Determining the Relationship Between Interpersonal Mindfulness, Social Media Use, and Marital Satisfaction

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A B S T R A C T

Objective: The present study aimed to determine the relationship between interpersonal mindfulness, social media use, and marital satisfaction.

Methods and Materials: This research is an applied study in terms of its objective. Additionally, it is a field study regarding data collection and analysis methods. The population under investigation consisted of married residents of Tehran who are members of social networks. Simple random sampling was employed for sample selection. To estimate the sample size, the formula proposed by Tabachnick and Fidell (2007) was utilized, resulting in a required sample size of 106 participants. In this study, data were collected using the Interpersonal Mindfulness Questionnaire (IMQ) (Paucho et al., 2018), the Social Networks Questionnaire (Khwaja Ahmadi, Pouladi, & Bahraini, 2016), and the ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale. To assess the structural model of the research, the four-stage structural model evaluation proposed by Hair et al. (2017) was applied.

Findings: The results of the covariance analysis test indicated that interpersonal mindfulness has a positive relationship with marital satisfaction, whereas social media use has a negative relationship with marital satisfaction.

Conclusion: Given the significant relationship between interpersonal mindfulness and social media use with marital satisfaction, it is recommended to design programs to enhance interpersonal mindfulness and appropriate social media use for increasing marital satisfaction among couples and implement these through virtual and electronic workshops.

Keywords: interpersonal mindfulness, social media, marital satisfaction

1. Introduction

Perhaps among all forms of suffering, marital and family relationships are the most complex and pervasive. The emotions involved in romantic relationships often bring moments of confusion, harm, and anger. Experienced therapists in this field know that working with couples and families directly relates to the essence of being

human; through this process, people learn how to trust each other, feel secure together, forgive each other's mistakes, love more deeply and fully, and discover what is most important in their lives (Barnes et al., 2007; Gesell et al., 2020; Mandal & Lip, 2022; Roberts & David, 2016). The family's role as the smallest social unit can significantly impact both positively, by creating a haven of peace, and negatively, by causing social harm (Mandal & Lip, 2022; Roberts & David, 2016).

Marital satisfaction is among the factors that play a critical role in the stability of marriage and family structure. The marital relationship forms the foundation for the parenting relationship. It is difficult for a couple to be good parents without being good partners (Barnes et al., 2007; Bradbury et al., 2000; Pakkhesal et al., 2020). In marriage and its continuity, marital adjustment and satisfaction are essential. A scientific study has found that marital satisfaction is based on several principles: agreement on important life issues, shared interests, mutual trust, expressing affection, and minimal complaints (Bradbury et al., 2000). Marital satisfaction is a key indicator of family performance, where spouses feel happy and satisfied with their marriage and being together (Ghafurian & MAHDAVIAN, 2022).

Some researchers define marital satisfaction as the objective feeling of happiness, satisfaction, and adjustment between spouses, while others describe it as an individual's subjective evaluation of the relationship and the internal and external compatibility of the husband and wife in various life situations to create mutual understanding (Pakkhesal et al., 2020; Parto et al., 2017). Couples marry to progress and achieve long-term goals, and marital satisfaction is one of the most crucial factors for progress and goal attainment, influenced by the couple's emotional stability. Family psychologists often use the level of marital satisfaction as a criterion to assess the quality of a couple's marital life (Behrooz et al., 2021; Smith, 2015). Marital satisfaction refers to the degree to which individual needs, expectations, and desires in marriage are met, a subjective condition that only the spouse can evaluate (Burpee & Langer, 2005).

The current era is one of the press, mass media, and communications. Our contemporary world is dominated by mass communication tools such as radio, television, satellite, mobile phones, and the internet. Today, few doubt that the world has entered a new era where information has become crucial (Gallagher, 2017). Many social scientists believe that the convergence of information and communication technologies and the restructuring of capitalist systems in recent decades have ushered us into a new era and society, referred to as the post-industrial society by Bell, the network society by Castells, and the information society by Uma Sayao (Sahin, 2017).

