

Counselling Intervention: A Tool for Digital Technology Use and Marital Satisfaction Among Couples in Benue State University Teaching Hospital.

Igbudu, Erdoo Jennipher¹, Akume, Gabriel Terzungwe², Igbudu, Terhemmen Joseph¹

¹Department of Educational Foundations Benue State University, Makurdi

²Department of Family Medicine, Benue State University Teaching Hospital Makurdi

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ABSTRACT

The study investigated counselling intervention: a tool for digital technology use and marital satisfaction among couples in Benue State University Teaching Hospital. The Survey research design was used for the study. The population of the study was 2900 staff of the Benue State University Teaching Hospital Makurdi. A sample size of 80 respondents was taken from the population using the purposive sampling technique. A self-developed instrument titled Digital Technology use and Marital Satisfaction (DTMS) was used for the study. Mean and Standard Deviation were used to answer the research questions and The T-Test statistical tool was used to test the hypotheses. The study revealed that: digital technology contribute to maintaining and enhancing communication between couples who are separated by a great distance, but it also brings about distractions and interruptions undermining the benefits of spending time with one's spouse resulting to lack of satisfaction among couples. It was recommended among others that Spouses watch the amount of time they spend using digital technology devices because it can negatively affect their marital life, personal interaction and that face to face discussion with their spouse should be of paramount instead of constantly been on their phones and personal Computer, ensuring that trust is prioritized among couples which can be gained through close interpersonal relationship and communication.

Keywords: Counselling intervention, Digital Technology, Marital satisfaction.

INTRODUCTION

The primer of digital technology seemed to have transformed and greatly improved communication, social interaction, work and human relationship. Technology which is a means through which people perform countless daily works, school tasks, as well as to connect and communicate with other people has influenced many facets of human endeavours with the contemporary marriage not been an exception. Despite the fact that these innovation has brought about convenience and efficiency, their pervasive presence in everyday life seem to raise concerns in the sphere of personal relationship and particularly marriage. The fact that technology offers numerous benefits in bridging geographical distances and enhancing connectivity, it also poses a significant challenge on intimate relationship, among couples. Many couples now seem to face emotional disconnect, reduced quality time, and increased conflict due to the overuse or misuse of digital technology devices such as smartphones, social media platforms, computers, Television and streaming services by their spouses.

The use of smartphones, television, social media platforms, messaging apps, and other digital tools seem to have taken a new dynamics in marital communication and satisfaction. According to Kisombo, Mgesa and Shorter (2019), marriage is a formal commitment between a man and a woman to cohabit more or less permanently. It is intended to be an intimate relationship built upon mutual understanding between the husband and the wife. For this union to stand the test of time, there must be interaction between the married couple initiated by communication. In buttressing this point Syam 2015, in Neelma, H., Tanveer, H. & Sobia, A. (2024), stated that husband and wife's communication is very vital in strengthening their relationship, though it is never constant; but changes from time to time.

Family and Couple relationships are an aspect of family life that may be positively and negatively affected by the presence of technology in the home. When this tool is used to connect family members in new ways, such as providing the opportunity for grooming calls when one is running errands or between appointments, it can strengthen family bonds (Lanigan, 2009). Digital technology devices can aid in planning, educating, communicating with family members while apart, and gaining a better global understanding (Hughes & Hans, 2001). It is also possible for technology use to increase closeness amongst spouses. Christensen (2009) described technology use in relationships as a “connected presence that allows family members to experience closeness when they are not together. In general, the use of these devices increases connect ability when couples are away from each other (Coyne, Stockdale, Busby, Iverson, & Grant, 2011). This could be why Watt & White, (1999) said increasing technology usage is good when linking family members to each other, but may have a negative effect when it causes isolation. The permeability of family boundaries have been affected by digital technology devices when it comes to work-family spill over, public and private world boundaries being blurred, and the availability of unrestricted access to knowledge through the Internet, which may not be consistent to family values and teachings (Lanigan, 2009).

Sutcliffe, Binder & Dunbar (2022) in a study found that close and intimate relationships prefer face-to-face, phone calls, or text to communicate. These interaction methods are vital to providing emotional support and social media plays its role in providing emotional support, especially Facebook. In one-to-one interviews with intercultural marriages, it was found that sharing leisure time was one of the major components of marital satisfaction. Spending leisure time together was the reason marital conflicts were resolved Sharaievska, Kim, & Stodolska, (2013).

