

## Exploring the Psychological and Relational Consequences of Smartphone Overuse in Marital Relationships

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### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** This study aimed to explore the psychological and relational consequences of smartphone overuse in marital relationships.

**Methods and Materials:** A qualitative research design was employed to gain in-depth insights into couples' experiences. The study included 24 married participants residing in Taiwan, selected through purposive sampling to capture diverse marital backgrounds. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, which allowed participants to articulate their perceptions and experiences regarding smartphone use within marriage. Interviews continued until theoretical saturation was reached, and each session lasted between 45 and 70 minutes. With participants' consent, all interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed using NVivo 14 software. A thematic analysis approach was applied, with open coding followed by categorization and theme development, ensuring systematic identification of patterns and meanings in the data.

**Findings:** The analysis generated four overarching themes: (1) Emotional Consequences, including stress, jealousy, mood dysregulation, and loneliness; (2) Relational Conflicts and Tensions, involving communication breakdown, trust issues, intimacy decline, and parenting disagreements; (3) Cognitive and Behavioral Patterns, encompassing habitual checking, compulsive use, time mismanagement, and escapism; and (4) Coping Strategies and Adaptive Responses, which included negotiating boundaries, rebuilding communication, joint digital activities, professional help-seeking, and emotional reconnection. Participants emphasized how smartphone overuse fostered feelings of neglect, suspicion, and conflict while also demonstrating the potential for constructive adaptations when couples actively addressed the challenges.

**Conclusion:** Smartphone overuse significantly affects marital relationships by eroding intimacy, intensifying jealousy, and provoking conflict. At the same time, couples who implemented intentional strategies, such as setting boundaries and engaging in shared activities, demonstrated resilience and relational recovery. These findings underscore the dual role of smartphones as both relational stressors

and potential tools for connection, highlighting the need for awareness, communication, and structured interventions in marital contexts.

**Keywords:** *Smartphone overuse; marital relationships; jealousy; intimacy; relational conflict; coping strategies; Taiwan*

## 1. Introduction

The rapid integration of digital technologies into daily life has transformed the way individuals communicate, interact, and sustain romantic relationships. While smartphones provide instant access to information, social networks, and entertainment, their overuse within intimate partnerships has raised concerns about relational stability, trust, and emotional well-being. Jealousy, in particular, has emerged as a central construct in understanding how technology-mediated interactions may threaten marital satisfaction and commitment. Across cultures and theoretical traditions, jealousy has been conceptualized as both a destructive and protective force—undermining intimacy when excessive, yet serving adaptive functions when it signals threats to relationship security (Shchukina, 2024). Within the digital age, these dynamics are intensified as the boundary between public and private spheres becomes increasingly porous, creating novel triggers for suspicion, emotional distress, and relational conflict.

Evolutionary psychology has long proposed that jealousy is not merely a maladaptive emotion but a product of evolved mechanisms designed to protect pair bonds. Empirical work supports the notion that jealousy functions as an adaptive response to cues of partner infidelity, mobilizing behaviors aimed at preventing loss of reproductive opportunities or resources (Arnocky et al., 2024). Experimental studies have demonstrated that imagined partner infidelity reliably induces jealousy, which in turn predicts stronger mate retention strategies, highlighting its role as a motivational system (Arnocky et al., 2015; Davis et al., 2018). Such findings are consistent with cross-cultural patterns showing that jealousy emerges reliably across diverse societies as a protective response to perceived threats to exclusivity and commitment (Scelza et al., 2019).

Sex differences in jealousy have been extensively investigated, with evolutionary theorists proposing that men are more sensitive to sexual infidelity due to risks of paternal uncertainty, whereas women are more attuned to emotional infidelity given the threat of diverted resources (Kato, 2014; Walum et al., 2013). Population-based studies confirm that jealousy has significant heritable components and interacts with broader attachment and personality traits (Larsen et al., 2021; Richter et al., 2022). These patterns suggest that

jealousy is deeply rooted in biological and psychological processes, yet its expression is shaped by social, cultural, and technological contexts.

