



Gen Z Marriage: Loneliness as a Moderator of Partner Phubbing and Marital Satisfaction

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Abstract

Generation Z, known as digital natives, is highly familiar with technology and social media, which can influence various aspects of life, including marital satisfaction. This study aimed to explore the role of loneliness as a moderator in the relationship between partner phubbing and marital satisfaction in Generation Z. A correlational quantitative approach with a cross-sectional design was employed in this research. The study involved 204 Generation Z participants aged 20-29 who had been married for 1-7 years. The research instruments included a partner phubbing scale, a marital satisfaction scale, and a loneliness scale. Data analysis was conducted using the moderation mediation module in Jamovi. The results indicated that both partner phubbing and loneliness were negatively related to marital satisfaction ($Z = -2.633, p < .001$; $Z = -3.843, p < .001$). This suggests that higher levels of phubbing experienced by partners are associated with lower reported marital satisfaction. Furthermore, greater loneliness was found to be linked to lower marital satisfaction in Generation Z. However, no moderating effect of loneliness was found in the relationship between partner phubbing and marital satisfaction ($Z = 0.794, p = .427$). This indicates that the impact of phubbing on marital satisfaction remains consistent for individuals with both low and high levels of loneliness. This study offers valuable insights for Generation Z couples on the impact of technology use on marital relationships, highlighting the importance of considering loneliness in maintaining relationship quality. Education on the mindful use of technology is crucial for achieving marital satisfaction among Generation Z.

Keywords: *generation Z, loneliness, marital satisfaction, phubbing*

1. INTRODUCTION

Generation Z, typically encompassing individuals born between the mid-1990s and the 2000s, is a cohort that has grown up in a digital era (Csobanka, 2016). As digital natives, they are deeply immersed in technology, social media, and online connectivity from an early age. Technology plays a significant role in daily life, including shaping identities, social interactions, and interpersonal relationships, including marital relationships (Tirocchi, 2024; Turner, 2015).

While Generation Z is known for being adaptable to technological changes, they face unique challenges in marriage. One prominent issue is how technology, particularly smartphones, can influence perceptions of marriage (Arocho, 2021) and disrupt the quality of marital relationships (Çakır & Köseliören, 2022). Young couples in Generation Z may struggle to maintain meaningful face-to-face interactions, given their tendency to remain constantly connected to the digital world (Olçum & Gülova, 2023). The pervasive use of social media and the internet in their daily lives can lead to communication problems, intimacy issues, and marital satisfaction challenges (Alimoradi et al., 2019; McDaniel et al., 2017).

Marital satisfaction is a global evaluation by individuals regarding the state of their marriage, reflecting their happiness and functionality in the relationship (Crane, 2013). It is not only about

how well couples function together but also about the subjective feelings they have towards each other and their marriage as a whole (Chen & Hu, 2021). Aspects such as relationship adjustment, happiness levels, integrity, and commitment between partners are essential elements in the evaluation of marital life.

Marital satisfaction is heavily influenced by partners' subjective feelings, including happiness, satisfaction, and pleasure when reflecting on various aspects of their marriage. When couples feel that their relationship is fulfilling and meets their expectations, they are more likely to experience greater overall happiness and satisfaction (Tummala, 2008).

From a health psychology perspective, marital relationships play a critical role in shaping individuals' emotional stability, stress regulation, and overall psychological well-being (Carr et al., 2014). Disruptions in relational quality, such as those caused by technoferece, can negatively impact mental health by increasing emotional distress, reducing perceived social support, and diminishing relationship satisfaction.

The interaction between partners is crucial for marital satisfaction. Shared understanding, interaction, and communication are key elements in creating a satisfying marital life. Couples who understand and support each other, as well as communicate effectively, are more likely to enjoy a happy marriage (Lavner et al., 2016). Marital satisfaction is an important aspect of an individual's psychological well-being, contributing to long-term emotional stability and happiness (Carr et al., 2014; Kharपुरi & Priya, 2019). Given that Generation Z is now in the stage of adulthood where marriage becomes more common, it is essential to understand the factors influencing marital satisfaction within this generation.

