

## The Role of Social Media in the Emergence of Marital Alienation

دور وسائل لتواصل الاجتماعي في ظهور الاغتراب الزوجي

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### Abstract:

Social media platforms are now an integral part of our daily lives, and our attachment to them has become conditional on the services they provide. However, their excessive use has led to the emergence of negative phenomena in society, especially among spouses. Therefore, this study sought to examine the impact of social media use on marital relationships, with a particular focus on the phenomenon of marital alienation. Excessive use of digital platforms (such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok) contributes to a decline in the quality of communication between spouses and leads to the emergence of several negative phenomena, including marital silence, emotional divorce, declining marital satisfaction, increased jealousy and suspicion, and a decrease in emotional interaction. The results also indicate that the unbalanced use of these platforms may ultimately lead to family disintegration or even legal divorce. As the digital environment has become an integral part of daily life, it is essential to consciously manage this space to mitigate its risks to family stability.

**Keywords:** Social media, marital alienation, Spouses.

ملخص:

تشكل مواقع التواصل الاجتماعي اليوم في حياتنا جزء لا يتجزأ منها، وأصبح ارتباطنا بها مرهونا بما تقدمه إلا أن الإفراط في استخدامها أدى إلى ظهور ظواهر سلبية في المجتمع خاصة بين الأزواج، لذا سعت هذه الدراسة إلى الكشف عن تأثير استخدام وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي على العلاقات الزوجية، مع التركيز على ظاهرة الاغتراب الزوجي فالإفراط في استخدام المنصات الرقمية (مثل فيسبوك، إنستغرام، تيك توك) يسهم في تراجع جودة التواصل بين الأزواج ويؤدي إلى مظاهر

سلبية متعددة مثل الخرس الزوجي، الطلاق العاطفي، ضعف الرضا الزوجي، تصاعد الغيرة والشكوك، وانخفاض التفاعل الوجداني. كما تبين أن الاستخدام غير المتوازن لهذه الوسائل قد يفضي إلى تفكك أسري أو طلاق قانوني.

كلمات مفتاحية: وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي، الاغتراب الزوجي، الأزواج.

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## **1. Introduction and Problem Statement**

Marriage is considered one of the deepest, most sacred, and most respected human bonds, as it represents a foundation for warmth, support, and mutual understanding between the partners. This relationship contributes to reinforcing common interests and bearing mutual responsibilities, while achieving balance in meeting psychological, physical, and social needs. Within the framework of marriage, both spouses develop psychologically within a family dynamic nourished by positive interactions between them, enriched by social norms and principles. The family is considered a central axis for the growth of its members, ensuring their safety and the continuity of their lives. Therefore, any obstacle that stands in the way of achieving its objectives may lead to crises that negatively affect this fundamental pillar.

In the current era, amid the multiple transformations in different aspects of life -particularly the digital transformation that has cast its shadow over our lives -various social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, ...) and others have become widely used, often excessively, by society, impacting the formation of social relationships. Families now face multiple threats stemming from diverse social phenomena, making these challenges a great danger not only to family unity but also to the stability of society as a whole. Despite the advantages and services provided by digital communication platforms, their negative effects on family and society cannot be ignored, especially when misused. These effects manifest in various dimensions, including financial problems linked to the waste of resources, time lost in unproductive discussions, as well as health repercussions such as weakened eyesight and back pain, in addition to psychological and social

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consequences like isolation, introversion, and escape from reality. Excessive use also reduces opportunities for family communication and absence from social activities and events, thereby weakening the quality of an individual's social relationships and threatening family cohesion (Sakr, 2019, p. 340).

Despite the importance of social media platforms, their overuse leads to many negative consequences, including depression, anxiety, and other psychological disorders, in addition to the spread of rumors and harm to others. They also contribute to family disintegration, weak social relationships, and a waste of time. The absence of privacy leads to the exploitation of personal information for defamation, while excessive use encourages imitation of foreign behavioral patterns and fashions, resulting in weakened family ties and the emergence of artificial personalities

Excessive use of social media has clearly affected family relationships, which have become confined to their lowest levels, leading to a decline in meetings, gatherings, and conversations that once brought family members together. It has also resulted in the disappearance of many cultural, scientific, recreational, and religious activities that used to bring family members closer from time to time. This phenomenon highlights the urgent need for researchers and specialists to study this problem in depth, with the aim of proposing insights and solutions that contribute to overcoming these challenges, while taking into account the nature and demands of the era without ignoring or bypassing them (Al-Haouri, 2001, p. 8).