Social networks, as manifestations of new communication technology, hold a powerful and significant place in individuals' and families' lives, influencing both individual and social aspects. In recent years, the popularity of online social networks has increased unprecedentedly, with the most popular ones having hundreds of millions of users (Adair et al., 2018; Behrooz et al., 2021). The diversity and attractiveness of social networks have increased their user base.

With the expansion of the internet and virtual social networks, and their easy accessibility for everyone, a new form of interpersonal communication has emerged. Due to their high penetration rate, these networks have become part of daily life, necessitating an examination of their effects on couples' relationships and satisfaction. According to the Iranian Statistical Center's survey results in 2017, the internet penetration rate in the country was 64%, up from 45.3% in 2015, with 47.9 million internet users, showing that 59.7% of the population used the internet. Researchers have identified both positive functions of these networks, such as information exchange, relationship maintenance, goods and services provision, and job creation, and negative functions (Parto et al., 2017). Marwan et al. (2014) showed that social network use is associated with increased emotional distress between spouses. Farooqi et al. (2013) reported that long-term use of Facebook is related to decreased emotional-social relationships between couples. When couples become dependent on the internet, especially social networks, their motivation to interact with others, particularly their spouse, diminishes, negatively affecting their relationship and social interactions (Rezapour et al., 2018).

Social networks can significantly influence individuals' social awareness and, consequently, marital satisfaction. Conversely, they can lead to corruption, delinquency, and marital conflicts. Social networks play a crucial role in reducing marital satisfaction. The family is one of the most important social systems, formed based on the marriage of two opposite sexes. Maintaining and continuing the family is highly significant. Family cohesion and harmonious, satisfying relationships between spouses are key factors in the family's strength and survival. Paying attention to marital satisfaction and its influencing factors is essential for family health and continuity (Chasombat, 2014; Pakkhesal et al., 2020; Parto et al., 2017). Given the need to maintain family

health, it is essential to address family issues and problems. Understanding the factors related to marital satisfaction, which underpin family life, is crucial. Increased marital satisfaction can reduce many psychological, emotional, and social problems within families and society. One of these factors, especially in the current era, is the extent of social network use (Parto et al., 2017; Rezapour et al., 2018).

Mindfulness involves deep contemplation of current and ongoing events and is defined as a receptive and non-judgmental awareness of what is happening in the present moment. Although the core of mindfulness involves increasing the capacity for attentive and intelligent awareness beyond thought, its goal includes greater awareness of feelings, thoughts, and bodily sensations moment by moment. It involves experiencing the present moment, being mindful of one's feelings and thoughts, and extending and accepting one's thoughts and those of family and friends to cultivate a sense of conscience and self-regulation, helping us distinguish right from wrong, known as the true self or self-monitoring. This practice involves refraining from impulsive actions, achieving self-control, and treating others as we would like to be treated (Fincham, 2022; Gesell et al., 2020; Kabat-Zinn, 2023; Pratscher et al., 2019; Rizal et al., 2020). Jon Kabat-Zinn (2002) uses the analogy of ocean waves to explain mindfulness. Thoughts in your mind are like the surface of a lake or ocean; there are always waves, sometimes big, sometimes small, and sometimes almost invisible. The waves are created by the wind, rising and falling and changing direction, just as the wind does. You cannot prevent the waves, but you can learn to surf on the beach (Kabat-Zinn, 2023).

Since the establishment of the Stress Reduction Clinic and MBSR (Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction) in 1979 at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center, mindfulness and its impact on health and disease treatment have been the subject of various scientific studies over the past three decades. Mindfulness is often described as the heart of Buddhist meditation. Although cultivating mindfulness is not a Buddhist activity, it is essentially universal because it is about attention and awareness, which are innate human capacities. However, it is fair to say that the most significant development and refinement of mindfulness and how to cultivate it historically roots in Buddhist traditions and texts, offering valuable resources for our deep understanding and enhancement of mindfulness (Barnes et al., 2007; Kabat-Zinn, 2023; Kappen et al., 2018; Keng et al., 2011; Ottavi et al., 2019).