Beyond evolutionary explanations, contemporary studies emphasize the role of personality characteristics and attachment orientations in shaping jealousy responses. Individuals with insecure attachment styles tend to display heightened jealousy and suspicion, often interpreting ambiguous behaviors as signs of betrayal (Richter et al., 2022). Personality traits, including both bright and dark dimensions, are associated with different jealousy profiles, with traits such as neuroticism amplifying jealousy intensity and traits like agreeableness moderating its expression (Barelds & Dijkstra, 2021). Similarly, dyadic trust plays a pivotal role: couples with low mutual trust report higher levels of jealousy and greater susceptibility to conflicts around fidelity (Kemer et al., 2015).

This relational dimension becomes particularly salient in the digital era, where constant online availability and exposure to alternative partners heighten insecurity. The anonymity and accessibility of social media interactions often blur the boundaries of fidelity, amplifying distrust and suspicion (Toplu-Demirtaş et al., 2020). Cyber jealousy and related abusive behaviors underscore the ways in which attachment insecurities and personality vulnerabilities translate into maladaptive responses in technology-mediated contexts.

Infidelity—real or perceived—remains one of the most potent triggers of jealousy. Studies confirm that anticipated or discovered infidelity significantly predicts jealousy responses across genders, often leading to defensive or retaliatory behaviors (Arnocky et al., 2015; Naz & Usman, 2019). Women, in particular, report heightened distress when confronted with infidelity, associating it with violations of emotional trust and stability (Naz & Usman, 2019). Pregnant women also exhibit distinctive jealousy patterns, with elevated concerns about partner fidelity reflecting heightened adaptive sensitivities during vulnerable reproductive stages (Massar & Buunk, 2019).

Technological platforms amplify these concerns by making partner behaviors more visible and easily misinterpreted. Facebook messages, for instance, have been shown to elicit jealousy depending on the sex of the message sender and the type of interaction, underscoring how subtle

cues in digital communication can ignite suspicion (Dunn & Billett, 2017). Similarly, alcohol use, casual online interactions, and ambiguous messages often increase perceived infidelity risks and fuel jealousy among couples (Ostria et al., 2017). These findings highlight the dual role of technology as both a facilitator of connection and a catalyst for insecurity.

Emerging research has begun to explore the neurobiological underpinnings of jealousy. Intranasal oxytocin administration has been shown to attenuate jealousy responses in the face of both real and imagined partner infidelity, suggesting that hormonal pathways are deeply implicated in regulating emotional reactivity and bonding (Zheng et al., 2021). These findings align with broader evidence that jealousy involves complex interactions between affective, cognitive, and neuroendocrine systems. Such work bridges evolutionary perspectives with psychophysiological mechanisms, offering a more comprehensive understanding of jealousy as both an adaptive response and a potential risk factor for relational distress.

Jealousy cannot be fully understood without attending to cultural and social frameworks. In societies where monogamy is strictly enforced, jealousy tends to be more strongly pathologized, whereas in communities practicing consensual non-monogamy, jealousy may be interpreted differently or even attenuated (Edlund et al., 2022; Hatfield et al., 2020). Comparative studies between monogamous and non-monogamous individuals reveal differences in jealousy intensity and personality correlates, suggesting that cultural scripts shape not only relational expectations but also emotional regulation (Edlund et al., 2022).

Legal and moral frameworks also intersect with jealousy, particularly when it escalates to violence. Research on extreme cases highlights that jealousy has been invoked as a mitigating factor in crimes of passion, often distinguished legally from premeditated violence (Hakimov, 2023). Such perspectives underscore the duality of jealousy as both a socially comprehensible emotional reaction and a potential driver of destructive behaviors with serious legal implications.

While jealousy serves adaptive purposes, it may become pathological when excessive or delusional. Clinical studies distinguish between normal, non-delusional jealousy and maladaptive forms linked to psychopathological traits such as paranoia or obsessive-compulsive tendencies (Sheikhmoonesi et al., 2020). Personality dimensions, including introversion and low agreeableness, have been

found to correlate with heightened vulnerability to pathological jealousy. Addressing such dynamics is crucial for therapeutic interventions aimed at reducing relational dysfunction and preventing escalation into abuse.

The digital revolution has profoundly transformed the experience and expression of jealousy. Increased exposure to alternative partners through social media, dating apps, and online interactions has intensified relational insecurities, giving rise to phenomena such as “cyber jealousy” and online surveillance (Shchukina, 2024). Unlike traditional triggers, digital interactions often lack clear boundaries, making it difficult for individuals to assess whether behaviors constitute infidelity or harmless connection. This ambiguity amplifies relational tensions and creates new challenges for maintaining trust.