The use of digital technology devices can significantly hinder communication in couple relationships when not properly managed. These effects can be understood across behavioral, emotional, and relational dimensions such as a reduced face-to-face Interaction. Frequent use of smartphones, laptops, and social media reduces opportunities for direct, meaningful conversations. Couples may be physically present but psychologically absent resulting to diminished emotional connection and intimacy. Digital communication like texting and chatting among couples often times replaces in-depth discussions. A situation whereby a well-meaning message may be brief, ambiguous, or misinterpreted due to lack of non-verbal communication, this brings about increased misunderstandings and unresolved conflicts.

The researchers perceived that excessive engagement with digital technology devices among couples creates emotional distance. Partners may feel ignored, unimportant, or neglected when attention is constantly diverted to screens, leading to lower relationship satisfaction and feelings of loneliness within the relationship. Social media platforms are likely to introduce issues such as, online infidelity or emotional affairs, suspicion due to hidden conversations, in some cases comparing ones spouse with others, brings about trust issues and frequent arguments.

Time factor is an important aspect of this discussion that shouldn't be left out. Technology often intrudes into moments meant for bonding (bedtime, Meal times, outings and leisure time). Reducing shared experiences that strengthen relationships between couples thereby weakening bonds over time. It is important to note that excessive reliance on digital devices can lead to behavioral addiction, where one partner prioritizes screen time over relationship needs neglecting ones emotional and relational responsibilities, this in most cases brings about conflicts that may be difficult to resolve because couples in most cases avoid difficult conversations and resort to digital distractions or indirect communication such as messaging through phones instead of discussing in person. This action leads to accumulation of unresolved issues and long-term resentment that brings about marital dissatisfaction. Technology devices have come to stay and surely these devices have become part of the landscape of family life. In a recent study on technology use in the family context by Lanigan (2009) it was reported that, 61.8% of American households own computers, 87.6% of these households have Internet access. And as of January 2008, there were 253,353,579 wireless cell phone subscribers, and 90% of people with a cell phone said they always have their phone with them even while in bed. With the increasing pervasiveness of technology in family life, it is important to note that, the significance of communication technology lies in the role it plays in providing links between and within households and between households and the outside world” (Dickinson, Murcott, Eldridge, & Leader, 2001). The use of technology to communicate is not simply an

alternate means couples utilize to interact with one another but represent a qualitative change in how family communication is conducted (Lanigan, 2009).

It is essential at this point to note that the use of cell phones allow people to make calls to others at any time of the day and from just about anywhere likewise, computers allow for emails to be sent in order to increase contact with other people. While televisions remains one of the most influential media platforms in the society improving knowledge in science, history, health and culture and supporting distant learning, it also serves as a means of entertainment, and socialization creating shared experiences thereby influencing opinions, attitudes and social values.

However, these technological advances may also introduce distractions, secrecy, cyber infidelity, and decreased face-to-face interaction. As couples increasingly turn to screens rather than to themselves, there seem to be a rise in marital dissatisfaction linked to technology use. Given the media's essential nature, one may assumed that in addition to its merits, it also has significant flaws that drastically restrict the intimacy of interaction among couples.

The researchers observed that couples no longer leave work at the office, nor leave home at home, with technology creating constant connection to the outside world. Clearly, technology has woven itself through the complexities of couple's lives and relationships. Communication technology device use, such as cell phones, more than computer use, is linked to increased distress and decreased marital satisfaction as well as increased negative work-to-family or family-to-work spill over in individuals (Chesley, 2005). People no longer leave work at the office, nor can they leave home at home with technology creating constant connection to the outside world. Clearly, technology has woven itself through the complexities of people's lives and relationships. Family and Couple Relationships are an aspect of family life that may be positively and negatively affected by the presence of technology in the home.

