Social Media Practices among Married Couples in a Ghanaian Residential Area

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Abstract

Social media engagement is key to sustaining marriage relationships. It is a tool and an emerging backbone that couples employ in communication. Its role in marriages in Ghana is yet to be known. Thus, this study used a descriptive survey design, a non-probability convenience sampling technique, and a structured questionnaire to collect data from 30 couples (60 subjects) in a selected residential area in Ghana to identify the significance of social media use among married couples. The study also employed percentages and frequency tables to analyze the data. Findings ascertained that though social media foster adverse behaviours such as jealousy among couples, it assists them in expressing love, romance, and assiduously caring for each other. The study, therefore, concluded that social media is a beneficial relationship communicative tool when employed positively and meticulously. The study made augmented suggestions that will assist couples in modifying and enhancing their social media use to benefit their relationships.

1. Introduction

Marriage couples' needs are complex and dynamic. They include sexual and cognitive needs, safety and love, respect and self-actualization (Hashemi et al., 2017). Communication is a subtle tool that provides a conducive environment to respond to these needs. Social media is a common platform that aids couples in expressing, sharing and responding to their needs (Alanazi, 2021; Baruah, 2012; Whiteside et al., 2018; Ziha et al., 2021).

Social media applications are compatible with mobile devices such as smartphones, tablets and laptops. The devices must also have an internet connection to enable the applications to be active and functioning. Among mobile devices, the most accessible, portable, affordable and compatible with social media applications is the smartphone (Asma & Waqar, 2020). Smartphones have become an indispensable part of our lives, especially in recent years. A smartphone is a conveniently moveable device that allows users to talk, text, and use social media and gaming applications (Wajcman et al., 2008). A smartphone is also a navigation and entertainment tool (Rice & Katz, 2003). Smartphones with internet connectivity aid social media applications such as WhatsApp, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, and Telegram to enable successful usage. Social media also include networking sites and blogs (Lallana, 2015; Siddiqui & Singh, 2016).

Social media is an evolution of social networking.(Edosomwan et al., 2011; Lallana, 2015; Meikle, 2016). Social media comprise web-based and user-friendly applications or computer tools that people use to create content, network socially, share tastes and relevance, and connect to people.(Bowie, 2012; Mirchevska et al., 2012; Njoroge, 2013; Siddiqui & Singh, 2016). Social media aid in social networking and offers means to share information, interests, text, audio and video. It also allows sharing news and updating one's status daily updates (Hashemi et al., 2017; Venkatraman, 2017). Social media has transformed the lives of people globally. It is relatively inexpensive and widely accessible to all. Social media creates a platform for people to discuss their issues and opinions. Social media assist people in shopping, getting an informal and formal education, and assessing and using business tools (Mirchevska et al., 2012; Whiteside et al., 2018; Ziha et al., 2021).

Reiterating that, social media may be considered as a relatively inexpensive communicative tool; couples use it to express the status of their marriages, as expected by their partners. That includes love, trust, commitment and honesty. The rest are passion and satisfaction in their relationships. The most common and general way of doing so is by displaying photos of happy and exclusive moments of themselves and their partners on social media. Besides, married couples use social media to communicate with family and friends, keep up to date with

celebrity and social media influencers' news, and share photos and videos.

Social media provides a quick and accessible way to deal with marital concerns at any time, such as discussing responsibilities throughout the day. Social media allow assessing social support when people are stressed, especially when offline relationships with their partners are bizarre. In other instances, distressed couples seek encouragement from friends and family on social media (Whiteside et al., 2018). Social media breaks a barrier of physical distance that is very significant in marriage. Couples far away from each other can use social media to share their romantic relationship and feel closer to each other.

Due to irresolute handling, Social media gravely harm marital stability and family cohesion (Gull et al., 2019; Hashemi et al., 2017). Couples perceive that when their partners excessively use social media, it induces strained relationships due to jealousy. The reason is that their spouses' may neglect their home responsibilities and give attention to other social media users. That may weaken interpersonal communication among the couples and create feelings of mistrust (Alanazi, 2021). Invariably, social media unduly influence husbands and wives to publicize intimate relationships and post ambiguous information online that could damage romantic relationships.

