

Associations of Perceived Couple-Communication Quality and Internet Use With Marital Satisfaction Among Married Adults

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Article Info

Article type:

Original Research

How to cite this article:

Rezaei Mollajegh, R., Farahi, F., Mousavi, S. T., & Mohammadi Sahebdivan, J. (2027). Associations of Perceived Couple-Communication Quality and Internet Use With Marital Satisfaction Among Married Adults. *AI and Tech in Behavioral and Social Sciences*, 5(1), 1-7.

<https://doi.org/10.61838/kman.aitech.5936>



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ABSTRACT

This cross-sectional predictive-correlational study examined the associations of perceived couple-communication quality and internet use with marital satisfaction among married adults in Ardabil, Iran. The target population comprised all married adults living in Ardabil during the Iranian calendar year 1404 (2025–2026), of whom 235 were recruited through convenience sampling. Participants completed the ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Questionnaire, the Couples' Communication Quality Questionnaire, and the Internet Use Questionnaire. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlations, and simultaneous multiple regression. Perceived couple-communication quality was positively associated with marital satisfaction, whereas the internet-use score was negatively associated with marital satisfaction. Together, the two predictors explained 45.2% of the variance in marital satisfaction. Communication quality ($\beta = .602$) was the strongest positive predictor, while the internet-use score had a smaller significant negative coefficient. These findings suggest that the quality of couple interactions is more consequential for marital satisfaction than the internet-use score. Communication-skills training and deliberate, mutually agreed management of technology during shared couple time may therefore be useful components of counseling and relationship-enrichment programs.

Keywords: marital satisfaction, couples' communication quality, internet use, social media, couples

1. Introduction

Marriage is a central context for emotional bonding, psychological support, and intimacy in adulthood, and the quality of the marital relationship is closely related to how couples adapt to the demands and pressures of shared life (Rashidi Vala et al., 2024). Marital satisfaction is among the most important indicators of relationship quality and reflects an individual's overall appraisal of the desirability, pleasure, and quality of the relationship with a

spouse (Tan et al., 2023). It is not merely the absence of conflict; rather, it is shaped by interacting communicative, emotional, and relational processes, including dialogue, reciprocal responsiveness, perceived support, trust, and problem solving (Lee & Ng, 2024). Identifying factors associated with marital satisfaction is therefore important both theoretically and for the development of premarital education, relationship-enrichment programs, and couple-therapy interventions.

Communication quality occupies a central place in explanations of marital satisfaction because many emotional needs, expectations, problems, and conflicts are expressed and managed through spouses' verbal and nonverbal interactions (Tan et al., 2023). It refers to the effectiveness with which partners communicate thoughts and feelings, listen to one another, recognize a partner's needs, express support, and resolve conflict constructively (Lee & Ng, 2024). Clear and constructive communication can foster feeling understood, emotional security, and satisfaction; conversely, avoidance, poor expression of needs, and conflictual interaction can increase emotional distance. Research with newlywed couples has linked communication processes to marital satisfaction (Tan et al., 2023), while actor-partner models indicate that communication about psychological stress may affect both partners' experiences of communication and relationship satisfaction (Lee & Ng, 2024). Iranian studies likewise suggest that better verbal communication, empathy, emotional security, and communication skills are associated with improved relationship functioning and conflict resolution (Esfahani et al., 2024; Rashidi Vala et al., 2024).

Contemporary marital relationships also develop within a social environment transformed by communication technologies (Denecker et al., 2024). Smartphones, social-networking platforms, messaging applications, and other digital tools are now embedded in everyday routines and have blurred the boundary between face-to-face and technology-mediated communication. Digital tools can help partners remain connected, exchange affectionate messages, coordinate daily tasks, and sustain contact while apart; however, when the amount or context of use conflicts with a partner's need for attention and emotional presence, the same tools may disrupt face-to-face interaction (Karaman & Arslan, 2024). Consequently, the relational significance of technology depends less on access alone than on the extent, context, and intrusiveness of its use (Denecker et al., 2024).

Two concepts have become particularly relevant: technofence and partner phubbing. Partner phubbing occurs when a person directs attention to a mobile phone in the presence of a romantic partner, leaving the partner feeling that they are competing with the device or digital activity for attention. From the perspective of expectancy violations theory, people in close relationships hold expectations regarding attention, responsiveness, and presence; phone use during moments when direct

engagement is expected can be experienced as a negative violation of those expectations (Roberts & David, 2024). Thus, the central issue is not simply the presence of a phone, but the meaning attributed to phone-use behavior within the couple's interaction.

Technology-related conflict is one mechanism through which phone use may affect relationship satisfaction. Dyadic evidence indicates that both women's and men's phubbing behaviors are associated with conflict over mobile phones, which in turn is linked to lower relationship satisfaction (Togar et al., 2023). A partner's digital behavior can therefore influence not only their own experience but also the other partner's satisfaction. Cultural conditions may further shape how technology use is interpreted and how strongly it affects close relationships.