At the same time, technological innovations have also introduced opportunities for relational growth. Couples may utilize communication technologies to reinforce bonds, maintain long-distance intimacy, and engage in collaborative digital activities. However, such benefits coexist with risks, and the challenge lies in balancing connectivity with relational boundaries (Hatfield et al., 2020).

Taken together, the literature highlights jealousy as a multifaceted construct that is simultaneously rooted in evolutionary imperatives, shaped by cultural scripts, mediated by individual differences, and transformed by digital technologies. Its consequences for marital relationships are profound, ranging from heightened vigilance and protective mate retention behaviors to destructive conflict and relational breakdown. In contexts where smartphones and social media dominate daily life, the triggers and expressions of jealousy are undergoing significant transformation, requiring renewed theoretical and empirical attention (Shcherbata & Borets, 2021; Valentová et al., 2020).

The present study builds on this body of knowledge by exploring the psychological and relational consequences of smartphone overuse in marital relationships. By focusing on the lived experiences of married individuals in Taiwan, it aims to illuminate how jealousy, trust, and intimacy are reconfigured in the digital era, and how couples navigate the tensions between technological engagement and emotional connection.

## 2. Methods

## 2.1. Study Design and Participants

This study employed a qualitative research design with the aim of exploring the psychological and relational consequences of smartphone overuse in marital relationships. A purposive sampling strategy was used to recruit participants who could provide in-depth perspectives on the phenomenon under investigation. The study included 24 married individuals residing in Taiwan, representing diverse age groups, employment statuses, and lengths of marriage. This diversity was intended to ensure a broad range of experiences and insights. Recruitment continued until theoretical saturation was achieved, meaning no new themes or significant insights emerged from the interviews, ensuring the adequacy of the sample size for qualitative analysis.

## 2.2. Measures

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, which allowed participants to share their lived experiences while enabling the researcher to guide the discussion around key themes related to smartphone use and its impact on marital dynamics. An interview guide was designed to cover topics such as patterns of smartphone use, emotional and relational effects, conflicts arising from overuse, and coping strategies adopted by couples. Interviews lasted between 45 and 70 minutes, depending on the depth of the responses provided by participants. All interviews were conducted face-to-face or via secure video conferencing, based on participants' preferences and availability. With informed consent, interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim for analysis.

## 2.3. Data Analysis

The transcribed interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis, supported by NVivo 14 software. The analysis followed an iterative process that involved coding, categorizing, and identifying patterns across the dataset. Initially, open coding was used to label significant statements and concepts. These codes were then refined into broader categories and emerging themes that captured the psychological and relational consequences of smartphone overuse. To enhance the rigor of the analysis, constant comparison techniques were applied throughout, and reflective memos were maintained to document analytic decisions. The use of NVivo facilitated systematic management of data and ensured that the coding process was transparent and traceable.

## 3. Findings and Results

The study sample consisted of 24 married individuals residing in Taiwan, including 13 women (54.2%) and 11 men (45.8%). Participants' ages ranged from 28 to 52 years, with the largest proportion (10 participants, 41.7%) between 31 and 40 years old, followed by 8 participants (33.3%) between 41 and 50 years, and 6 participants (25%) under the age of 30. In terms of marital duration, 9 participants (37.5%) had been married for less than 10 years, 11 participants (45.8%) reported a marriage length of 10–20 years, and 4 participants (16.7%) had been married for over 20 years. Regarding employment status, 15 participants (62.5%) were full-time employees, 5 participants (20.8%) were self-employed, and 4 participants (16.7%) were homemakers. Educational backgrounds varied, with 6 participants (25%) holding postgraduate degrees, 12 participants (50%) holding undergraduate degrees, and the remaining 6 participants (25%) having completed high school or vocational training.