Various factors influence marital satisfaction, including communication quality (Lavner et al., 2016), emotional regulation (Bloch et al., 2014), and commitment between partners (Hou et al., 2019). Other factors such as work-life balance (Ashwini, 2018), social support (Nawaz et al., 2014), and economic conditions (Khezri et al., 2020) also contribute to marital satisfaction. However, in the context of Generation Z, technology use and digital interactions have emerged as increasingly relevant factors that require attention (Serbanescu, 2022).

Technology-mediated behaviors such as phubbing represent a growing concern in health psychology due to their impact on mental well-being and interpersonal functioning. As digital interactions increase, research has begun to document how technology-related behaviors can contribute to emotional dysregulation, decreased life satisfaction, and increased isolation within intimate relationships (Carnelley et al., 2023; Sease et al., 2024).

Phubbing, the act of ignoring a partner in favor of using a smartphone, has emerged as one factor that can undermine relationship quality. In the case of Generation Z, where smartphones and social media dominate, partner phubbing can decrease marital satisfaction by diminishing the quality of face-to-face interactions, fostering feelings of neglect, and triggering conflicts (Khodabakhsh & Le Ong, 2021; Wang et al., 2021).

Partner phubbing refers to behavior in which one partner feels ignored because the other is more focused on their smartphone, such as checking social media or texting, rather than giving attention to their partner (Al-Saggaf, 2022). The term "phubbing" is a blend of "phone" and "snubbing," describing the act of disregarding someone due to being engrossed with one's smartphone (Garrido et al., 2021).

The impact of phubbing on romantic relationships can be highly detrimental (Beukeboom & Pollmann, 2021). When one partner feels neglected due to phubbing, it can reduce relationship satisfaction. Partners who feel unappreciated may begin to lose trust and experience negative emotions such as anger, disappointment, or feeling undervalued. If this behavior continues,

phubbing can erode emotional closeness and communication quality in the relationship, ultimately threatening the harmony of the partnership (Carnelley et al., 2023).

Several studies have reported that frequent exposure to partner phubbing is associated not only with reduced relationship satisfaction but also with heightened psychological distress, including symptoms of anxiety, and depressive tendencies (Maftai & Măirean, 2023; Wang & Zhao, 2022). This finding aligns with the broader understanding in health psychology that ongoing relational neglect can contribute to negative emotional outcomes and mental health vulnerabilities.

Despite being in a social relationship such as marriage, individuals are not exempt from loneliness. Research shows that loneliness can be a significant factor affecting marital satisfaction (Dadoo & Dabiri, 2019). Loneliness is a subjective emotional state characterized by the perception that one is alone or isolated, even in the presence of others (Seeman et al., 2023). Loneliness arises when there is a mismatch between the social connections a person desires and those they actually have (Tiwari, 2013).

Both partner phubbing and loneliness have been separately studied as factors related to marital satisfaction. However, there is limited research exploring the role of loneliness in moderating the relationship between partner phubbing and marital satisfaction, especially among Generation Z. Individuals who feel lonely are more likely to experience a sense of being neglected and unsupported by their partner, which can exacerbate the negative effects of phubbing. Therefore, research into the moderating role of loneliness is crucial to understand how the strength of the relationship between partner phubbing and marital satisfaction may shift depending on loneliness as a moderator. The selection of loneliness as a moderating variable is grounded in theoretical and empirical evidence suggesting that lonely individuals are more emotionally reactive to perceived rejection and relational neglect (Hawkley & Cacioppo, 2010). According to social pain theory, loneliness heightens one's sensitivity to exclusion cues, such as being ignored or overlooked by a partner (Saporta et al., 2021). Therefore, loneliness may amplify the psychological and relational consequences of phubbing.

This study aims to explore the extent to which loneliness influences the relationship between partner phubbing and marital satisfaction in Generation Z. By identifying the role of loneliness, this research seeks to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how phubbing affects marital satisfaction in Generation Z couples.

Research on the moderating role of loneliness is essential to understanding the complex dynamics between partner phubbing and marital satisfaction. By considering loneliness as a moderating factor, the findings of this study may offer new insights into how to mitigate the negative impact of phubbing and provide practical recommendations for Generation Z couples to enhance the quality of their marital relationships in the digital age.