Recent research and studies indicate that the digital environment has become an integral part of people's lives. As Malekzadeh (2025, p. 3) points out, individuals live within these digital environments in a way that shows the internet is not merely a separate virtual space but an extension of real life. For many, cyberspace constitutes an additional sphere for social interaction and relationship-building. Consequently, virtual spaces are integrated into the fabric of daily life rather than being viewed as isolated or alien worlds. This has greatly impacted their daily interactions and social relationships, including marital relationships.

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The digital environment includes a set of elements that enable communication and information exchange online, and it is considered one of the most significant technological developments that have transformed concepts and methods of communication between spouses. With the increasing reliance on digital devices and social media platforms, there is no doubt that the digital environment has had an impact on changes in marital relationships, where many family problems have begun to emerge due to spouses' misuse of social media, leading to coldness in the relationship between them, in addition to the spread of marital infidelity and the seepage of boredom into their relationship (Al-Juaid, 2022, p. 22). Abdulkader's (2000) study also revealed that social media has a significant impact on the occurrence of marital problems (Al-Khasawneh, 2024, p. 490).

New challenges have emerged that affect the quality of marital relationships, as they may cause the partners to drift apart and generate feelings of alienation or emotional separation. Marital alienation, or what is known as "marital estrangement," is among the most prominent problems threatening family stability and security. This condition deepens the sense of disconnection between spouses despite the legal continuation of the relationship, and heightens their sense of estrangement from everything within their shared life despite being in the same environment. It also leads to a lack of psychological and emotional closeness.

Fundamentally, each spouse is supposed to be a source of comfort and a haven of security and stability for the other, within a strong bond based on mutual love, respect, and positive communication. Communication here means that each partner talks to the other, listens to them, and shares feelings and thoughts. According to Mahmoud (2006), the absence of harmony between spouses reduces their ability to confront problems and challenges that may arise, creating feelings of incompetence and inadequacy, and potentially leading to a growing desire for separation and discontinuation of life together (Abd Al-Razzaq & Al-Rajeh, 2016, p. 189).

Abd Al-Rahman (2003) also points out that marital alienation is a psychological disorder that disrupts the balance of life between spouses and

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limits their ability to interact positively with their surroundings. This may lead to psychological and social problems that worsen if neglected, negatively affecting the psychological health of both spouses, with consequences that extend to society as a whole (Farhat & Abdul-Moneim, 2018, p. 512).

Marital alienation leads both partners to feel psychological detachment and emotional distance, with each losing the sense of participation and complementarity in their roles. This results in a negative outlook on the family's future, where joint tasks turn into individual burdens, placing the family structure in a state of disorder and imbalance. At that point, the family becomes in need of intervention and support to restore harmony and compatibility, so that it can regain its ability to perform its fundamental functions (Al-Bishri, 2020, p. 58).

This is attributed to several factors, including the long hours spent by spouses in front of screens, the virtual interactions that may replace direct communication, as well as social comparisons facilitated by social media that lead to dissatisfaction and tension in the marital relationship.

Understanding the impact of social media use on the rise of marital alienation requires careful study of its causes and effects, with an emphasis on how to manage this environment in ways that enhance communication and understanding between spouses rather than reinforcing distance and estrangement. Although the digital environment provides many opportunities to strengthen bonds and reinforce relationships, it also presents challenges that may exacerbate alienation and threaten family cohesion. Therefore, we sought to examine the impact of the digital environment on families with regard to the emergence of marital alienation among spouses, through answering the following questions:

- What is meant by social media and marital alienation?
- What is the effect of social media use on the emergence of marital alienation among spouses?

## **2. Objectives of the Study**

- To define the concepts of social media and marital alienation.
- To study the effect of social media use on the quality of marital relationships.
- To highlight the behavioral and psychological factors associated with its use (such as online marital infidelity, unwanted sexual contact, and direct communication).