**Table 1**

*Thematic Coding Table*

Category (Theme)	Subcategory	Concepts (Open Codes)
1. Emotional Consequences of Smartphone Overuse	Stress and Anxiety	Constant checking, Fear of missing out (FOMO), Nervousness when phone is unavailable, Heightened irritability
	Emotional Detachment	Emotional numbness, Reduced sensitivity to partner's feelings, Disconnection in shared moments, Preference for digital interaction
	Jealousy and Insecurity	Monitoring partner's phone use, Suspicion of infidelity, Comparing with online peers, Feelings of neglect
	Mood Dysregulation	Quick temper, Emotional swings, Dependence on notifications for mood, Frustration over interrupted talks
	Loneliness within Marriage	Feeling unseen, Sense of isolation despite presence, Unmet emotional needs, Lack of validation

	Reduced Empathy	Ignoring emotional cues, Overlooking partner's struggles, Dismissing partner's worries
2. Relational Conflicts and Tensions	Communication Breakdown	One-sided conversations, Distracted listening, Misunderstandings, Avoidance of deep talks
	Power Struggles	Arguing over screen time, Competing for attention, Imbalance of priorities
	Escalation of Disputes	Arguments about phone usage, Silent treatment, Intensified quarrels, Cyclical conflicts
	Trust Issues	Hidden phone activity, Password secrecy, Reduced openness, Suspicion about online contacts
	Decline in Intimacy	Reduced eye contact, Less affection, Bedtime phone distractions, Declining sexual closeness
3. Cognitive and Behavioral Patterns	Parenting Disagreements	Conflicts over children's screen time, Inconsistent rules, Criticism of partner's parenting while distracted
	Financial Tensions	Spending on apps/games, Online shopping conflicts, Disputes over data bills
	Habitual Checking	Automatic scrolling, Checking during meals, Checking before sleep, Checking upon waking
	Multitasking Strain	Divided attention, Forgetfulness, Errors in household tasks, Lack of focus in discussions
	Compulsive Behaviors	Urge to respond instantly, Compulsion to refresh feeds, Difficulty putting phone aside
4. Coping Strategies and Adaptive Responses	Time Mismanagement	Neglecting shared plans, Delay in chores, Staying up late online, Prioritizing phone over spouse
	Escapism through Smartphones	Avoiding conflicts, Using games/social media to cope, Hiding behind screen in tense moments
	Negotiating Boundaries	Setting screen-free times, Agreeing on tech-free zones, Mutually agreed limits
	Rebuilding Communication	Active listening exercises, Shared conversations without phones, Eye-contact reinforcement
	Joint Digital Activities	Watching videos together, Sharing memes, Playing online games as a couple
	Professional Help-Seeking	Counseling for tech overuse, Couples therapy, Digital detox workshops
	Emotional Reconnection	Shared hobbies, Revisiting rituals, Date nights without devices, Practicing gratitude
	Self-Regulation	Mindfulness practices, Tracking screen time, Personal rules for usage, Turning off notifications

## 1. Emotional Consequences of Smartphone Overuse

**Stress and Anxiety.** Many participants described constant smartphone checking as a source of heightened stress and anxiety. They felt restless when unable to access their phones, with one participant stating, *"If my battery is low, I feel nervous and can't focus on what my wife is saying."* Others reported a persistent fear of missing out, which added unnecessary tension to daily interactions.

**Emotional Detachment.** Several respondents noted that excessive smartphone use led to emotional distance in their marriages. One husband reflected, *"She is sitting beside me, but her mind is inside the phone. It feels like we live in different worlds."* This detachment manifested in reduced sensitivity to a partner's feelings and a preference for online engagement rather than shared moments.

**Jealousy and Insecurity.** Smartphone overuse also triggered jealousy and insecurity. Participants reported monitoring their partner's online activity and feeling neglected. A wife explained, *"When he keeps laughing at messages from his female colleagues, I start thinking, maybe he doesn't enjoy my company anymore."* Such suspicions often strained trust within the relationship.

**Mood Dysregulation.** The data revealed that reliance on smartphones contributed to mood instability. Partners became frustrated when conversations were interrupted by phone notifications. One participant remarked, *"Whenever I want to discuss something serious, he gets distracted by a notification, and I lose my temper immediately."*

**Loneliness within Marriage.** Despite physical closeness, several respondents described feelings of loneliness caused by their partner's smartphone preoccupation. A woman shared, *"It is strange to feel lonely while living with my husband. He is there, but not really there."* This sense of invisibility left emotional needs unmet.

**Reduced Empathy.** Overuse appeared to erode empathic understanding. One participant noted, *"When I feel down, instead of asking what's wrong, she just scrolls through her phone. I feel dismissed."* The neglect of emotional cues reinforced the perception of growing distance.

## 2. Relational Conflicts and Tensions

**Communication Breakdown.** Participants emphasized how smartphones weakened everyday communication. One husband stated, *"I am talking, but she only says 'uh-huh' while typing a message. It's not real listening."* This



distracted communication often led to misunderstandings and avoidance of meaningful dialogue.