This research contributes to the health psychology literature by integrating digital behavior patterns, such as phubbing, with relational and psychological outcomes. It highlights the need to consider psychological vulnerability factors, like loneliness, when examining how emerging digital habits influence mental health and relationship dynamics in young married populations.

2. METHODS

2.1. Research Design

The study uses a quantitative correlational approach with a cross-sectional design. This design allows for the examination of relationships between variables at a single point in time, making it suitable for understanding how partner phubbing, marital satisfaction, and loneliness interact in Generation Z individuals who are married. The primary objective of the research is to

investigate whether loneliness acts as a moderator in the relationship between partner phubbing and marital satisfaction.

2. 2. Participants

The participants of this study were individuals from Generation Z, defined as those born between 1995 and 2005. Participants were required to be married or currently in a marriage, not in a long-distance marriage, and must use a smartphone.

2. 3. Procedures

The sampling method used in this study was convenience sampling, a non-probability sampling technique where participants are selected based on availability and ease of access (Elfil & Negida, 2017). Data collection was conducted using an online form (Google Form), which was distributed through various social media platforms, including Instagram, X (Twitter), Facebook, and WhatsApp. This approach was designed to reach married Generation Z participants.

2. 4. Instruments

The instruments used in this study include a demographic data form, the Partner Phubbing Scale, the Marital Satisfaction Scale, and the Loneliness Scale. Demographic data form collects basic information about the participants, such as their age, gender, duration of marriage, and number of children.

All instruments originally developed in English were translated into Bahasa Indonesian using a standardized *forward-backward translation* procedure to ensure linguistic and conceptual equivalence. First, two bilingual psychologists independently translated the original items into Indonesian. The two translated versions were synthesized and reviewed to resolve discrepancies and ensure cultural relevance. Next, a separate pair of bilingual experts, blind to the original instruments, back-translated the Indonesian versions into English. These back-translations were then compared with the original items to assess semantic accuracy and consistency.

To evaluate cultural appropriateness, a panel of three experts in clinical psychology and psychological measurement reviewed the translated items. Minor adjustments were made to accommodate cultural sensitivities, especially in items that referenced emotional expressions or interpersonal behaviors within romantic relationships. A pilot test involving 30 married Indonesian Gen Z participants was conducted to assess clarity, cultural acceptability, and internal consistency of the translated scales.

Partner Phubbing Scale measures the extent to which a person feels ignored or neglected by their romantic partner due to the partner's use of a smartphone. It was developed by David and Roberts (2016) and consists of 9 items. The scale has demonstrated good reliability with an alpha coefficient of $\alpha = 0.94$ (David & Roberts, 2016). It has been widely used in research on partner phubbing across various countries (David & Roberts, 2021; Schokkenbroek et al., 2022; Yam, 2022; Zhan et al., 2022). In this study, the Indonesian version of the Partner Phubbing Scale had a reliability of $\alpha = 0.954$.

The ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale, developed by Fowers and Olson (1993), is used to assess various aspects of marital satisfaction, including communication, conflict resolution, and affection. The scale has been widely used in studies of marital satisfaction in various countries (Arab Alidousti et al., 2015; Kareem et al., 2023; Nunes et al., 2022). It demonstrates strong psychometric properties, with internal consistency ranging from $\alpha = 0.74$ to 0.86 (Arab Alidousti et al., 2015; Fakari et al., 2022; Fotokian et al., 2020). In this study, the Indonesian version of the

ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale had a reliability of $\alpha = 0.978$. The ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale (EMS) developed by Fowers and Olson (1993) consists of 15 items, with 10 items assessing key aspects of marital satisfaction (e.g., affection, communication, conflict resolution), and 5 items measuring idealistic distortion, which reflects the respondent's tendency to present an overly positive view of their marriage. Each item is rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). Some items are negatively worded and were reverse-scored before further computation.

