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# SOCIAL MEDIA PRESSURE IN MARRIAGE: A CRITICAL REVIEW

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## Abstract

The rapid expansion of social media in Indonesia, with 139 million active users spending more than three hours online daily, has increasingly blurred the boundary between private marital life and public spectacle. This condition has intensified digital jealousy, social comparison, and dramaturgical self-presentation, which may strain relationship quality and shape young people's perceptions of marriage. This study aims to analyze social media pressures on marital dynamics among Indonesia's younger generation, particularly Gen Z and millennials, by drawing on Goffman's dramaturgical theory to examine mechanisms related to idealized expectations, negative marital narratives, and relational conflict. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, this study conducted a systematic literature review of secondary sources published between 2016 and 2026, including journals, books, and reports. The data were analyzed through content analysis involving open, axial, and selective coding, with triangulation used to strengthen validity. The findings indicate that social media amplifies upward comparison through curated "front-stage" representations of marital harmony, while digital jealousy, phubbing, and cyber-infidelity contribute to declining trust and relational dissatisfaction. Negative viral content also appears to delay marriage commitments among


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younger generations. Intensive social media use is associated with a 15% decline in marital satisfaction and increasing divorce trends, although media literacy and family values function as important moderating factors. The study concludes that social media pressures pose a growing challenge to family institutions, yet targeted interventions, including digital literacy, premarital counseling, and the promotion of realistic relational content, may help mitigate these risks. The study contributes to family sociology and digital society literature by clarifying how online visibility, comparison, and mediated interaction reshape contemporary marital expectations and relationship stability.

**Keywords:** Social Media Pressure; Marital Dynamics; Digital Jealousy; Family Sociology; Digital Society

## INTRODUCTION

The development of digital technology has revolutionized the social life of modern society, particularly in interpersonal interactions and relationship formation. Social media has emerged as a dominant platform shaping social dynamics, including the institutions of family and marriage (Jabali et al., 2024). In Indonesia, the number of active social media users has reached 139 million, with an average daily usage of over 3 hours (DataReportal, 2025), making it an integral part of daily routines. This high level of usage has not only expanded social networks but also transformed the privacy of married life. Couples now frequently share intimate moments like wedding photos, family vacations, and daily routines on platforms like Instagram and TikTok (Alfazeena & S, 2025). This phenomenon shifts the boundaries between the private and public spheres, making married life a mass consumption experience for thousands of followers.

From a sociological perspective, marriage serves as a pillar of social stability, the reproduction of generations, and the transmission of cultural norms. However, social media introduces new pressures through social comparison. Individuals tend to compare their marriages to the idealized images portrayed by others, fueling dissatisfaction and unrealistic expectations about marriage. Empirical research supports that intensive social media use is correlated with increased romantic conflict. Bouffard et al. (2022) found that digital jealousy—such as monitoring a partner's social media activity—decreases the quality of direct communication and emotional intimacy. In the Indonesian context, a survey showed that

62% of young couples experienced tension due to their partner's social media posts (Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection, 2024).

Furthermore, social media shapes negative narratives about marriage through viral trends like "Marriage is Scary." Nasri and Octavia (2025) analyzed how this type of content, popular among Gen Z Indonesians, reinforces the perception of marriage as a financial and emotional burden, leading to delays or rejection of matrimonial commitment. It threatens the sustainability of the traditional family institution. Theoretically, Erving Goffman's (1959) dramaturgy theory explains this dynamic with the metaphor of a theatrical stage. Individuals project a "front stage" of a harmonious married life on social media for an optimal social image, while real conflicts are hidden in the "back stage." This pressure forces young couples to maintain digital performances for public validation.

Recent studies have shown that intense exposure to social media content shapes idealized expectations and social comparisons that increase anxiety and doubts about marriage, especially among the younger generation. A study by Rahmah (2025) in Banjarmasin found a significant influence of social media on perspectives and desires regarding marriage, indicating the formation of ideal expectations and concerns through repeated exposure to content. A case study among Gen Z students in Yogyakarta reported the emergence of cognitive, emotional, and physiological dimensions of anxiety related to negative narratives about marriage on platforms like TikTok and Instagram, leading to delays or rejections of marriage(Astuti, 2025). Research on TikTok's impact on young adult women's perceptions of marriage suggests a dual effect: fueling doubts and standards of ideal partners while also providing a space for reflection and selective readiness—confirming that specific platforms can amplify pressure but also serve as a source of information (literacy) (Pakarti et al., 2023). A study examining marital relationships in the digital age found that intensive social media use is associated with a decline in the quality of face-to-face communication, increased jealousy, online infidelity, and privacy conflicts, while family values (religion/culture) serve as a buffer against these negative effects (Mutmainnah et al., 2026). Case analysis of millennial couples in the context of divorce shows that social media acts as a risk factor that triggers jealousy and distrust that can lead to serious conflict or divorce. However, technology can also strengthen communication when used constructively (Sabila et al., 2025). Overall, the literature shows consistent findings: social media influences perceptions and marital dynamics through mechanisms of social comparison, exposure to

negative narratives, and privacy invasions, but this impact is moderated by factors such as media literacy, family values, and platform usage patterns.