One variable that can influence life satisfaction is mindfulness. Mindfulness means paying attention to the present moment in a particular way, purposefully, and without judgment. Mindfulness means being in the moment with whatever is present, experiencing reality without explanation (Sharifi et al., 2019). Mindfulness can manifest in various ways in interpersonal interactions. Perhaps the easiest observable way is focused attention on another person while they are speaking. This conscious presence and self-regulation in listening enable us to let go of limiting structures, including deeply rooted emotional responses based on past experiences, the inability to hear the speaker accurately, drawing conclusions based on self-prediction, and misinterpreting emotions (Lenger et al., 2017). Several practical methods show that mindfulness may affect marital satisfaction. One of the most beneficial impacts of mindfulness is reducing automatic and impulsive reactions between spouses. Another influence mindfulness has on relationships is fostering a sense of well-being and happiness within individuals (Fatehi et al., 2021). Individuals with higher mindfulness levels tend to express more joy, satisfaction, and well-being in their lives (Langer & Burpee, 2005), and these feelings generally extend to their marital life. Research indicates that mindfulness correlates with greater skill in couple interactions, spouse acceptance, increased empathy, and higher marital satisfaction (Babapour et al., 2020; Barnes et al., 2007; Burpee & Langer, 2005; Fatehi et al., 2021; Sharifi et al., 2019; Smith, 2015). Based on the provided content, this study aims to answer the question of whether there is a significant relationship between interpersonal mindfulness, social media use, and marital satisfaction.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

This research is an applied study in terms of its objective. Additionally, it is a field study regarding data collection and analysis methods. The population under investigation consisted of married residents of Tehran who are members of social networks. Since a large number of individuals are targeted in this research, simple random sampling was employed. To estimate the sample size, the formula proposed by Tabachnick and Fidell (2007) was utilized. According to this formula, the minimum sample size in correlational studies is calculated using $N > 50 + 8M$, where N is the minimum sample size, and M is the number of independent (predictor) variables. Considering that there are

7 predictor variables (three dimensions of social networks and four dimensions of mindfulness) in this study, the required sample size was 106. Given that larger samples reduce the margin of error and considering the possibility of incomplete or damaged questionnaires, 160 questionnaires were distributed and used.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Mindfulness

A 27-item self-report scale. Respondents indicate their agreement or disagreement with each statement on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (always). The score range on this scale is 27-135. The total score of each subscale indicates the level of interpersonal mindfulness, with higher scores representing greater mindfulness. In 2020, Dr. Abbas Abdollahi examined the validity and reliability of this questionnaire among couples, yielding a Cronbach's alpha of 0.84. The items measure subscales such as presence, non-judgmental acceptance, non-reactivity, self-awareness, and others (Sharifi et al., 2019).

2.2.2. Social Networks

Comprising 19 questions, this questionnaire includes three dimensions (usage level, usage type, and trust in users). Its reliability was 0.86. The questionnaire is based on a 5-point Likert scale (Parto et al., 2017; Rezapour et al., 2018).

2.2.3. Marital Satisfaction

This T-scale has a mean of 50 and a standard deviation of 10. Scores below 30 indicate severe dissatisfaction, scores between 30 and 40 indicate dissatisfaction, scores between 40 and 60 indicate relative satisfaction, scores between 60 and 70 indicate high satisfaction, and scores above 70 indicate extreme satisfaction with marital relationships. The 48-item questionnaire yielded a Cronbach's alpha of 0.92 in MirKheshti's research (Babapour et al., 2020; Parto et al., 2017).

2.3. Data analysis

The structural model of the research was evaluated based on the four-stage model evaluation structure proposed by Hair et al. (2017).