Social media engagements among married couples may also result in social media addiction (I. Abbasi & Drouin, 2019; Jomy, 2019). Social media addiction is frequent attention to social media activities which interfere with an individual's effective functioning in vital areas of life. Social media addiction characterizes an individual's inability to have a stable social circle that may lead to loneliness and depression (Demircioğlu & Göncü Köse, 2021). People who engage in social media addiction do not often have effective offline interactions with their family and friends (I. S. Abbasi, 2019). Virk (2017) identified that couples who spend excessive time on social media are prone to impulse buying, lifestyle disorders and fear psychosis phobias. They also watch pornography and violent movies and are more domestically violent.

Partners sometimes may not disclose their marital status on social media. That often leads to arguments and problems among married couples. Social media has a propensity to affect couples' intimacy, perceived social support, and constructs of sexual function. It can cause sexual stress that may lead to sexual malfunctioning (Alimoradi et al., 2019). Social media engagements make spouses deceive themselves. That leads to divorces (Aydın et al., 2018; Saleh & Mukhtar, 2015). Invariably, divorce is an emerging common cause of suicide among young couples (Virk, 2017).

Couples engaging in social media may entice themselves to practice social media cheating or infidelity (Cravens & Whiting, 2014; Saleh & Mukhtar, 2015). Social media cheating occurs when a partner has romantic and sexual affairs with another person (s) other than their spouse on social media. However, McDaniel et al. (2017) asserted that couples who engage in infidelity-related behaviours on social media do so due to relationship dissatisfaction, ambivalence, attachment avoidance and anxiety.

2 Rationale

In Ghana, many married couples use mobile phone and numerous social media applications to create and share information among themselves via virtual networks. However, studies have not yet ascertained the potency of such practices that promote good communication, mutual harmony, and quality relationships. What is factual is that marital discord is in the ascendency, and divorce cases are continually surging. The study, therefore, sought to understand the role that social media communication plays in the success of marriages in a residential area in the Ashanti Region of Ghana. Nonetheless, the following questions guided the study: (a) How much time do couples spend communicating with their mobile phones? (b) What positive and negative impacts do social media have on married couples? (c) How can married individuals keep their marital unions stable amid social media use?

3 Methods

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a descriptive survey design. A descriptive survey is a process to identify and infer, as it exists at present, with great accuracy, from a sample, what a larger group of people think, feel, and do (Coolican, 2014; Feldman, 2009; Kothari, 2004; Williams, 2007). The study considered the design accurate for the study because it would describe the current practices among married couples in the selected site at a specific point in

time.

3.2 Population

The population for the study comprises all married couples in a residential area in Santasi in the Ashanti Region of Ghana. The population was suitable for the study because the residential area is predominantly middle and upper-income bracket earners who are more likely to afford and maintain technological gadgets such as android phones that support social media communication and internet connectivity. Invariably, data is not readily available to ascertain the total number of married couples, especially those with android phones in the residential area.

3.3 Sample and Sampling Technique

Though the study employed a statistical approach in analyzing the data, the study used a non-probability convenience sampling technique to select 30 married couples. This was because of the small nature of married couples' population in the residential community. As a result, 60 subjects participated in the study. The convenience sampling technique examines a real-life phenomenon in small samples without statistical inferences about the wider population (Etikan et al., 2016; Kothari, 2004; Hameed Taherdoost, 2016). It was a suitable technique for this study as it only samples those who are available and willing to participate. It is also inexpensive as compared to other sampling techniques options.

3.4 Instrumentation

The study employed a structured questionnaire. We carefully developed the questionnaire mainly from relevant documentary materials. In doing so, we ensured that we covered the research objectives. The questionnaire was in two parts. The initial part collected demographics. The later part, comprised mainly of close-ended items with a 4-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 4 = *strongly agree*) and a few open-ended questions, collected information that answered the research questions (Albaum, 1997; Joshi et al., 2015; Rattray & Jones, 2007). The open-ended items enabled respondents to elaborate, give in-depth answers and express themselves better.