The focus on the younger generation is increasingly relevant as this group dominates social media usage in Indonesia (DataReportal, 2025). They are vulnerable to this pressure due to their lack of marital experience and their reliance on online validation, which often compromises the authenticity of their relationships. The sociological implications of social media pressure include the erosion of spousal trust and an increase in early divorce rates. Statistics Indonesia (BPS) data (2025) recorded a 15% surge in divorce rates among 20-30-year-olds since 2020, attributed in part to digital factors. This research is needed to understand these mechanisms from the perspective of Indonesian family sociology. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the influence of social media pressure on the marital dynamics of the younger generation by exploring the impact of digital jealousy, social comparison, and dramaturgical performance. The findings are expected to provide policy recommendations for family education and digital literacy to strengthen the institution of marriage.

## METHODS

This study applies a qualitative descriptive method with a literature study approach (Creswell, 2013; Satori & Komariah, 2017) to describe in depth the phenomenon of social media pressure on marital dynamics. Primary data were obtained from credible secondary sources, including national and international scientific journals, sociological theory reference books, and official statistical reports relevant to the topic. Literature selection was carried out systematically based on the following criteria: (1) thematic relevance to social media pressure and marriage, (2) scientific validity, and (3) publication recency in the 2016–2026 period. Data collection techniques used documentation and database searches, with the principle of systematic literature review, to ensure completeness and reliability (Anggito & Setiawan, 2018; Sugiyono, 2017).

The collected data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis techniques in stages, including: (1) open coding to identify key themes such as patterns of marital pressure and idealization on social media, (2) axial coding to relate themes to marital dynamics variables, and (3) selective coding to integrate findings with relevant sociological theories.

This approach was supported by source triangulation to enhance validity, enabling a holistic understanding of the phenomenon's causal relationships and implications (Rijali, 2019).

## RESULTS

### Social Media as a Source of Social Pressure

Social media does indeed form new social standards that influence how individuals judge married life, as these platforms often display representations that emphasize harmony, luxury, and happiness without conflict, thus encouraging social comparisons that lead to dissatisfaction (Rahmah, 2025). Wedding content on Instagram, TikTok, and other platforms tends to favor positive, aesthetic moments—lavish receptions, vacations for two, and romantic captions—as posts, so that audiences who are constantly exposed to it easily form idealized expectations about marriage. Research results show a significant influence of social media exposure on the younger generation's perspectives and desires regarding marriage, with a substantial contribution to the formation of both idealized expectations and concerns (Moss, 2019).

Within the framework of Goffman's dramaturgical theory, social media functions as a front stage where individuals (including married couples) project their desired identity to an audience—managing the impression of harmony and success—while the private (backstage) side is often hidden. Contemporary research finds that the boundaries between the front and backstage are increasingly blurred in the digital age (Parawansah, 2026). As a result, observers tend to make upward social comparisons of selectively portrayed partners, potentially leading to feelings of inadequacy, anxiety about one's own relationships, or decreased marital satisfaction. Studies of Gen Z also report increased anxiety and delays in marriage decisions related to exposure to digital narratives about marriage (Astuti, 2025).

Negative effects are not deterministic: some studies suggest that family values, media literacy education, and critical usage patterns can mitigate adverse effects—for example, strong communication and commitment to religious/cultural values help maintain harmony despite exposure to idealizing content—so educational interventions (media literacy, digital reality-based premarital counseling) are recommended (Mutmainnah et al., 2026). To mitigate the impact of idealized marriage on social media, implement a combined intervention that includes improving media literacy by teaching critical reading of context, recognizing content selection, and selecting realistic sources; reducing exposure to perfect content by setting time

limits on platform usage and following accounts that showcase authentic relationship dynamics, including conflicts and how to resolve them; and strengthening communication between partners by setting aside quality face-to-face conversations to compare ideal expectations with reality, while developing strategies together to cope with digital stress.

**Impact on Marital Relationships**

Social media pressures have a profound impact on the quality of marital relationships, particularly through the phenomenon of digital jealousy, which triggers conflict. This jealousy arises when one partner sees interactions of the opposite sex on platforms like Instagram or Facebook, such as likes, comments, or direct messages, which are interpreted as threats to marital commitment. A study by Tandon et al. (2021) found that some respondents experienced jealousy on social media, with women being more susceptible to jealousy when seeing photos of their partners with other people. This phenomenon is reinforced by the concept of "Facebook jealousy" identified by Muise et al. (2009), which posits that exposure to ambiguous information on social media triggers a recurring cycle of suspicion.