Researchers have consistently attested that, using one's time to interact with other family members yields many positive benefits to the individual and their family (Zabriskie & McCormick, 2003 and Olson & DeFrain, 1994). It is to this effect that Glorieux, Minnen, and van Tienoven (2011) reported that time spent together is associated with relationship satisfaction for couples. Specifically noting that spousal face-to-face interaction is critical for marital quality. Likewise, Graham (2008) found that engaging interactions between couples led to increased satisfaction and feelings of closeness to one another. Alone time, however, has been shown to lead to lower levels of marital satisfaction (Orthner & Mancini, 1991). The more time couples spend together, the more opportunity there is for communication. In fact, Orthner and Mancini (1991) noted that, "the more couples stayed together, the more likely they were to communicate with themselves. Communication is the strongest engaging activity related to feelings of closeness between couples (Graham, 2008). Lee, Draper & Lee, (2001) described connectedness as a positive feeling that helps a person create more satisfying relationships. Although doing things together is correlated with positive feelings of connectedness and marital satisfaction, communication is even more strongly correlated with positive family and marital outcomes. Doing things together is "more conducive to optimal communication and leads to increased marital satisfaction" (Johnson, 2006). Doing things together without high levels of communication had little to no relationship to marital satisfaction. It is important, therefore, for couples to spend time quite frequently, communicating and interacting with one another ((Holman & Jacquart 1988 and Shaw & Dawson, 2001). This brings about satisfaction, bonding, and feel connectedness among couples.

Statement of problem

Despite the fact digital technology facilitates communication, there is a growing concern on its adverse effects on marital relationship. Constant phone usage, addiction to social media, lack of quality time, and the threat of online affairs have been reported to cause emotional disconnection, mistrust, and dissatisfaction in marriage. The convenience and benefits of digital technology, its overuse or inappropriate use has been implicated in growing marital tensions. Issues such as digital infidelity, lack of attention, cyber addiction, and poor communication are now more prevalent. These emerging issues have been explained by some researchers on how social media affects working individuals and their work while other studies explain how students are affected using social media platforms. Concern have been raised over digital technology usage, revealing that

many persons may be spending too much time with their digital technology gadgets, creating problems in their family life and making it difficult to maintain good relationships with their spouses. As noted by Asa and Nkan, (2017) and Udobong, (2016), whereas the causes of marital problems in most societies, including Nigeria, consist of factors such as: economic hardship, sickness, sexual incompatibility, unsatisfactory sexual relationship, childlessness, and preference for male children, digital technology usage has emerged as forerunners of marital dissatisfaction and breakdown.

Today, it is more common to find couples who have social media-related marital challenges than those who do not. There seem to be limited empirical research in this area within Benue State, Nigeria and African at large, especially regarding how counselling can respond to the challenges brought by technology in marital life. The limited localized research on how digital technology contributes to marital dissatisfaction and how counselling can effectively address these concerns has established a gap which the current study seeks to fill. A tool meant to enhance life has now posed as a possible "time bomb" in marital relationships, exploring the implication for counselling intervention.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive survey design. The population of the study was 2900 staff of the Benue State University Teaching Hospital Makurdi. The sample of the study is 80 married persons in the facility with 41 (51.25%) males and 39 (48.75%) females. Respondents ranged from ages 25 to 70 years. The participants had been married for an average of 10years.

Most of the participants were indigenes of Benue State, with a few from other States within Nigeria. All study participants had and use at least one digital technology device. A Multi staged sampling techniques was employed for the study, which includes stratifies, proportional and simple random sampling technique. A self-developed instrument titled Digital Technology use and Marital Satisfaction (DTMS) was used to collect data for the study.

Data was collected through direct contact with the respondents in Benue State University Teaching Hospital with the aid of a research assistant. Data was analysed using descriptive statistics of mean for the research question and T-Test statistical tool to test the hypotheses.

RESULTS

Table 1: Time Spent on of Digital Technology appliances among spouses.

Item	No.	SA	A	N	SD	D	Mean	Remarks
I frequently use digital technology to communicate with my spouse	80	4	9	9	23	35	3.95	Agreed
Technology helps us stay connected even when apart.	80	6	9	4	25	36	3.97	Agreed
My spouse and I spend quality time together using digital devices	80	20	17	11	24	8	2.93	Disagreed
Digital tools have improved how we resolve conflicts	80	20	26	11	15	8	2.56	Disagreed
My spouse often prioritizes screen time over our relationship	80	18	17	13	23	9	2.88	Disagreed
Technology distracts us from face-to-face communication	80	17	15	15	20	18	3.00	Agreed
I feel emotionally disconnected due to excessive digital device usage	80	19	18	8	23	12	2.86	Disagreed
Social media affects the trust in our relationship	80	19	23	11	21	6	2.91	Disagreed

We set boundaries for digital technology usage in our marriage	80	21	21	14	13	11	2.65	Disagreed
Technology has positively impacted our marital satisfaction.	80	21	20	12	19	8	2.66	Disagreed
Cluster Mean							3.04	Agreed

Source: field survey 2025.