To enhance the face and content validity of the questionnaire, two experts from the Department of Counselling Psychology, University of Education, Winneba, evaluated it for the precision of language, inclusion, and clarity of construction (Cohen et al., 2018; Hamed Taherdoost, 2016). Another expert from the University of Cape Coast did the same. We synthesized and synchronized their suggestions and incorporated them into the questionnaire.

We piloted the questionnaire on a randomly selected ten couples (20 subjects) in two residential areas in Kumasi with characteristics similar to that of the study's site. The purpose of the piloting was to resolve confusing points that may exist in the questionnaire. The reliability score, a Cronbach's alpha of 0.88, exceeded a recommended threshold of 0.70 (Alasuutari et al., 2008; Streiner, 2003).

3.5 Data Collection and Analysis

One of us (researchers), residing in the study's site, spent two weekends (six days) collecting the data in the participants' homes. They used Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays, and the hours of 3 pm to 7 pm. At that time, residents were less busy and relaxed in their homes. It was easy to collect the data because our colleague was a community member. In each house where they found a couple, they greeted them, made rapport with them, and echoed the purpose of the study and the need for data collection. When a couple accepted to participate in the study, our colleague gave them an envelope that contained a statement of confidentiality and anonymity note signed by all the researchers, a questionnaire, and a pen to fill. They retrieved all questionnaires after a week. We provided an email address and a WhatsApp number in case a respondent may rescind their decision to be included in the study.

We analyzed data with descriptive statistics, specifically the percentages. We arranged the data in frequency tables and made a simple comparison among married couples. The research question used percentage and bar charts provided in frequency tables. Research question two used simple percentages in the table adopted for the analysis. Research question three used a frequency table.

4.0 Results

The following results present a data analysis based on the purpose of the study. The results are the respondents' demographic analysis and the research objectives.

4.1 Demographics

The items in the initial section of the questionnaire solicited responses to age group, level of education, and the number of years in marriage. Response to age group ascertained that a higher percentage of respondents were relatively young married couples. The results are in Table 1. The results in Table 1 revealed that the majority (42%) of the respondents were below 30 years. Also, 24 (41%) respondents were between 30-39 years. The results further show that 6 (10%) of the respondents were 40-49 years, and 3 (5%) were 50 years old or above.

Table 1

Demographics

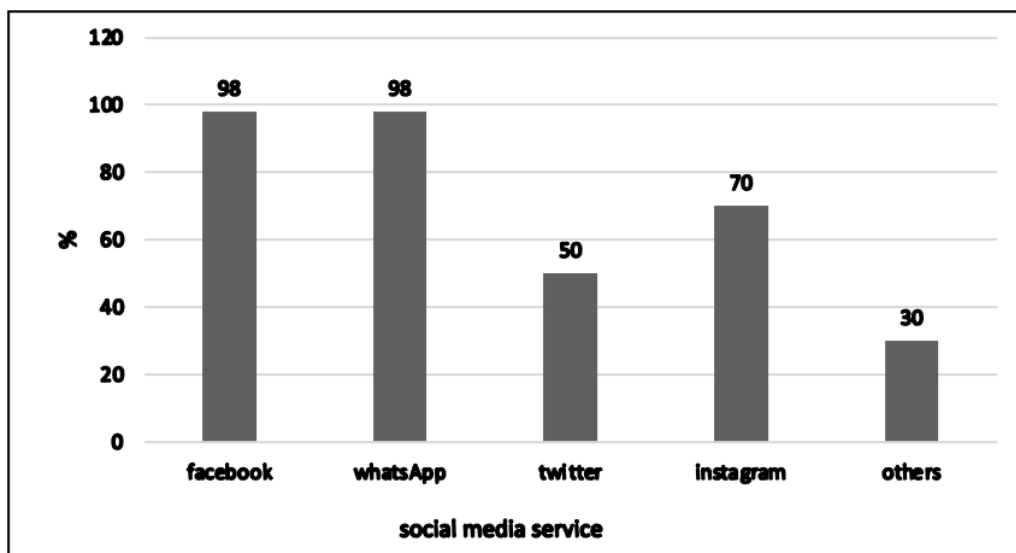| Age of respondents		
Age	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Below 30 years	27	45
30-39 years	24	40
40-49 years	6	10
Above 50 years	3	5
Total	60	100

Also, responses to the item that solicited a level of education ascertained that a higher percentage of the respondents attained post-basic education. 53% of the respondents were secondary school graduates. 37% of them were university graduates, and 10% (6) of the respondents attained a primary level of education. Responses to the number of years that respondents had been married revealed that a higher percentage of them had spent less than five years. 56% of them had spent less than five years in marriage. 32% of the respondents had been married for between five to ten years, and 12% of the respondents were married for more than ten years.