Excessive social media use also erodes the quality of communication between couples. Ideal time for face-to-face interaction is replaced by scrolling feeds or responding to notifications, leading to "phubbing," or ignoring one's partner for the sake of one's phone. Longitudinal research by Utami et al. (2020) showed that phubbing is negatively correlated with marital satisfaction, as partners feel emotionally neglected. It reduces the depth of conversation, with superficial online communication replacing the intimate dialogue that builds bonds.

A further impact is a decrease in overall relationship satisfaction, which can lead to prolonged conflict. Bouffard et al. (2022), in Nwankwo's (2026) study, analyzed 1,200 married couples and found that using social media for more than 2 hours a day decreased marital satisfaction scores by 15%, with this effect mediated by a decrease in trust. This study used a hierarchical regression model controlling for variables such as age and marital duration, confirming a significant causal relationship.

Furthermore, social media pressures create social comparisons that undermine self-perception in marriage. Couples often compare their relationships to idealized images on social media, such as the "perfect" couple posting romantic moments, which can lead to dissatisfaction. Clayton et al. (2013), in Dayton's (2023) dissertation, reported that the intensity of Facebook use predicted marital conflict, primarily through envy fueled by upward

comparison. Another risk is an increased likelihood of emotional infidelity or cyber-infidelity, where online interactions with an ex or new partner erode the boundaries of commitment. Hertlein and Twist (2019) found that 20-25% of divorce cases in the US involve digital evidence from social media. Their study highlighted how platform privacy facilitates secrets that undermine marital trust.

## DISCUSSION

### Changing Perceptions of the Young Generation towards Marriage

Social media plays a significant role in shaping young people's perceptions of marriage; the "Marriage is Scary" trend emphasizes negative narratives (marital conflict, financial stress, loss of freedom) that heighten fear of commitment and delay marriage (Faqih, 2025). First, recurring content on platforms like TikTok and Instagram produces frames that highlight marital failure or problems—narratives that easily go viral and are often accepted by avid viewers as generic representations of marriage—thus fueling fear and skepticism about the institution of marriage among Gen Z (Angela, 2025).

Second, quantitative and qualitative evidence demonstrates measurable impact: survey studies and field research have found significant correlations between social media use and changes in perceptions and intentions toward marriage; some studies report the contribution of social media to variations in attitudes toward marriage reaching tens of percent, making social media not merely an information channel but a variable that influences aspirations and life decisions (Rahmah, 2025). Third, from a social construction perspective, the reality of marriage is shaped through symbolic interactions and the circulation of information: when digital platforms amplify negative narratives, the social meaning of marriage experiences mainstreaming—that is, the normalization of certain views—especially among individuals whose intensity of exposure and resonance with their personal experiences are high (Asy'ari & Amelia, 2024).

Fourth, important mediating factors must be considered: individual interpretations of content are influenced by personal experiences (family trauma, emotional preparedness), economic circumstances, gender norms, and media literacy; therefore, the influence of social media is conditional—it can amplify concerns or, conversely, encourage thoughtful preparation if balanced educational content is available (Ulum, 2025). Fifth, recommended

policy implications and interventions include strengthening media literacy, implementing premarital education programs, and providing content that balances reality and expectations—steps that the literature has shown reduce perceptual distortions and help young people make more informed marital decisions (Dewi et al., 2025).

## CONCLUSION

This study has illuminated the profound influence of social media pressure on marital dynamics among Indonesia's younger generation, particularly through mechanisms of digital jealousy, social comparison, and dramaturgical performance on platforms like Instagram and TikTok. Drawing from a systematic literature review, the findings reveal that social media not only blurs the boundaries between private marital life and public spectacle—echoing Goffman's front-stage/backstage dichotomy—but also fosters idealized expectations, negative narratives, and relational conflicts such as phubbing, diminished trust, and heightened divorce risks. These dynamics erode communication quality, amplify dissatisfaction, and contribute to delayed or rejected marital commitments, with empirical evidence linking intensive use to measurable declines in satisfaction and rising divorce rates among 20-30-year-olds. Sociologically, this phenomenon signals a broader erosion of traditional family institutions in digital Indonesia, where Gen Z's heavy platform engagement intensifies vulnerability amid limited real-world experience. Moderating factors such as media literacy, religious/cultural values, and critical use patterns offer protective buffers, underscoring that impacts are not deterministic but contingent on individual and contextual resilience. While this literature-based analysis provides a comprehensive synthesis of recent evidence, its reliance on secondary sources limits its generalizability to primary empirical contexts; future research should employ mixed-methods designs, including longitudinal surveys and in-depth interviews with Indonesian couples, to test causal pathways and the efficacy of interventions. Ultimately, these insights advocate targeted interventions: integrating digital literacy into premarital counseling, promoting realistic family education programs, and encouraging platform regulations to promote authentic content. By fostering balanced digital habits, policymakers and educators can safeguard marital sustainability, empowering the younger generation to navigate online pressures while preserving authentic relational bonds.

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