More recent multimethod evidence adds important nuance. Using data from both members of couples, daily experience sampling, and objective smartphone-use records, Denecker et al. (2024) found that a partner's smartphone use negatively predicted husbands'—but not wives'—relationship quality; smartphone-related conflict did not mediate this association, and such conflict occurred infrequently (Denecker et al., 2024). Likewise, maladaptive social-media use and phubbing may mediate the association between satisfaction of basic psychological needs within romantic relationships and relationship satisfaction (Karaman & Arslan, 2024). Meta-analytic findings across 52 studies associate partner phubbing with lower relationship and marital satisfaction, less intimacy and responsiveness, and greater conflict and jealousy (Ni et al., 2025).

Communication quality and technology use should therefore not be treated as isolated domains. Technology can support connection, but when it diverts attention from a spouse during shared interaction, it can reduce the quality of that same communication and become a source of conflict (Denecker et al., 2024; Togar et al., 2023). Two couples may use technology for similar amounts of time yet experience different levels of marital satisfaction because they differ in communication quality, agreed boundaries for phone use, and responsiveness to one another's needs (Roberts & David, 2024).

Communication quality may also protect relationships in a technology-saturated environment. Couples who can discuss needs, expectations, privacy, and limits for technology use may be better able to prevent digital disagreements from becoming persistent conflicts. Communication satisfaction and the manner in which

partners discuss daily stressors are related to relationship satisfaction and operate reciprocally across both members of the dyad (Lee & Ng, 2024). This makes communication quality especially important in the Iranian cultural context, where improvements in empathy, verbal communication, and emotional security have been linked to stronger relationship outcomes (Esfahani et al., 2024; Rashidi Vala et al., 2024).

Taken together, the evidence suggests that marital satisfaction in the digital era is shaped by an interconnected network of communicative and behavioral processes. High-quality communication can promote emotional responsiveness, constructive conflict resolution, and mutual understanding, whereas intrusive technology use can reduce partner-directed attention and increase phone-related conflict. Accordingly, the present study examined the associations of perceived couple-communication quality and the internet-use score with marital satisfaction among married adults in Ardabil, Iran.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Design and Participants

The study used a cross-sectional, descriptive-correlational design, with simultaneous multiple regression as the primary analytical method. The target population comprised all married adults residing in Ardabil during the Iranian calendar year 1404 (2025–2026). Because no comprehensive sampling frame of married residents was available, participants were recruited through convenience sampling. An a priori power analysis for simultaneous multiple regression with two predictors, a medium effect size ($f^2 = .15$), $\alpha = .05$, and power = .95 indicated a minimum sample of approximately 107. To improve estimate stability and allow for incomplete responses, the target sample was set above 220; the final analytic sample comprised 235 participants.

Eligibility criteria were age 18 years or older, currently married, married for at least one year, residing in Ardabil, able to read and write Persian, using at least one communication technology such as a smartphone, messaging application, or social-networking platform, and providing informed consent. Exclusion criteria were more than 10% missing questionnaire responses, clearly invalid or invariant response patterns across most items, or withdrawal at any stage. The demographic form recorded age, gender, educational attainment, employment status,

duration of marriage, number of children, and perceived economic status.

After the necessary institutional permissions and research-ethics approval had been obtained, eligible individuals received an explanation of the study. Participation was voluntary, data were collected without names or identifying information, and participants could withdraw at any time. After providing informed consent, participants completed the questionnaires with reference to their actual marital relationship and usual patterns of internet use.

2.2. Measures

- **ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Questionnaire**

The 35-item Persian short form of the ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Questionnaire, derived from the original ENRICH inventory, was used (Fowers & Olson, 1989; Ghahremani et al., 2017). It contains four subscales: marital satisfaction (Items 1, 5, 9, 13, 17, 21, 24, 27, 30, and 35), communication (Items 2, 6, 10, 14, 18, 22, 25, 28, 31, and 34), conflict resolution (Items 3, 7, 11, 15, 19, 23, 26, 29, 32, and 33), and idealistic distortion (Items 4, 8, 12, 16, and 20). Responses are recorded on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree), with scoring adjusted as required by the instrument. Reported internal-consistency coefficients for the four subscales were .86, .80, .84, and .83, respectively. Cronbach's alpha for the measure in the present sample was .88.

- **Couples' Communication Quality Questionnaire**

This 33-item questionnaire, developed in Iran from the theoretical framework of Miller, Nunnally, and Wackman, assesses four dimensions of couple communication: attention to self, attention to spouse, planning for problem solving, and communication styles (Khoshkam et al., 2007). Prior work reported satisfactory validity and a Cronbach's alpha of .90. In the present sample, Cronbach's alpha was .91.