4.2 Research Question One: Time spent communicating on social media

The purpose for research question one sought information about the type of social media that respondents used, the frequency and duration of usage and use patterns (such as time of day and place when social media is mostly used). The research sub-item of question one that sought the type of social media that respondents used indicated that majority of the respondents operate a WhatsApp and Facebook account. The results are presented in Figure 1. Figure 1 showed that 58 (98%) of the respondents had Facebook and WhatsApp Account, followed by Twitter which had 30 (50%) respondents, Instagram 42 (70%) and others 18 (30%).

Figure 1

Distribution of Type of Social Media that Respondents Use

A sub-item of research question one sought the type of networking site respondents used most often. As presented in Table 2 below, the responses show that Facebook and WhatsApp are the most often visited or used social network services at 54 (90%), followed by Instagram 18 (30%), Twitter 5 (8%), and others 10 (6%).

Table 2

Distribution of respondents by social media most frequently used

Most frequently used social media type		
Social Network Service	Frequency	Percentage
Facebook	54	90
WhatsApp	54	90
Twitter	5	8
Instagram	18	30
Others	10	16

Another sub-item of research question one sought to establish the duration of time respondent spent on Social Network Services (SNS) per visit. The study compared male versus female use patterns. The results are presented in Figure 2. The results in Figure 2 show that female respondents spent much more time per visit compared to their male counterparts. 64% of female respondents spent more than 30 minutes on SNS per visit, compared to 34% of male respondents.

Figure 2

Distribution of Respondents by Social Network Services (SNS) most often used
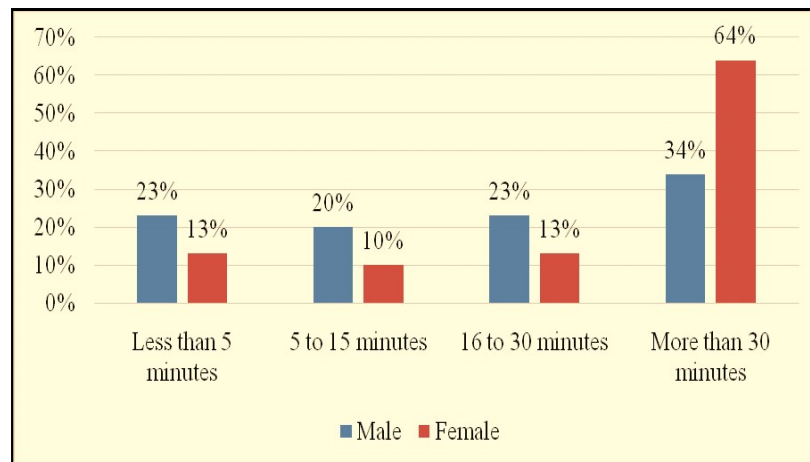
Based on research question one, respondents were also asked to indicate what they mostly use SNS for. The results show that majority of the respondents visited SNS to catch up with family. The results are presented in Figure 3. Figure 3 indicates that 48% (29) of the respondents visited SNS to catch up with family, followed by 33% (20) of the respondents who visited SNS to connect with old friends, and lastly, 19% (11) of the respondents did so to make new friends.