## **3. Significance of the Study**

The significance of this study lies in the importance of the subject it addresses: the relationship between social media and marital alienation among spouses, and how the use of these platforms contributes to the emergence of gaps and problems within families.

## **4. Definition of Terms**

### **4.1. Social Media:**

Social media are digital platforms designed to enable individuals to create groups and interact with friends, whether current or former. These platforms provide the ability to conduct voice and video conversations and exchange photos and files, thereby contributing to the strengthening of social relationships and the consolidation of bonds between them (Al-Bishri, 2020, p. 58).

Das and Sahoo (2011) also defined social media as a form of virtual communication that allows individuals to interact with one another, originating from the basic human need to live within communities and build society (Daghriri, 2017, p. 92).

According to Aksoy (2018), social media platforms are: “an environment where a group of people gather to share relationships, data, and content using online communication channels, where social media applications appear as forums, microblogs, and social networks” (Al-Khasawneh, 2024, p. 493).

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Thus, social media can be defined as interactive digital platforms that create networks and virtual communities, communicating with one another through multiple channels such as text, images, audio, and video. These objectives are grounded in the necessity of strengthening human approaches to building relationships and belonging to the community. They also provide space for sharing data and content, and social connections, creating a dynamic environment that combines interaction and collective participation.

#### **4.2. Marital Alienation**

Marital alienation is considered a psychological phenomenon that affects marital life and the relationship between spouses, where one or both partners feel hatred, non-belonging, isolation, lack of interactions, and sometimes an absence of communication, with significant failure in their relationship.

Khitab (2011) viewed it as an advanced stage of emotional divorce, encompassing a set of symptoms such as lack of interaction, dialogue, participation, passivity, and poor communication in its various forms (Aziz, 2021, p. 373).

Therefore, marital alienation represents a psychological and social condition that may affect one or both spouses within the marital framework. This condition is manifested through a sense of emotional detachment, weak positive interaction, and the loss of warmth and intimacy that are supposed to prevail in marital life. This type of alienation usually appears through a decline in effective communication, reduced emotional sharing, and both partners feeling isolated or lonely despite continuing to live within the same family. It is not considered merely daily disputes but rather indicates a profound disturbance in the emotional and social foundations of the marital relationship, which may threaten family stability and ultimately lead to disintegration or divorce if not addressed urgently and effectively.

#### **5. The Most Important Social Media Platforms**

With the expansion of users' digital needs and the increasing reliance on virtual interaction, a set of social media platforms have emerged.

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Although they share several basic functions, they continuously seek to attract as many users as possible by offering innovative features and diverse digital experiences. Among the most prominent of these platforms, as indicated by Daoudi and Ghadiri (2025, p. 80), are:

**5.1. Facebook:** Founded in 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg, it initially started as a network for Harvard University students, then expanded to include high school students, and was finally launched to the public in 2006. Facebook is characterized by personal profiles that contain users' data, interests, and social connections. It also allows users to post photos and videos, share, comment, and "like," thereby supporting social interaction and dialogue among users. Academic studies have shown that excessive use of Facebook is associated with lower life satisfaction and increased psychological stress among some users.

**5.2. Instagram:** Launched in 2010 by Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger, benefiting from the spread of smartphones with high-quality cameras and the desire to share photos and videos quickly and easily. Instagram is a social networking platform that relies on images and videos and encourages interaction and comparison among users. The application is known for its visual appeal, as users often post daily moments highlighting beauty and appearance. This has driven researchers to study its impact on self-esteem, body comparisons, and body image. For example, one study found that users who spend more time on Instagram suffer from lower body image satisfaction and self-esteem due to visual comparisons.

## **6. The Role of Social Media in Shaping Marital Alienation**

The intensive use of these platforms and websites carries several risks, including negative consequences on personal relationships. It may lead to distance between partners and the emergence of imbalances in family relationships, especially marital relationships, such as marital silence, emotional divorce, and marital alienation. One of the most significant repercussions of using these platforms is the emergence of marital alienation, manifested in the following aspects:

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### **6.1. Partner Rejection and the Illusory Ideal Image:**

Social media promotes idealized perceptions of life through edited images, advertisements, and carefully selected content. This leads spouses to compare their real lives with these artificial versions they see online. Such comparisons may cause feelings of inadequacy, discontent, or rejection of the partner, which negatively affects self-confidence and creates disturbances in self-image and the relationship. Studies, including those addressed by Holland and Tiggemann, indicate that intensive use of social media - particularly visual platforms like Facebook and Instagram - is linked to growing concerns about body image. This effect is clearly reflected in the posting, editing, and interaction with photos through comments, which provide broad opportunities for social comparison and appearance evaluation. Consequently, greater focus is placed on outward appearance, reinforcing the pursuit of the “ideal thinness” concept and increasing levels of dissatisfaction with weight and body shape. This, in turn, has negative psychological consequences for the individual (Alfonso-Fuertes et al., 2023).