- **Internet Use Questionnaire**

The Internet Use Questionnaire assesses four domains of internet use: educational (5 items), research-related (5 items), communicative (8 items), and recreational (4 items). Items are rated on a four-point Likert scale, and domain scores can be calculated separately before deriving a total score. The instrument has previously been used in Iranian research on the quantity and type of internet use (Darvizeh et al., 2011). In the present study, Cronbach's alpha

coefficients were .66 for educational use, .56 for research use, .81 for communicative use, and .75 for recreational use; the alpha coefficient for the overall internet-use score was .86.

2.3. Statistical Analysis

Descriptive statistics and Cronbach's alpha were calculated for all primary variables. Pearson correlation coefficients were used to examine bivariate associations. Simultaneous multiple linear regression was then used to estimate the contributions of couples' communication quality and internet-use score to marital satisfaction. Assumptions were evaluated through skewness and kurtosis, the Durbin-Watson statistic, tolerance and

variance-inflation factors, standardized residual plots, and Cook's distance.

3. Findings and Results

Data from 235 married residents of Ardabil were analyzed. The sample included 125 women (53.2%) and 110 men (46.8%). Participants' mean age was 37.64 years ($SD = 7.82$; range = 22–58), and mean marriage duration was 12.37 years ($SD = 7.21$). Regarding education, 41 participants (17.4%) had a high-school diploma or less, 68 (28.9%) held an associate degree, 89 (37.9%) held a bachelor's degree, and 37 (15.7%) held a master's degree or higher. Descriptive statistics and internal-consistency estimates are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics and Reliability of the Study Variables

Variable	M	SD	Min	Max	Skewness	Kurtosis	α
Marital satisfaction	52.18	9.41	28	73	−0.26	−0.31	.88
Couples' communication quality	113.67	17.82	64	153	−0.18	−0.44	.91
Internet-use score	4.12	1.09	1.70	6.80	.37	−0.21	.86

All skewness and kurtosis values were within acceptable ranges, and no marked departure from normality was observed. Cronbach's alpha exceeded .80 for the three total scores used in the primary analyses; however, the educational-use ($\alpha = .66$) and research-use ($\alpha = .56$) subscales showed weak internal consistency and should be interpreted cautiously. Before regression analysis, the Durbin-Watson statistic was 1.89. Tolerance was .93 and

the variance-inflation factor was 1.08 for both predictors, providing no evidence of problematic multicollinearity. Standardized residual plots supported approximate linearity and homoscedasticity, and all Cook's distance values were below 1.

Pearson correlations among marital satisfaction, communication quality, and internet-use score are shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Correlation Matrix of the Study Variables

Variable	1	2	3
1. Marital satisfaction	1		
2. Couples' communication quality	.65***	1	
3. Internet-use score	−.34***	−.27***	1

Communication quality was positively correlated with marital satisfaction: participants reporting better couple communication tended to report greater marital satisfaction. The internet-use score was negatively correlated with marital satisfaction, indicating lower average satisfaction among individuals with higher internet-use scores.

Communication quality was also negatively correlated with the internet-use score.

A simultaneous multiple regression was conducted to determine the contributions of communication quality and internet-use score to marital satisfaction. The overall model is summarized in Table 3.

Table 3

Regression Model Predicting Marital Satisfaction

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	SE of estimate	F	df	p
Regression model	.672	.452	.447	7.00	95.53	2, 232	< .001

The regression model was statistically significant. The two predictors jointly explained 45.2% of the variance in

marital satisfaction (adjusted $R^2 = .447$). The individual regression coefficients are presented in Table 4.

Table 4

Regression Coefficients Predicting Marital Satisfaction

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p	Tolerance	VIF
Constant	22.34	3.42	—	6.53	< .001	—	—
Couples' communication quality	.318	.027	.602	11.92	< .001	.93	1.08
Internet-use score	-1.53	.437	-.177	-3.50	< .001	.93	1.08

Communication quality had the larger standardized regression coefficient ($\beta = .602$, $p < .001$). Holding internet-use score constant, a one-standard-deviation increase in communication quality was associated with a .602-standard-deviation increase in marital satisfaction. Internet-use score also had a negative, statistically significant regression coefficient ($\beta = -.177$, $p < .001$). The unstandardized regression equation was:

$$\text{Predicted marital satisfaction} = 22.34 + 0.318(\text{communication quality}) - 1.53(\text{internet-use score})$$

Overall, both predictors had significant regression coefficients, but perceived couple-communication quality had a substantially larger standardized coefficient than the internet-use score.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

This study examined marital satisfaction in relation to perceived couple-communication quality and the internet-use score among married adults in Ardabil. Communication quality showed a positive association with marital satisfaction and had the larger standardized coefficient in the regression model. The internet-use score was negatively associated with marital satisfaction and remained significant after communication quality was controlled. These findings indicate that marital satisfaction was associated with both the quality of spousal interaction and the reported pattern of internet use.