3. Findings and Results

The demographic information of the participants (160 individuals) includes gender, age, and education. The results from the descriptive statistical indicators of demographic characteristics show that the participants in this study ranged from 17 to 64 years of age, with a mean age of 34.42 and a standard deviation of 9.73. Most of them were women (77.5%). The highest frequency in the education variable belonged to the bachelor's degree level (52 individuals), and the lowest frequency was related to below high school diploma (6 individuals).

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for Research Variables

Research Variables	Social Media (19 items)	Interpersonal Mindfulness (27 items)	Marital Satisfaction (47 items)	Statistical Indicators
Maximum Score of the Scale	95	135	235	
Minimum Score	19	27	106	
Maximum Score	95	114	235	
Mean	57.26	79.6	136.32	
Standard Deviation	12.51	12.15	16.77	

Table 2

Significance Coefficients of Path Analysis for Direct Relationships Between Variables

Variable Relationships	Path Coefficients	t Statistic	Significance Level
Interpersonal Mindfulness ← Marital Satisfaction	0.351	9.22	0.001
Social Media ← Marital Satisfaction	-0.456	13.52	0.001

The second step in evaluating the structural model of the research is assessing the determination coefficient of the endogenous variables. In this study, the endogenous variable is marital satisfaction. The determination coefficient

examines the predictive accuracy of the proposed model. In other words, the determination coefficient indicates how much variance of the endogenous variables is explained by the exogenous variables. The determination coefficient values of 0.19, 0.33, and 0.67 indicate weak, moderate, and strong coefficients, respectively. As shown in Figure 1, the determination coefficient of 0.803 for the endogenous variable indicates that interpersonal mindfulness and social media explain 80.3% of the variance in marital satisfaction.

The purpose of evaluating the effect size is to determine whether removing an exogenous variable from the model significantly impacts the determination coefficient of the related endogenous variable. Therefore, the effect size indicates the strength of the relationship between exogenous and endogenous variables in the model. According to Cohen's (1988) criteria, effect sizes of 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35 indicate small, medium, and large effect sizes, respectively. The f^2 value for interpersonal mindfulness and social media

was 0.70 and 0.58, respectively. Therefore, the results show that interpersonal mindfulness plays a more important role in explaining marital satisfaction, and removing it from the model would significantly reduce the determination coefficient (R^2) of marital satisfaction.

The purpose of evaluating the predictive power (Q^2) is to determine whether the latent exogenous variables of the model have predictive power for the endogenous variables. In the structural model, a Q^2 value greater than zero for any endogenous variable indicates the predictive power of the related exogenous variable. Henseler, Ringle, and Sinkovics (2009) proposed cut-off values of 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35 for weak, medium, and strong predictive power, respectively. The Q^2 values for interpersonal mindfulness and social media were 0.68 and 0.59, respectively, indicating that both variables are strong predictors of marital satisfaction, but the predictive power criterion value for interpersonal mindfulness is higher than that for social media.