Table 1 shows the mean scores of the respondents on use of digital technology in marriage. The responses collected from the respondents on items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10 were presented using mean scores. The result indicates that the respondents agreed with the statement that they use digital technology in their marriages, with a cluster mean score of 3.04 which is above the 3.00 cut-off point.

Table 2: Marital Satisfaction Level among couples

Items	No.	SA	A	N	SD	D	Mean	Remarks
I feel emotionally fulfilled in my marriage	80	20	7	6	28	19	3.23	disagree
My partner and I express love and affection regularly	80	9	13	11	25	22	3.51	disagree
We communicate effectively about our needs and concerns	80	8	8	11	25	28	3.71	disagree
I am satisfied with the time we spend together	80	10	8	10	28	24	3.60	disagree
I feel valued and respected in my marriage	80	8	6	10	26	30	3.80	disagree
Conflicts in our marriage are handled constructively	80	15	14	18	19	14	3.07	disagree
We support each other's goals and growth	80	18	14	8	19	21	3.15	disagree
I am overall satisfied with my marriage.	80	11	15	7	25	22	3.40	disagree
Cluster Mean							3.43	disagree

Source: field survey 2025.

Table 2 shows the mean scores of the respondents on marital satisfaction level. The responses collected from the respondents on items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8 were presented using mean scores. The result indicates that the respondents disagreed with the statements that they were satisfied with their marriages, with a cluster mean score of 3.43 which is above the 3.00 cut-off point.

Table 3: Counselling among Couples

S/N	Items	Yes		No	
		Freq.	(%)	Freq.	(%)
1	Have you ever discussed digital technology usage in marriage with a counselor?	12	15.0	68	85.0
2	Would you consider counseling to address issues related to digital technology in your marriage	27	33.8	53	66.3

Source: field survey 2025.

Table 3. Revealed that majority of the respondents had never discussed digital technology usage in marriage with a counsellor, with a high percentage score of 85.0%. The result also shows that most of the respondents had never considered Counselling to address issues related to digital technology in their marriages with a high percentage score 66.3%.

Table 4: T-test Result

	Test Value = 0					
	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
frequency of digital device use	18.847	79	.000	3.23750	2.8956	3.5794

Table 4 revealed that the hypotheses formulated was rejected. The result of hypotheses one (H01) showed that there is significant relationship between the frequency of digital device use and marital satisfaction. With a value of (t) = 18.847 (p -value = $0.000 < 0.05$). The null hypotheses which state that there is no significant relationship between the frequency of digital device use and marital satisfaction was rejected and the alternative accepted.

H02: Couples do not perceive counselling as necessary in addressing digital technology related marital issues.

Table 5: T-test Result

	Test Value = 0					
	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
counselling as necessary in addressing digital technology	29.053	79	.000	3.16250	2.9458	3.3792

Table 5 revealed that the hypotheses formulated was rejected. The result of hypotheses two (H04) showed that Couples perceive counselling as necessary in addressing digital technology-related marital issues, with a value of (t) = 29.053 (p -value = $0.000 < 0.05$). The null hypotheses which states that Couples do not perceive counselling as necessary in addressing digital technology-related marital issues was rejected and the alternative accepted.

H03 Counselling interventions have no significant effect on improving marital satisfaction in the context of digital technology use.