The positive association between communication quality and marital satisfaction is consistent with Iranian and international evidence. A systematic review of Iranian studies concluded that communication-skills training is associated with greater marital satisfaction, intimacy, mental health, and quality of life and with fewer marital conflicts (Azarnik et al., 2024). Research with Iranian couples of reproductive age has likewise emphasized

communication skills, mutual understanding, and marital satisfaction as central components of couple functioning (Shahmirzad et al., 2025). Among newlyweds, communication processes have also been linked to marital satisfaction, with poorer patterns partly explaining lower satisfaction (Tan et al., 2023).

Marital life is inherently interactive: many needs, expectations, disappointments, and conflicts arise in daily communication. When partners can express needs and feelings clearly, listen attentively, respond empathically, and manage disagreement without contempt, withdrawal, or escalation, they are more likely to experience security, acceptance, understanding, and intimacy. These experiences support a more favorable appraisal of the relationship. Poor communication, by contrast, can produce misinterpretation, unresolved conflict, reduced perceived support, and emotional distance.

The negative association between internet use and marital satisfaction accords with recent Iranian findings. Riahifar et al. (2024a) reported a negative relationship between social-media use and marital satisfaction (Riahifar et al., 2024a), while a second study showed that interpersonal mindfulness moderated this relationship (Riahifar et al., 2024b). This suggests that attention, presence, and interpersonal responsiveness may alter the strength of technology's association with marital quality.

The result is also consistent with evidence that maladaptive social-media use and phubbing are related to poorer relationship quality (Karaman & Arslan, 2024). Roberts and David (2024) found that partner phubbing was associated with lower satisfaction when phone use violated expectations concerning a partner's attention and presence (Roberts & David, 2024). Meta-analytic evidence further indicates that partner phubbing is linked to lower relationship and marital satisfaction, reduced intimacy and

responsiveness, and greater conflict and jealousy (Ni et al., 2025). These associations have been observed across different samples and societies, although cultural and relationship characteristics may influence their magnitude.

Attention displacement offers one explanation. Physical co-presence does not guarantee psychological presence: a spouse may be nearby while directing substantial cognitive and emotional attention to a phone, messaging application, or social-networking platform. Such behavior can reduce opportunities for face-to-face conversation, eye contact, emotional responsiveness, and shared activity. A partner may interpret it as reduced interest or personal importance, thereby diminishing intimacy and satisfaction. A second explanation involves disagreement about duration of use, responses to messages, privacy, social-media participation, or phone use during shared time. Denecker et al. (2024) found a negative partner-smartphone-use association with relationship quality for husbands only; smartphone-related conflict did not mediate that association, underscoring that the effects of co-present phone use are not uniform (Denecker et al., 2024).

A notable finding was that perceived couple-communication quality had a substantially larger standardized regression coefficient than the internet-use score. Internet use is therefore best understood within the broader relational context rather than as an independent determinant. Couples with stronger dialogue, empathy, and conflict-resolution skills may be more able to agree on phone-use times, privacy, online behavior, and protected relationship time, thereby limiting technology-related disruption. In relationships already characterized by misunderstanding and unresolved conflict, technology may instead amplify existing problems.

Several limitations should be considered. The cross-sectional correlational design precludes causal conclusions. Convenience sampling limits generalizability, and self-report measures may be affected by shared-method and response biases. The broad measure of internet use also could not distinguish supportive uses from intrusive uses. Future research should employ longitudinal and dyadic designs, objective smartphone-use indicators, and specific constructs such as partner phubbing and technoference. Sampling both members of each couple would permit actor-partner analyses and a clearer test of reciprocal effects.

In conclusion, marital satisfaction was more strongly associated with perceived couple-communication quality than with the internet-use score. Strengthening

communication skills while promoting mindful, mutually agreed technology practices may therefore offer a more effective approach to improving marital relationships than focusing exclusively on reducing screen time.

Authors' Contributions

All authors contributed to the conception and design of the study, data collection and analysis, interpretation of the findings, drafting of the manuscript, and critical revision of its intellectual content. All authors approved the final version of the manuscript and agree to be accountable for the work.

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.

Acknowledgments

We would like to express our gratitude to all individuals helped us to do the project.

Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

Funding

According to the authors, this article has no financial support.

Ethics Considerations

The study was conducted in accordance with applicable ethical principles. The necessary institutional permissions and research-ethics approval were obtained before data collection. Participation was voluntary, no names or identifying information were collected, and participants could withdraw at any time. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before questionnaire completion.

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