Figure 3

Reason for visiting social media
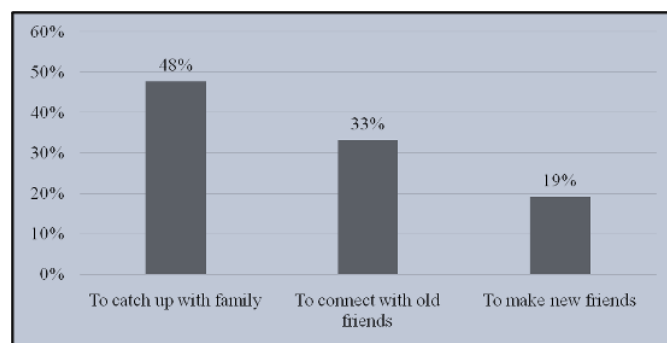
4.3 Research Question two: Positive and negative impact(s) of social media on married couples

The second objective of the study was to examine the positive and negative impact of social media among couples. The results show that, generally, social media has both positive and negative impacts on married couples. The results are presented in Table 3. The findings in Table 3 show that 30 (50%) of respondents agree that the use of social media facilitates communication and support among spouses/couples in daily life. Meanwhile, 21 (35%) of respondents strongly agree that the use of social media facilitates communication and support among spouses/couples in daily life, and only two percent of respondents disagree with the statement. Averagely, 36 (60%) of the respondents agrees to the fact that use of social media can be useful in expressing romantic relationships among couples.

Most of the respondents agree that social media have a negative impact to people in relationships. Regarding the issue of social media being a causative agent for addictive behaviours like surveillance which creates jealousy,

30 (50%) of respondents agree that it is a challenge. 24 (40%) of respondents agree that the use of social media among spouses/partners affects personal relationship with family members. The results show that the use of social media has sometimes led to misunderstandings between spouse /partners and destructed relationships among some couples/partners. For instance, 50% of respondents agree that social media has been a source of destruction among some couples.

Table 3

Impacts of social media on Married Couples

Impacts of social media on married couples						
Statements	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Not sure	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Positive statement						
Social media facilitates communication and support	-	5%	10%	50%	35%	100%
Social media affects personal relationship with family members	4%	13%	19%	42%	23%	100%
Social media helps in monitoring a spouse/partner	17%	29%	27%	19%	8%	100%
Social media can be useful in expressing romantic relationships	5%	8%	27%	34%	26%	100%
Negative statements						
Social media causes addictive behaviors like surveillance which creates jealousy.	-	5%	10%	50%	35%	100%
Social media affects personal relationship with family members.	2%	18%	20%	40%	20%	100%
Social media has sometimes led to misunderstanding between spouses /partners.	7%	10%	5%	45%	33%	100%
Social media has destructed relationship among some couples/partners	1%	6%	7%	50%	36%	100%

4.4 Research Question Three: keeping marital unions stable in the Midst of social media

Research question three sought to reflect on strategies adopted by respondents to keep their marriages stable. The results show that married couples deployed a number of strategies for keeping their marriage stable. The results are presented in Table 4. The results in Table 4 reveal that, majority of the respondents 57 (95%) strongly agree to the statement that feelings of love and care were the top strategy, followed by respect which had 51 (85%) of the respondents agreeing to that statement. Again, discussing things together attained 33 (55%) from the respondents and knowledge of partner's current worries scored similar scores of 33 (55%) from the total respondents.

Table 4

Strategies Adopted by Respondents to Keep Their Marriages Stable

Strategies adopted to keep marriages stable

Statements	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Not sure	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
I can tell you some of my spouse's life dreams	20%	15%	-	30%	35%	100%
I know my partner's current worries	25%	25%	10%	20%	20%	100%
My partner really respects me	5%	5%	5%	40%	45%	100%
I feel loved and cared for	-	-	5%	-	95%	100%
We really enjoy discussing things together	15%	15%	20%	25%	30%	100%
I know my partner's current worries	15%	15%	20%	25%	30%	100%

5.0 Discussion and Conclusion

The study established that relatively young adult married couples were the major social media users. This finding assents an assertion of (Amos et al., 2022) that globally, young people are the majority consumers of Internet content. The study also confirms Perrin's (2015) identification that 90% of young adults aged 30 years and below are most likely to use social media. Perrin (2015) studied social networking usage between 2005 and 2015. In contrast, (Alzouma, 2008) asserted that most young adults below 35 years in Africa did not have income due to high unemployment rates and could not afford to buy mobile phones and use social media.

This dissimilarity in Alzouma's (2008) assertion, Perrin (2015) and the current findings can be peculiar to the fact that the internet and social media provided adequate opportunities to earn income and soothe psychosocial tendencies in recent years compared to previous years Salem & Mourtada (2012) and Mowbray & Hall (2021) acknowledged that young adults used social media to either find jobs or promote their talents for income. Quiroz & Mickelson (2021) affirmed that in 2019, 79% of Americans above 12 years had social media profiles. These Americans perceived social media to be associated with lower stress levels, less physical illness, and greater well-being.