Table 6: T-test Result

	Test Value = 0					
	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
Counselling interventions	14.937	79	.000	1.58750	1.3760	1.7990

Table 6 revealed that the hypotheses formulated was rejected. The result of hypotheses three (H05) showed that counselling interventions had significant effect on improving marital satisfaction in the context of digital technology use, with a value of (t) = 14.937 (p -value = $0.000 < 0.05$). The null hypotheses which state that counselling interventions had no significant effect on improving marital satisfaction in the context of digital technology use was rejected and the alternative accepted.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The results indicates that constant use of Digital Technology devices, among spouses correlated with reduced feelings of connectedness and closeness with a loss in communication among participants" spouses. Couples are able to strengthen their feelings of connectedness to one another, as well as overall marital satisfaction, by spending time together. Time spent together facilitates the opportunity for communication to take place, and as

a result strengthens spousal bonds. This also agrees with the findings of Olson & DeFrain (1994), Zabriskie (2001) and Lee & Robins (2001) that, families with better communication skills were more balanced and, therefore, functioned better. Time spent together is one way connectedness is developed, as such when a person does not feel connected to another, the subsequent feeling and lack of connectedness is a reflection of an unhealthy relationship. Connectedness is the foundation of a strong marriage, the strength and solidarity of couples is foundational to the development of healthy family relationships.

The finding is also in line with Orthner & Mancini (1991) notion that the more time couples spend together, the more likely they are to communicate and subsequently connect with one another. As there are many contexts and ways in which couples spend time together, there are likewise many threats or intrusions upon that time. The increasing presence of technology may serve as a facilitator of connectedness, but may also be a potential intrusion on couple time. Without good communication skills to facilitate connectedness, a couple may feel unwanted and dissatisfied. Thus, Reissman, Aron, and Bergen, (1993), noted that spending time together is a maintenance strategy as well as a mode of therapy; that results in a more satisfying relationships. If technology use replaces spending time with one's spouse, this may cause damage to the relationship. These distractions have a significant relationship with the overall feeling of marriage satisfaction. This study, therefore, indicated that distractions and interruptions may undermine the benefits of spending time with one's spouse. In order to preserve meaningful interactions during couple time, there is a need for self-regulation on the use of digital technology devices among couples. It is likely that, couples who regulate their usage time while spending time together feel more connected than when much use of digital technology devices is involved. Based on the data from this study, it is clear that spouses need to regulate their personal digital technology device usage so as not to miss out on opportunities to increase feelings of connectedness with one another. The interruptive and distractive nature of personal ICT devices must be acknowledged and boundaries set so as to preserve couple face-to-face time and avoid decreased spousal connectedness.

It is therefore, paramount to create out time for discussions of technology boundaries in marriage during counselling sessions, and to also develop a digital literacy programs for couples to promote healthier communication habits while addressing trust issues linked to behaviour arising from the use of digital technology devices among spouses. It is of great importance to note that when it comes to relationship, quality face-to-face contact seem to be the most effective way of communicating and strengthening family bond than through the various forms of technology used in communication. Therefore, in order to build and maintain healthy relationships, it is important to regulate digital technology devices to avoid distraction. Therefore, family interaction and communication have been studied in order to preserve such valuable experiences and strengthen couples relationship and marital satisfaction. Researchers such as (Zabriskie & McCormick, 2003) found that using one's time to interact with other family members yields many positive benefits to the individual and their family as time spent together is associated with relationship satisfaction for couples.

From a Person-Centred Therapy approach it is important for a counsellor to encourage intentional communication practices among couples, establish digital boundaries, promote emotional awareness and expression, encourage couples to rebuild trust and intimacy through guided interventions noting that while digital technology offers convenience and connectivity, its uncontrolled use can hinder effective communication, emotional closeness, and overall relationship satisfaction. A balanced and mindful use of digital technology devices is essential to maintain healthy couple communication and satisfaction in marriage.

CONCLUSION

The findings from this study adds to our understanding of how Digital technology contribute to maintaining and enhancing communication between couples who are separated by a great distance. Technology can enhance or interfere with specific connections between family members, as well as their overall relationship. persona- socio counselling encourages honest and non-judgmental, open communication between couple while discussing their sexual desires, boundaries, and expectations from one another without reproach. It is therefore very

RECOMMENDATION

Spouses should be careful with the amount of time they spend using digital technology devices because it can negatively affect their marital life. Personal interaction and discussions with their spouse should be paramount instead of wasting time chatting on Facebook, twitter and WhatsApp or with the personal Computer ensuring that trust is prioritized among couples which can be gained through close interpersonal relationship and communication Marital leisure and satisfaction should be given serious consideration by spouses by devoting more time for each other.

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