### **6.2. Online Marital Infidelity:**

Studies indicate that some spouses exploit social media to initiate emotional relationships or engage in inappropriate interactions with others, a behavior known as infidelity. These behaviors are associated with reduced marital satisfaction, increased conflicts, and heightened suspicions between partners.

### **6.3. Social Media Addiction and Declining Marital Satisfaction:**

Multiple studies, such as one published in *PubMed* under the title “The impact of social media addiction on self-esteem and life satisfaction among married couples,” demonstrated that social media addiction reduces satisfaction with marital life. While it may increase feelings of social recognition, it comes with negative side effects such as wasted time, mental distraction, and weakened interaction between spouses. Another study conducted in China focused on older adults and revealed a correlation between addiction to short-video platforms and a decline in the quality of marital interaction (Chadha et al., 2025).

#### **6.4. Jealousy, Monitoring, and Suspicion:**

The facilities provided by social media, such as monitoring messages and observing the partner's activities, sometimes lead to increased jealousy and a sense of mistrust. These factors may intensify conflicts and erode bonds between spouses. This was confirmed by Stieger (2019, p. 1), who indicated that social media facilitates jealousy and suspicion in romantic relationships due to the ease of communication with potential partners, which may lead to new forms of stalking and harassment.

#### **6.5. Public Conflict and Emotional Tension:**

Excessive and unbalanced use of social media leads to partner neglect and a lack of quality time spent together. In addition, text messages may increase misunderstandings due to the absence of non-verbal cues, which reinforces alienation and psychological detachment.

#### **6.6. Divorce and Family Disintegration:**

Legal and social studies indicate that social media has become one of the main causes behind the rise in divorce cases. For example, in a study conducted by Widia and Ali (2024), data from Sharia courts in Indonesia revealed that about 60% of divorce cases between 2021–2022 were linked to improper use of these platforms. It has been proven that social media is closely associated with divorce, as it plays a major role in sparking repeated disputes and conflicts.

Furthermore, American analyses in a series of studies conducted by a team of researchers found a relationship between excessive use of social media and marital dissatisfaction. For instance, the increase in the number of Facebook users in the United States was associated with a 2.18% rise in divorce rates. These factors highlight the importance of awareness about the responsible use of social media to ensure the maintenance of marital balance and to limit the negative impact of these platforms.

In addition, a study conducted by the University of Texas at Austin in 2011 found that 11.4% of users of “non-social” networks were happier in their relationships than those who used social media extensively. These findings

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and studies are examples of the type of research carried out by the Center for Mobile Communication Studies (Clayton, 2014).

### **7. Conclusion and Recommendations**

The widespread use of social media has become an integral part of daily life, influencing various aspects of individual well-being and relationships. The impact of social media is particularly significant among spouses, as excessive use may lead to a decline in self-esteem and life satisfaction, both of which are essential components of a healthy marriage. Therefore, the continuous and increasing interaction through digital media requires awareness of its importance and effects, and working towards achieving a balance between digital life and real social life. This balance is crucial to maintaining family bonds, preserving the psychological health of individuals, and ensuring the stability of marital relationships away from the potential negative consequences that may result from excessive or unregulated use of digital communication platforms.

Accordingly, we can propose the following recommendations:

1. The necessity of community awareness regarding the responsible and balanced use of social media to avoid its negative effects on marital relationships.
2. Encouraging spouses to dedicate quality time for direct communication away from digital media.
3. Strengthening the role of religious and educational institutions in promoting a culture of ethical use of technology.
- Encouraging researchers to conduct more field studies to monitor the rapid changes in family relationships within the digital environment.

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