In accordance with the original scoring procedure, total raw scores were computed separately for the Marital Satisfaction (MS) subscale (items 2, 3, 5, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 14, and 15) and the Idealistic Distortion (ID) subscale (items 1, 4, 6, 9, and 13). For negatively keyed items (items 5, 8, 12, 14, and 9), scores were reversed prior to computation. Raw scores were then converted into percentile ranks based on the normative data provided by Fowers and Olson (1993). When a raw score fell below the lowest available norm in the table, a conservative extrapolated value was assigned (i.e., MS = 10th percentile, ID = 0 percentile), to ensure continuity of scoring while acknowledging potential limitations in extreme scores. The final EMS score was computed using the following correction formula, which adjusts the MS percentile score based on the respondent's level of idealistic distortion: $EMS = PCT_MS - [0.40 \times PCT_MS \times (PCT_ID / 100)]$.

The Three-Item Loneliness Scale (TILS) measures subjective feelings of loneliness and social isolation. It was developed as a quick tool for assessing loneliness, with items derived from the Revised UCLA Loneliness Scale (Hughes et al., 2004). The TILS has been tested and used in several countries and has shown good psychometric properties, with reliability ranging from $\alpha = 0.72$ to 0.82 (Hughes et al., 2004; Igarashi, 2019; Trucharte et al., 2021). In this study, the Indonesian version of TILS demonstrated good internal consistency with a reliability of $\alpha = 0.877$.

2. 5. Data Analysis

The data analysis involved descriptive statistics, assumption testing, and moderation analysis. All analyses were conducted using Jamovi statistical software, with moderation analysis performed using the mediation and moderation module in Jamovi. Moderation analysis was used to assess whether the strength or direction of the relationship between the variables of interest was influenced by a third variable, in this case, loneliness (The Jamovi Project, 2024).

3. RESULTS

The age range for participants was 20 to 29 years old, and the duration of marriage ranged from 1 to 7 years. The demographic characteristics of the participants are presented in Table 1. Based on the data collected, the study involved 204 participants who were married. The majority of participants were female (62.3%). Participants' ages varied, with the highest proportion aged between 25 and 28 years. The most common age was 26 years (23.5%). The duration of participants' marriages also varied, with the largest proportion being married for 2 years (36.3%), followed by 4 years (19.6%) and 3 years (18.6%). Additionally, most participants had one child (62.7%).

Descriptive analysis showed that the average partner phubbing score was $M = 30.32$ ($SD = 10.81$), on a scale ranging from 9 to 45. This mean score falls above the theoretical midpoint of 27, suggesting that participants in this study generally perceived a relatively frequent occurrence of phubbing behaviors from their partners. The median score was 36.00, further indicating that more than half of the participants reported higher-than-midpoint experiences of partner phubbing.

Table 1

Demographic data

Characteristics	n	%
Gender		
Female	127	62,3
Male	77	37,7
Age (years)		
20	3	1,5
21	7	3,4
22	1	0,5
23	5	2,5
24	8	3,9
25	33	16,2
26	48	23,5
27	42	20,6
28	37	18,1
29	20	9,8
Marriage duration (years)		
1	35	17,2
2	74	36,3
3	38	18,6
4	40	19,6
5	10	4,9
6	5	2,5
7	2	1,0
Number of children		
0	42	20,6
1	128	62,7
2	32	15,7
3	2	1,0

Furthermore, the average loneliness score ($M = 5.94$) was situated at the midpoint of the scale, with minimum and maximum values of 3.00 and 9.00, respectively. The median score ($Mdn = 7.00$), which was higher than the mean, indicates that more than half of the participants reported relatively high levels of loneliness. The low variability in loneliness scores ($SD = 2.23$) suggests consistent experiences of loneliness among participants.

The average marital satisfaction score was $M = 32.82$ ($SD = 21.04$), with a maximum value of 85.36. According to the criteria defined in the methods section, this mean indicates a moderate level of marital satisfaction overall. The large standard deviation suggests high variability among participants. The median score was 28.00, lower than the mean, indicating that more than half of the participants reported relatively lower satisfaction levels, with a few high scorers elevating the mean. A summary of the descriptive analysis results is presented in Table 2.

