reflection has been shown with a reduction in maladaptive forms of thinking (rumination and worry) (Fatehi et al., 2021; Rizal et al., 2020). Mindfulness also correlates positively with emotional and motivational aspects of life, namely with adaptive regulation of emotions, needs for autonomy, competence, psychological well-being, empathy, self-compassion, resilience, sexual satisfaction, and mental health (Rizal et al., 2020).

5. Suggestions and Limitations

This study encountered several limitations that warrant mention. First, the use of self-reported measures for assessing interpersonal mindfulness and marital satisfaction can introduce biases such as social desirability and recall bias, potentially skewing the results. Second, the cross-sectional design of the study limits the ability to draw causal inferences between social media use, interpersonal mindfulness, and marital satisfaction. Additionally, the sample was restricted to married individuals from a specific geographical area, limiting the generalizability of the findings to other populations or cultural contexts. Future research could benefit from a more diverse sample and the incorporation of longitudinal designs to better understand the dynamics over time.

Future research should consider expanding the demographic and cultural diversity of the study sample to enhance the generalizability of the findings. Longitudinal studies could provide deeper insights into how the relationships between social media use, interpersonal mindfulness, and marital satisfaction evolve over time. Moreover, incorporating qualitative methods, such as interviews or focus groups, could offer richer, more nuanced data on the subjective experiences of individuals regarding mindfulness and its impact on relationships. Investigating the role of different types of social media platforms could also elucidate more specific interactions that may differentially influence marital satisfaction.

The findings of this study have practical implications for marital counseling and relationship coaching. Therapists and counselors could incorporate mindfulness training into their sessions to help couples improve their emotional and interpersonal awareness, which has been shown to enhance relationship satisfaction. Additionally, raising awareness about the potential negative impacts of excessive social media use on marital relationships can be beneficial. Couples could be encouraged to establish 'digital detox' periods where they focus on engaging with each other without the interference of electronic devices, fostering deeper connection and satisfaction in their relationship. This study underscores the importance of balance between digital interaction and face-to-face communication in maintaining the health of marital relationships.

Authors' Contributions

All authors have contributed significantly to the research process and the development of the manuscript.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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