Figure 1

Structural Model of Marital Satisfaction
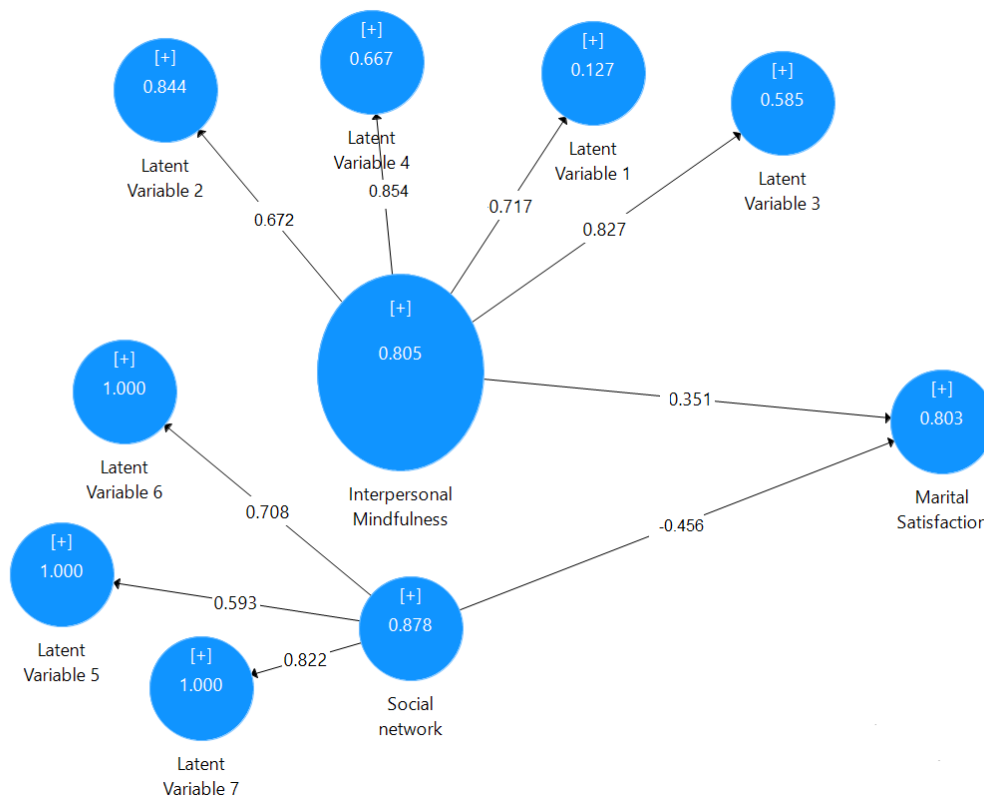
4. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study aimed to determine the relationship between interpersonal mindfulness, social media use, and

marital satisfaction. The findings from the first research hypothesis indicated a significant positive correlation between interpersonal mindfulness and marital satisfaction. This result is consistent with the prior findings (Babapour et

al., 2020; Barnes et al., 2007; Burpee & Langer, 2005; Chen et al., 2017; Fatehi et al., 2021; Fincham, 2022; Gesell et al., 2020; Kappen et al., 2018; Kozlowski, 2013; Lenger et al., 2017; Mandal & Lip, 2022; McGill et al., 2016; Pepping et al., 2018; Smith, 2015). Lambie's (2008) emotional awareness framework helps explain these findings. Our results align with this theory, suggesting that as individuals engage in consultative behavior, they may feel more connected (Chen et al., 2017). Previous research has shown that mindfulness allows individuals to act with greater purpose and enhances emotional awareness (Chen et al., 2017). Acceptance of emotions and increased purposefulness encouraged by mindfulness may create a greater capacity for life satisfaction, leading to positive outcomes in relationships. Additionally, mindfulness may enable individuals to interrupt rumination and encourage them to adopt their partner's perspective (Karremans et al., 2020). Mindfulness may help one spouse consider the other's viewpoint (Leary & Diebels, 2017). As a spouse allows negative emotions to decrease and positive emotions to increase, the relationship environment and any couple interactions are likely to be strengthened (Fincham, 2022). Additionally, marital relationships are undoubtedly full of thoughts and emotions, and mindfulness helps couples maintain necessary control over their thoughts and emotions. Similarly, Kabat-Zinn (2023) stated that mindfulness assists individuals in managing stressful events (Kabat-Zinn, 2023), which helps couples solve life problems more easily and subsequently experience greater satisfaction.

The capacity for mindfulness to stay in the present moment and be non-judgmental can accelerate a person's ability to choose more useful and effective responses to interpersonal interactions by preventing automatic and hasty reactions. This deep and thoughtful cognitive process can promote more acceptance and communication in interpersonal relationships by preventing rash and thoughtless communication, which often characterizes interpersonal conflicts. Ultimately, mindfulness can enhance not only greater awareness of internal experiences but also greater appreciation and kindness toward those experiences (Sharifi et al., 2019). Previous supportive evidence indicates that mindfulness may lead to relationship satisfaction in various ways. It reveals the need for attention in the relationship. Being present and mentally engaged with one's partner allows couples to provide supportive feelings and form relationships through empathy (Fatehi et al., 2021).