Table 2
Descriptive data

	N	Mean	Median	SD	Min	Maks
Partner phubbing	204	30.32	36.00	10.81	12.00	45.00
Loneliness	204	5.94	7.00	2.23	3.00	9.00
Marriage Satisfaction	204	32.82	28.00	21.04	8.52	85.36

Assumption tests showed that the data were normally distributed ($p = .112$). Additionally, there was no multicollinearity among the predictor variables, as indicated by a Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) of 3.41 ($VIF < 10$) and a Tolerance value of 0.293 ($p > .01$).

Moderation analysis (Table 3) revealed that partner phubbing was significantly and negatively associated with marital satisfaction ($Estimate = -0.3938$, $SE = 0.1496$, $Z = -2.633$, $p = .008$, 95% CI $[-0.687, -0.101]$). This indicates that higher levels of partner phubbing are associated with lower levels of marital satisfaction reported by Generation Z participants. These findings highlight that ignoring one's spouse due to excessive smartphone use can harm relationship quality and reduce marital satisfaction. Additionally, loneliness was also significantly and negatively associated with marital satisfaction ($Estimate = -2.2239$, $SE = 0.5786$, $Z = -3.843$, $p < .001$, 95% CI $[-3.358, -1.090]$), suggesting that the higher the level of loneliness experienced by Generation Z participants, the lower their marital satisfaction. However, the interaction between partner phubbing and loneliness was not significantly associated with marital satisfaction ($Estimate = 0.0680$, $SE = 0.0856$, $Z = 0.794$, $p = .427$, 95% CI $[-0.100, 0.236]$). This indicates that loneliness does not significantly moderate the relationship between partner phubbing and marital satisfaction. In other words, the effect of partner phubbing on marital satisfaction remains consistent regardless of the level of loneliness experienced by individuals.

Table 3
Moderation Analysis Results

	Estimate	SE	95% Confidence Interval		Z	p
			Lower	Upper		
Partner phubbing	0.3938	0.1496	-1.906	-1.55	-19.35	< .001
Loneliness	-2.2239	0.5786	-3.3579	-1.090	-3.843	< .001
Partner phubbing * Loneliness	0.0680	0.0856	-0.0998	0.236	0.794	0.427

The simple slope analysis (Table 4) revealed that, at average levels of loneliness, partner phubbing was significantly and negatively associated with marital satisfaction ($Estimate = 0.394$, $SE = 0.150$, $Z = 2.63$, $p = .009$). This indicates that, at an average level of loneliness, higher levels of partner phubbing are associated with lower marital satisfaction. At low levels of loneliness (one standard deviation below the mean), the effect of partner phubbing on marital satisfaction was not significant ($Estimate = 0.243$, $SE = 0.156$, $Z = 1.55$, $p = .120$). This suggests that for individuals who feel less lonely, partner phubbing does not significantly impact marital satisfaction.

Table 4
Simple Slope Analysis Results

	Estimate	SE	Z	p
Average	0.394	0.150	2.63	0.009
Low (-1SD)	0.243	0.156	1.55	0.120
High (+1SD)	0.545	0.305	1.79	0.074

At high levels of loneliness (one standard deviation above the mean), the effect of partner phubbing on marital satisfaction approached significance but did not meet commonly accepted significance levels (*Estimate* = 0.545, *SE* = 0.305, *Z* = 1.79, *p* = .074). This indicates that for individuals who feel very lonely, partner phubbing tends to have a greater impact on reducing marital satisfaction, although this result is not strong enough to be considered statistically significant.

These findings suggest that the impact of partner phubbing on marital satisfaction varies depending on the level of loneliness experienced by individuals. While partner phubbing generally has a negative effect on marital satisfaction, its impact is more pronounced for individuals with higher levels of loneliness. However, for those with lower levels of loneliness, partner phubbing does not significantly affect marital satisfaction.

An exploratory independent samples t-test was conducted to examine whether gender differences existed in the main study variables. The results indicated no significant gender differences in loneliness ($t(202) = 0.354, p = .724$), marital satisfaction ($t(202) = -1.268, p = .206$), or partner phubbing ($t(202) = -0.161, p = .872$). These findings suggest that perceptions of phubbing, experiences of loneliness, and levels of marital satisfaction were relatively consistent across male and female participants in this sample.

4. DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to examine the relationship between partner phubbing and marital satisfaction among Generation Z couples and to explore whether loneliness moderates this relationship. The findings demonstrated that both partner phubbing and loneliness were significantly associated with lower marital satisfaction. However, no significant moderating effect of loneliness was observed. This conclusion suggests that the negative impact of partner phubbing on marital satisfaction persists regardless of whether individuals experience high or low levels of loneliness. These results provide a broad overview of how technology-related behaviors and emotional factors independently contribute to marital outcomes in young adults.

The study findings revealed a negative relationship between partner phubbing and marital satisfaction. These results align with previous research, which indicates that greater neglect of a partner due to technology use is associated with lower marital satisfaction (Wang & Zao, 2022). When one partner engages in phubbing, the other may feel emotionally neglected, leading to stress (Maftei & Măirean, 2023). Physical presence is not accompanied by emotional attentiveness, potentially fostering a sense of emotional disconnection. This neglect can create significant emotional distance between partners, diminishing the closeness and togetherness essential for a healthy marriage.

Phubbing interferes with direct communication between partners, which is a cornerstone of strong relationships. When attention is focused on smartphones rather than on the partner, the quality of meaningful conversations diminishes. Such behavior can lead to misunderstandings,

unclear expressions of feelings or desires, and, eventually, increased conflict in the relationship. Time spent together without technological distractions is vital for strengthening the marital bond (Hogan et al., 2021). However, phubbing reduces the quality of shared time by diverting attention away from interpersonal interactions, which weakens emotional connection (Roberts & David, 2016).

From a psychological health perspective, the findings suggest that persistent exposure to partner phubbing may erode marital quality and contribute to increased psychological distress. Neglect and lack of emotional responsiveness in intimate relationships are well-documented predictors of anxiety, depressive symptoms, and emotional dysregulation (Maftai & Măirean, 2023). When individuals feel ignored or undervalued by their partner, it may lead to heightened sensitivity to rejection and greater vulnerability to low mood and stress. In the context of Generation Z, where emotional expression often intersects with digital behavior, such relational neglect can escalate into internalized psychological strain.

Emotional and physical intimacy plays a critical role in sustaining marital satisfaction (Greeff & Malherbe, 2001; Yoo et al., 2014). Phubbing disrupts moments of intimacy by limiting opportunities for partners to connect on a deeper level. When someone prioritizes their smartphone over their partner, chances to strengthen bonds through physical touch, eye contact, or meaningful conversations are lost. Partners who frequently experience phubbing may feel less valued or significant in the relationship, potentially heightening feelings of jealousy or insecurity—especially if the phubbing involves interactions with others via social media or messaging apps (Arsyad & Imran, 2023). Such insecurities can lead to negative emotions about oneself and the relationship, ultimately reducing marital satisfaction.

The findings also suggest a negative relationship between loneliness and marital satisfaction. This is consistent with prior research showing that feelings of isolation or lack of emotional connection with a partner can decrease marital happiness (Mund & Johnson, 2020; Tough et al., 2018). In a marriage, partners are expected to meet each other's emotional needs, such as feeling loved, appreciated, and cared for. Loneliness may indicate that these needs are not being met by one's partner (Tejada et al., 2020). Feeling neglected or overlooked can result in dissatisfaction and a decline in relationship well-being (Sease et al., 2024).

Emotional intimacy is a vital component of marital satisfaction (Zaheri et al., 2016). Increased loneliness tends to reduce emotional closeness between partners, leaving individuals feeling disconnected both emotionally and physically (Saporta et al., 2021). This reduces the frequency and quality of meaningful interactions, such as sharing feelings, attention, or quality time together. Loneliness may also trigger negative self-reflection and doubts about the relationship (Hawkley & Cacioppo, 2010). Individuals might begin to feel unworthy of love or that their marriage fails to meet expectations, which exacerbates dissatisfaction with both themselves and their partners.