The study also ascertained that more of the respondents attained post-secondary education. It suggests that married couples that use social media relatively had higher levels of education. The findings concur with Perrin (2015) that in 2013, more than half of people with a high school diploma used social media. It could also link to the assertion that although everyone has the potential to use social media, a higher level of education and income are an enabler of potential usage of social media (Hsu et al., 2015). It is understandable since high education provides a means of acquiring digital and technological skills impetus in handling social media applications. Also, higher education is associated with higher incomes that enable a social media user to afford gadgets, applications and data charges.

Furthermore, the study ascertained that more respondents had been married for less than five years. It implies that respondents were in marriages that were still young. However, the study could not identify any linkage between the number of years in marriage and social media use. Nonetheless, it is predictable that the couples that have been in marriage for less than five years could be relatively younger. Thus, their desire for social media usage.

The findings also suggest that Facebook and WhatsApp are the frequently used social media applications. The revelation on Facebook agrees with I. Abbasi & Drouin (2019) that Facebook is one of the most popular social network services globally. The authors identified that Facebook had grown exponentially from 5.5 million active users in 2005 to 2.38 billion monthly active users as of the first quarter of 2019. Many people use Facebook to improve their mood and cope with bad feelings. The mood improvement and managing bad feelings lead them to

more frequent Facebook use (I. Abbasi & Drouin, 2019).

Also, during a study on the effects of social media on the interpersonal relationship among married couples in a selected neighbourhood of Dhaka City in Bangladesh, Ziha et al. (2021) found that 86% of the married couples that participated in the study used Facebook frequently. On the contrary, Alanazi (2021) discovered that the most popular social media applications used by married couples in Saudi Arabia were WhatsApp, followed by Twitter, then Instagram, and Snapchat.

On the findings of this study on WhatsApp, Ziha et al. (2021) concur that 52% of the married couples that participated in their study used WhatsApp. In their findings, Ziha et al. (2021) identified WhatsApp as the second most used type of social media behind Facebook. Okwudiri et al. (2021) also found that married couples used WhatsApp lesser than Facebook. The researchers indicated that 25% of respondents mostly use WhatsApp. Nonetheless, 53% of them made use of Facebook. They also revealed that every social media user has a personal objective for using their desired social media application.

Thus, it is clear that future research must focus on reasons that promote the use of a particular social media app than the other. For example, a fascinating factor to be considered in determining the usage of a social media application is its availability in the countries. Interestingly, a country like china has blocked social media use among its citizens since 2009. In 2021, Nigeria banned the use of Twitter for seven months. In 2020, India banned TikTok with 58 other mobile applications. Iran banned Facebook and Twitter in 2009. North Korea blocked Twitter in 2016 (Barry, 2022)

The study results showed that relatively female respondents spent much more time per visit than their male counterparts. The finding agrees with a study by Alanazi (2021) that suggested that women, relative to men, spent more time on social media and reported higher social media usage than men. The suggestion concurs that men are relatively busy or engage in numerous activities that keep them. They spend more time at work. They hang out with colleagues, go clubbing and spend part of their time either spectating or engaging in sporting activities, which is not synonymous with women who spend a lot of their time taking care of the home and family after work.

The results show that more respondents visited social network sites to catch up with family. Some also connect with old friends while others make new friends. Ziha et al. (2021) indicated that married couples in Bangladesh used social media solely to chat and stay updated about incidents in their social circle. They also upload photos and check the status of people in their contacts. However, some Bangladesh married couples use social media for business purposes. Some also used it for job and educational purposes. Whiles others shop on it and seek medical and food services.

Another finding indicated that respondents agreed that social media impacts married couples positively and negatively. A positive impact of social media is that married couples use it to express romantic relationships among themselves. Generally, one can find that this is true because nowadays, social media has become part and parcel of daily life. (Hashemi et al., 2017) indicated that social media has a role in increasing empathy between couples. In line with the findings, (Alanazi, 2021) also identifies that social media positively assist married couples in sharing interests, hopes, and achievements, making online friends, sharing expertise, and learning new things. Relatively, married couples that use social media are satisfied with their marriages (McDaniel et al., 2017; McDonald, 2016).