**Power Struggles.** Conflicts also emerged over control of screen time. Couples often argued about whose needs should take priority. A wife explained, *“He says work messages are urgent, but what about me waiting for him to join dinner?”* Such struggles reflected imbalances in marital priorities.

**Escalation of Disputes.** Smartphone use frequently acted as a spark for larger conflicts. Arguments began with complaints about scrolling but often escalated into prolonged disputes. A participant recalled, *“We fight about the phone, then it turns into fighting about everything else.”*

**Trust Issues.** Several interviewees linked smartphone secrecy to declining trust. One respondent remarked, *“She always hides her screen, and I start doubting her honesty. Even if it’s harmless, it hurts.”* Password-protected phones created suspicions of infidelity and reduced openness.

**Decline in Intimacy.** Excessive smartphone engagement interfered with intimacy, especially during evenings. A husband admitted, *“We go to bed together, but she spends an hour on Instagram before sleeping. By then, the mood is gone.”* Reduced eye contact and affection were common concerns.

**Parenting Disagreements.** Some participants described conflicts over children’s screen time, often blaming their spouse for being a poor role model. A mother shared, *“How can I stop my son from gaming all night if his father is always on the phone?”* These disagreements fueled marital strain.

**Financial Tensions.** A smaller group of participants highlighted financial disputes caused by spending on apps and data bills. As one wife put it, *“He bought an expensive game package without asking me. We already struggle with money.”*

### 3. Cognitive and Behavioral Patterns

**Habitual Checking.** Smartphones were described as deeply ingrained habits. Many respondents reported checking their phones at meals, before sleep, and immediately upon waking. A participant noted, *“The first thing I do in the morning is grab my phone, not greet my wife.”*

**Multitasking Strain.** Couples also observed reduced attention spans and frequent mistakes in daily tasks. One husband shared, *“She tries to cook and reply to messages at the same time, but then forgets to add salt or burns the food.”* Divided attention undermined household functioning.

**Compulsive Behaviors.** Interviewees described compulsions to respond instantly or refresh feeds. A wife explained, *“I can’t stop refreshing Facebook. Even when*

*we’re having dinner, my hand automatically goes to the phone.”* These behaviors reflected a loss of self-control.

**Time Mismanagement.** Smartphone use often displaced couple time and responsibilities. One participant remarked, *“We planned to watch a movie together, but he spent the whole evening scrolling, and then it was too late.”* Late-night use was especially common, leading to fatigue and irritability.

**Escapism through Smartphones.** Many respondents admitted to using phones as a way to avoid conflict. One husband confessed, *“When she gets angry, I just play games on my phone. It’s easier than facing the fight.”* Such avoidance patterns reinforced relational distance.

### 4. Coping Strategies and Adaptive Responses

**Negotiating Boundaries.** Several couples reported creating agreements to limit smartphone use, such as screen-free times or tech-free zones. A wife shared, *“We decided no phones at the dinner table. It helped us talk more.”*

**Rebuilding Communication.** Some participants actively worked on restoring meaningful dialogue. One husband said, *“Now when she talks, I put the phone down and look at her. It makes her smile, and I feel closer.”*

**Joint Digital Activities.** A number of couples found balance by engaging with technology together. A participant explained, *“We watch short videos together and laugh. It turns the phone from a wall into a bridge.”*

**Professional Help-Seeking.** A small subset reported seeking external help. A husband shared, *“We went to a counselor because our fights about the phone were too much. She guided us to set rules.”*

**Emotional Reconnection.** Several participants mentioned trying to rekindle closeness through offline activities. A wife noted, *“We started our old habit of evening walks without phones. It feels refreshing.”*

**Self-Regulation.** Some individuals practiced self-discipline by tracking screen time or disabling notifications. One participant explained, *“I set my phone to silent after 9 p.m. so I can focus on my husband.”*

### 4. Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of this study revealed that smartphone overuse exerts profound psychological and relational consequences within marital relationships. Four overarching themes emerged: emotional consequences, relational conflicts, cognitive-behavioral patterns, and adaptive coping strategies. Taken together, these results demonstrate that excessive smartphone engagement reshapes intimacy, alters

trust dynamics, and influences patterns of communication and conflict. These insights align with and extend previous research on jealousy, infidelity concerns, and the role of technology in romantic partnerships.