Beyond the relational consequences, loneliness poses a substantial threat to mental health. Research has linked chronic loneliness with increased symptoms of depression, anxiety, perceived stress, and physiological dysregulation such as altered immune responses and elevated cortisol levels (Hawkley & Cacioppo, 2010; Finley & Schaefer, 2022). In marital relationships, where emotional interdependence is expected, the presence of unresolved loneliness may erode psychological resilience and impair coping with daily stressors. Such behavior underscores the need to treat loneliness not only as a relational concern but also as a clinical marker of vulnerability in young couples.

When loneliness occurs in a marriage, individuals may withdraw from their partner or shared social activities. This withdrawal creates a cycle of social isolation that intensifies loneliness. In the marital context, such isolation can be particularly damaging, as marriage is often a primary source of social and emotional support. Consequently, satisfaction in the relationship declines (Haggerty et al., 2022). Loneliness in marriage can also increase stress (Finley & Schaefer, 2022). Lonely individuals may become more sensitive to their partner's behaviors, perceiving them as signs of rejection or indifference, which can trigger arguments and conflicts, further harming the relationship and reducing marital satisfaction (Karimi et al., 2019).

The study found that the interaction between partner phubbing and loneliness did not significantly correlate with marital satisfaction. In other words, loneliness did not significantly moderate the relationship between partner phubbing and marital satisfaction. This finding suggests that the impact of partner phubbing on marital satisfaction remains consistent, regardless of an individual's level of loneliness.

Loneliness may not be the most influential moderator in the relationship between partner phubbing and marital satisfaction. It is possible that other factors, such as trust, emotional attachment, or communication styles, are more relevant in moderating this relationship. Future studies may be needed to identify stronger and more pertinent moderating factors.

These findings suggest the need to reconsider how loneliness functions—not merely as an emotional experience, but also as a cognitive judgment influenced by one's expectations and perceptions of social support (Hawkey & Cacioppo, 2010). Individuals who have lower demands for emotional intimacy or who benefit from strong external support systems (such as friends, extended family, or community networks) may be less affected by partner phubbing. In contrast, those who place high emotional demands on their spouse and lack alternative sources of support may experience phubbing as more psychologically distressing. Future studies are encouraged to investigate how variations in support expectations, attachment patterns, and the availability of social support might interact with partner phubbing in influencing marital satisfaction.

The non-significant gender differences in partner phubbing, loneliness, and marital satisfaction suggest that the effects observed in this study may be generalizable across male and female participants within Generation Z. While prior research has occasionally noted gender-specific experiences in romantic dynamics, the present findings indicate similar relational and psychological patterns across genders in the context of phubbing and marriage.

This study has several limitations. It employed a correlational design, which limits the ability to draw causal conclusions. Although the study established relationships between partner phubbing, loneliness, and marital satisfaction, it cannot confirm whether partner phubbing or loneliness directly causes changes in marital satisfaction. Additionally, the interaction between partner phubbing and loneliness was not statistically significant, indicating that the moderation model used may not have been robust enough or that other more relevant factors could influence this relationship.

These results emphasize the importance of integrating psychological health perspectives into marital and relationship counseling, particularly for Generation Z couples who are navigating new patterns of digital behavior. Preventive mental health interventions should address not only relationship dynamics but also the internal psychological consequences of digital neglect and isolation. Strategies such as mindfulness-based relationship training, digital detox agreements, and cognitive-behavioral approaches to managing rejection sensitivity may enhance both relational quality and psychological well-being.

Although loneliness was not a significant moderator in the relationship between partner phubbing and marital satisfaction, the findings emphasize that loneliness remains a risk factor within the marital context. Therefore, interventions focused on alleviating loneliness, such as enhancing social support or strengthening emotional bonds, are still relevant to maintaining marital satisfaction.

The finding that loneliness does not moderate the relationship between partner phubbing and marital satisfaction suggests the need for further research to explore other factors that may act as moderators or mediators in this relationship. Future research could investigate variables such as trust, commitment, or communication styles.

These findings have practical implications for policymakers, particularly in designing programs to enhance family quality of life through education on mindful technology use. For example, public campaigns leveraging digital technology could promote reduced smartphone dependency and encourage quality time among family members. Empowering communities through the strategic use of digital tools has shown benefits in fostering social connections (Al Iffah, 2024).

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