Conversely, Virk (2017) identified that social media creates anxiety, stress and depression when couples receive and share only a few posts. According to Virk (2017), that could cause mental and physical unrest among partners. The researcher also identified if young couples use social media more instead of physical engagements among themselves, they develop fear psychosis phobias, hysteria, Suicidal emotions and violent behaviour that could lead to divorce. It is in line with Zhang et al. (2018) that between 2001 and 2016, there was a statistically positive correlation between mobile phone penetration and divorce rate in China. Also, some couples engage in impulse buying on social media. That could lead to or trigger domestic violence and divorce.

Saleh & Mukhtar (2015) concur with Virk (2017) that couples believe that social media can lead to infidelity. They also agreed that it leads to divorce. Since social media behaviour may create a false image of a person and provides an opportunity to watch and share pornography and violent movies and pictures, couples tend not to trust their partners. Virk (2017) undoubtedly indicated that because married couples engage with social media for long periods and sometimes till late at night, without giving much time for a physical workout, they are prone to

developing lifestyle disorders.

Aljasir (2022) also agreed with the findings by discovering problematic usage of social media leads to excessive phubbing. Phubbing is checking a cell phone during a conversation or spending time with a significant other. However, Aljasir (2022) found that though problematic usage of social media leads to excessive phubbing, the sampled couples were satisfied in their relationship in line with the phubbing behaviour. In line with the current findings, Tandon et al. (2021) also asserted that social media induce jealousy among married couples. Alimoradi et al. (2019) also discovered among Iranian married women that social media addiction had direct and indirect effects on sexual function and sexual distress.

Finally, the findings suggest that respondents deployed several strategies for keeping their marriage stable in keeping with the sound relationship house elements. The study findings match that of Bachand & Caron (2001) that friendship, love, and sharing of similar backgrounds or interests are strategies for stability and longevity of marriage. Also, Parker (2002) found that couples keep their marriages stable when they are best friends, show unconditional love to themselves, are committed and agree on aims and goals. Finally, Marks et al. (2008) found that overcoming external challenges to marriage and resolving marital conflict are ingredients in sustaining a stable marriage.

6.0 Implication to Counselling, Marriage Development and Use of Social Media

Social media has become a powerful tool in communication. Its impact on relationship communication is overwhelming. Imperatively, people in a relationship who find it difficult to express themselves face-to-face see social media as a helping tool to express themselves. Therefore, it will be prudent if people in a relationship, engaged or married, will use social media positively so that their use could not affect their partners. When used positively, social media will help to reduce unnecessary conflicts in marriage couples' relationships.

This study, therefore, recommends that married couples be careful because social media is reliable in terms of confidentiality and privacy. People in a relationship and engaged or married should be aware of self-disclosure of personal information on their social media accounts to keep their relationships safe and stable. Social media predicts positive and negative relationships between people in a relationship or engaged and marriage well-being. Therefore, the study recommends that individuals in any relationship are primarily responsible causative agents of healthy marriages and not otherwise.

Since couples deploy several strategies to keep their marriages stable, they must employ social media to learn and share best practices in marriage. They could create social media group platforms for learning and sharing the best practices. Couples could also engage the services of a marriage counsellors through social media. Moreover, they could seek sexual counselling from qualified experts on social media (Online Counsellors). Lastly, they could hold marriage conferences, workshops, and seminars on social media with the support from qualified Counsellors.

7.0 Limitation

This study was in a residential community in Ghana. Expectations were that the findings would motivate other researchers to replicate this study in related communities. Moreover, it would be expedient if future researchers could undertake a longitudinal study on the same topic to ascertain if there will be a significant change in the current findings. Though the study area was relatively not large, homes were scattered because the community was still a relatively new site. That created a challenge in moving from home to home to collect data. Future researchers should therefore use social media to collect data since couples are social media users. Finally, since the sample was drawn from a small population of married couples and may not represent the whole population, it is prudent not to generalize the findings of this study.

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