One of the most salient findings was the emergence of emotional detachment, loneliness, and insecurity among spouses when partners overused smartphones. Participants described feeling unseen or neglected even when their partner was physically present, highlighting the paradox of digital connectedness and relational disconnection. This aligns with theories conceptualizing jealousy as a relational barometer, signaling perceived threats to emotional exclusivity (Shchukina, 2024). The jealousy triggered in these contexts reflects not only fear of actual infidelity but also concerns about diminished emotional investment.

These results are consistent with evolutionary perspectives that posit jealousy as an adaptive mechanism to guard against partner defection. When attention and affection are redirected toward smartphones and digital interactions, spouses may interpret this as a rival-like threat, evoking jealousy and distress (Arnocky et al., 2024; Davis et al., 2018). The accounts of heightened insecurity, monitoring of phone activity, and suspicion of infidelity correspond with previous findings that jealousy is often elicited by ambiguous cues, such as online interactions or secretive digital behaviors (Toplu-Demirtaş et al., 2020).

Moreover, our participants' descriptions of mood dysregulation and irritability reflect research that links jealousy to heightened emotional volatility. Experimental work has demonstrated that imagined partner infidelity produces measurable increases in emotional arousal, further confirming that jealousy operates as a motivational system for protective action (Arnocky et al., 2015; Zheng et al., 2021). In our study, participants often responded to smartphone distractions with frustration or anger, underlining how digital preoccupations may serve as modern triggers of jealousy comparable to traditional infidelity cues.

Another key finding concerned the escalation of relational conflicts. Participants reported recurrent arguments about smartphone usage, secrecy around passwords, and reduced openness, all of which undermined trust. These relational tensions align with prior work showing that jealousy frequently arises in situations of uncertainty and limited transparency (Richter et al., 2022). Distracted communication and secrecy mirrored the very conditions that research has identified as fertile ground for suspicion and mistrust.

The decline in intimacy observed in this study parallels research documenting how technological engagement at bedtime interferes with sexual and emotional closeness (Naz & Usman, 2019). The diminished eye contact and affection described by participants resonate with studies demonstrating that even subtle cues, such as Facebook messages, can evoke jealousy depending on sender and context (Dunn & Billett, 2017). These micro-level interactions illustrate how technology magnifies relational vulnerabilities.

Importantly, our findings underscore the connection between jealousy and partner conflict. Prior studies have demonstrated that jealousy not only predicts negative emotional states but also motivates cost-inflicting behaviors such as arguments, monitoring, and accusations (Davis et al., 2018; Edlund et al., 2018). Participants' narratives of escalating disputes and silent treatment suggest that smartphone-related jealousy frequently transitions into overt conflict, reinforcing the cyclical relationship between emotional insecurity and marital discord.

Cross-cultural work also provides context for these findings. Studies indicate that jealousy is a near-universal response, though its triggers and expressions vary across societies (Scelza et al., 2019). In Taiwan, where family harmony and relational obligation are highly valued, smartphone overuse may be particularly destabilizing because it violates cultural expectations of attentiveness and respect in marriage. Thus, our findings extend existing cross-cultural scholarship by highlighting how technology reshapes jealousy triggers in Asian marital contexts.

The study also identified behavioral routines such as habitual checking, compulsive scrolling, and time mismanagement, all of which strained relationships. These compulsive behaviors map onto research that conceptualizes jealousy not only as an emotional reaction but also as a cognitive-behavioral pattern involving vigilance and monitoring (Barelds & Dijkstra, 2021). Participants described constant urges to refresh social media feeds or respond instantly to notifications, which echoes descriptions of obsessive vigilance characteristic of jealousy (Sheikhmoonesi et al., 2020).

Time displacement emerged as a critical mechanism through which smartphones eroded marital quality. Spouses noted neglect of shared plans and responsibilities, reminiscent of research showing that jealousy-related behaviors often involve resource diversion away from relationship maintenance (Walum et al., 2013). Such findings also align with evidence that jealousy can impair

attention and cognitive functioning, leading individuals to fixate on potential threats rather than relational engagement (Valentová et al., 2020).