Furthermore, self-regulation appears to be another key mechanism of mindfulness, as repeated focus on maintaining attention on a neutral stimulus or a physiological signal like breathing provides an appropriate environment for increased overall focus and reduced interfering stimuli such as stress. In other words, increased mindfulness enhances individuals' ability to perceive physical cues, significantly improving the quality of sexual relationships and increasing satisfaction (Kozlowski, 2013). In conclusion, individuals with high mindfulness are aware of every thought, emotion, and feeling, and they can experience their thoughts and emotions without emotional disturbance. High mindfulness in relationships allows couples to regulate their emotions and engage in more purposeful behaviors, leading to marital satisfaction.

The findings indicated a significant negative correlation between the amount of social media use and marital satisfaction. This result is consistent with the prior findings (Adair et al., 2018; Behrooz et al., 2021; Bijan et al., 2019; Chasombat, 2014; Christensen, 2018; Duradoni et al., 2020; Gallagher, 2017; Pakkhesal et al., 2020; Parto et al., 2017; Rezapour et al., 2018; Roberts & David, 2016; Saeednia & Ghorbanzadeh, 2017; Sahin, 2017). It can be inferred that married individuals who spend more hours on social media become preoccupied with these networks, leaving their spouse feeling lonely. Spending time on social media by one or both partners can reduce family bonding (Parto et al., 2017). Media and technology disrupt or interfere with the quality of interactions between individuals (McDaniel & Coyne, 2016). A common example in our modern world is someone scrolling through their social media while their spouse tries to communicate with them, creating a one-sided interaction (Roberts & David, 2016) and resulting in fewer positive face-to-face interactions (McDaniel & Drouin, 2019). When couples become dependent on the internet and social media, their motivation to interact with others, especially their spouse, decreases, negatively impacting their relationship and social interactions (Razapour et al., 2016). Moreover, many researchers have accepted that excessive use of the internet and social media may limit the development of interpersonal skills, and dependence on the internet and virtual networks for communication reduces face-to-face interactions, affecting the ability to manage conflicts and life problems (Parto et al., 2017). People who actively use social media tend to present themselves and their life situations better than they are. This situation negatively affects social media users' life satisfaction, making them feel inadequate and weak (Gallagher, 2017). While excessive use of social media causes social and psychological problems, it can also be used to escape

psychological issues like loneliness, stress, anxiety, negative self-perception, and depression (Duradoni et al., 2020). Research shows that social media addiction affects self-esteem, while some studies explain that low self-esteem also causes social media addiction (Sahin, 2017). Constant user presence on social media strengthens their relationships with virtual friends while reducing real-world relationships. These individuals replace spending time in virtual space with time that should be spent with friends and family. Sometimes a person becomes so accustomed to social network activities and connecting with virtual friends that they prefer to spend more time in virtual space with virtual friends rather than with physically close people like their spouse and family members (Pakkhesal et al., 2020).

Theoretically, the negative impact of social networks can be explained by the displacement hypothesis. While social networks may not completely replace interactions, this behavior reduces beneficial bilateral conversations and experiences with couples. Therefore, any positive benefits that might have arisen from regular communication in relationships are overlooked. Even small interruptions in relationships can weaken relationship intimacy, as those who cannot gain their partner's undivided attention may feel hurt and neglected (Hales et al., 2018). Finally, it must be said that the increase in internet and social media use, despite its beneficial uses, combined with the long work hours of couples, has led to family members being distanced from each other. Although physically close under one roof, family members sometimes experience significant emotional and spiritual distances, resulting in minimal empathetic interactions and conversations. When virtual space use becomes addictive, it can lead to problems for individuals. Some individuals suffer from a lack of control over internet use, leading to personal distress, dependency symptoms, and various negative consequences (Trojak et al., 2017). When couples engage in social networks, the amount of time they spend together decreases, and how they use and participate in virtual space can have various consequences, which may differ greatly from their expectations. Thus, the amount of time and activity in virtual space can impact the level of couple satisfaction. Social network presence and activity (regardless of type) take away or significantly limit the opportunity to engage in joint activities in the real world, weakening two-person cohesion and increasing marital discord.