Escapism through smartphones, reported by several participants, further supports the conceptualization of jealousy as intertwined with avoidance behaviors. Instead of confronting conflict directly, some individuals retreated into digital activities, a strategy that may temporarily reduce tension but ultimately intensifies marital disconnection. This finding resonates with clinical distinctions between adaptive jealousy and pathological patterns where avoidance and compulsions dominate relational dynamics (Sheikhmoonesi et al., 2020).

Despite the challenges, many participants reported adaptive strategies to mitigate the negative consequences of smartphone overuse. Couples negotiated boundaries such as screen-free times, rebuilt communication by practicing active listening, and engaged in joint digital activities. These findings support research suggesting that jealousy, while distressing, can sometimes motivate benefit-provisioning mate retention behaviors aimed at strengthening the bond (Davis et al., 2018).

For example, participants who set limits on device use reflected earlier work emphasizing the importance of trust and transparency in reducing jealousy (Kemer et al., 2015). Similarly, joint digital activities illustrate how technology can be reframed from a divisive force into a shared experience, echoing findings that not all digital interactions undermine intimacy (Hatfield et al., 2020). Moreover, cases where couples sought professional help resonate with evidence that jealousy, when chronic, often necessitates therapeutic intervention (Sheikhmoonesi et al., 2020).

These adaptive responses demonstrate that while smartphones introduce novel relational stressors, couples can employ intentional strategies to restore intimacy and trust. Such findings underscore the dual nature of jealousy as both a destructive and constructive force depending on how it is managed (Shcherbata & Borets, 2021).

Overall, the findings of this study align with and extend existing scholarship on jealousy and partner dynamics. The emotional consequences reported here parallel evolutionary models that frame jealousy as a protective mechanism against infidelity threats (Arnocky et al., 2024; Edlund et al., 2018). The relational conflicts observed mirror cultural and attachment-based research that highlights the role of insecurity and distrust (Richter et al., 2022; Toplu-Demirtaş et al., 2020). Cognitive-behavioral compulsions map onto clinical perspectives emphasizing obsessive features of

pathological jealousy (Sheikhmoonesi et al., 2020), while adaptive coping reflects the potential for jealousy to encourage constructive mate retention (Davis et al., 2018).

Furthermore, the transformation of jealousy in the digital age, as evident in our participants' narratives, supports broader claims that technology catalyzes new relational challenges and opportunities (Shchukina, 2024). The fact that participants experienced jealousy not only from potential rivals but also from digital distractions underscores the evolving triggers of insecurity and mistrust in contemporary marriages.

## 5. Suggestions and Limitations

This study is not without limitations. First, the sample size, though appropriate for qualitative inquiry, was limited to 24 participants from Taiwan, which constrains generalizability. Cultural norms surrounding marriage and technology use may shape experiences of jealousy differently in other societies. Second, the reliance on self-reported data introduces potential biases such as selective memory and social desirability. Participants may have underreported negative behaviors or overemphasized adaptive strategies to present themselves in a favorable light. Third, the qualitative design, while rich in detail, does not allow for quantification of the prevalence or strength of associations between smartphone use and relational outcomes. Finally, the cross-sectional nature of the study prevents causal conclusions, leaving open the possibility that pre-existing relational issues influenced both smartphone behaviors and jealousy dynamics.

Future research could build on these findings in several directions. Quantitative studies with larger, more diverse samples would help establish the prevalence of smartphone-related jealousy and test its association with relational satisfaction across cultures. Longitudinal designs are needed to examine whether smartphone overuse predicts relational decline over time or whether couples adapt to technological stressors. Cross-cultural comparisons could illuminate how different societal norms influence the triggers and expressions of jealousy. Furthermore, experimental work might explore the role of interventions such as digital detox programs or oxytocin administration in mitigating jealousy responses, building on promising neurobiological findings (Zheng et al., 2021). Lastly, research integrating legal and clinical perspectives could further clarify when jealousy transitions from a normative relational emotion to a



pathological or criminologically relevant phenomenon (Hakimov, 2023).

For practitioners, these findings highlight the importance of addressing smartphone use in marital counseling. Therapists should encourage couples to establish boundaries around device use, promote open discussions about trust and transparency, and help partners develop strategies for emotional reconnection. Relationship education programs could incorporate modules on digital literacy, teaching couples how to navigate the challenges of technology while preserving intimacy. Finally, public awareness campaigns may help normalize conversations about smartphone-related jealousy, reducing stigma and empowering couples to seek support before conflicts escalate.

### 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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### Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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### Ethical Considerations

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

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