The findings indicated that interpersonal mindfulness plays a more important role in explaining marital satisfaction, and removing it from the model significantly reduces the determination coefficient (R^2) of marital satisfaction. Both variables are strong predictors of marital satisfaction, but the predictive power criterion value for interpersonal mindfulness is higher than for social media. Finally, the results showed that the moderating role of interpersonal mindfulness in the relationship between social media (predictor variable) and marital satisfaction is significant. Fatehi (2018) reported the mediating role of mindfulness in the relationship between emotional schemas and marital satisfaction among married female students at Yazd University. Explaining the mediating role of mindfulness, it should be said that couples who can recognize and describe their thoughts and behavioral emotions find it easier to show and express their feelings (Fatehi et al., 2021). This facilitates communication and mutual understanding in romantic relationships. Couples who can avoid immediate reactions and delay their responses, especially in difficult situations, feel more compatible with their partner in a romantic relationship. Acting with awareness and focusing attention on the current experience and situation in the relationship, focusing on the present, and not returning to past situations can help with relationship satisfaction (Mandal & Lip, 2022).

Studies have shown that the ability to be present in the moment with awareness of emotions, distinguishing between emotional situations, becoming aware of the partner's perspective in the relationship, and enhancing emotional intelligence and regulation skills ultimately increase marital satisfaction (McGill et al., 2016). People with higher mindfulness can see details that others overlook. Mindfulness is understood as a specific state, a technique, and a feature of quality of life. It may arise from an individual's talent or using mindfulness training (Didonna, 2009). Mindfulness has been proven to have a positive impact on individual performance. A positive relationship between mindfulness and reflection with decreased forms of non-adaptive thinking (rumination and worry) was shown (Gesell et al., 2020). Mindfulness is also positively correlated with emotional and motivational aspects of life, such as adaptive emotion regulation, autonomy needs, competence, psychological well-being, empathy, self-compassion, resilience, sexual satisfaction, and mental health (Rizal et al., 2020). Conscious and intentional attention combined with openness and non-judgmental observation leads to a meaningful change in the individual's perspective, called re-perception. This change in perception leads to changes in other psychological dimensions, including cognitive, emotional, and behavioral flexibility,

and the pursuit of valuable life goals. Based on this mechanism, the individual realizes that pains, discomforts, negative thoughts, etc., are not themselves and thus can observe them from a meta-perspective, reducing maladaptive behaviors and habits. Such a mechanism can change the individual's attitude and perspective towards interpersonal relationships with the spouse, increasing compatibility and satisfaction with the spouse's relationships (Babapour et al., 2020).

5. Limitations & Suggestions

During the research process, the researcher encountered limitations that might have affected the research quality. These limitations include the study being conducted on married individuals in Tehran, which should be cautiously generalized to women and other cities. The study was conducted simultaneously with the COVID-19 outbreak, and due to the complexity of the disease and social distancing, completing the questionnaires online was challenging, causing delays. The present research method was descriptive-cross-sectional and correlational, which is one of the limitations, as it does not have the validity and certainty of experimental studies and reduces the power of generalizing the findings. Since the present research is of a correlational design, it is suggested that future researchers use a longitudinal or experimental study to clarify the role of the research variables. As the measurement tool was a questionnaire, it is suggested that future research use other tools such as interviews and observations to obtain more robust results. Given the significant relationship between interpersonal mindfulness and social media use with marital satisfaction, it is recommended to design programs to enhance interpersonal mindfulness and appropriate social media use for increasing marital satisfaction among couples and implement these through virtual and electronic workshops.

Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed in this article.

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