

# The Digital Dilemma: Extramarital Relationships in Social Networks and the Mediating Role of Spirituality and Religious Attitudes

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## ABSTRACT

**Background:** The family unit is recognized as one of the five essential social structures. Extramarital relationships pose a significant threat to this structure, leading to numerous issues and are regarded as a primary contributor to divorce. The rising incidence of extramarital relationships has led researchers to examine the underlying dynamics and contributing factors. This study aimed to explore the influence of social networks on extramarital relationships, with a particular focus on the mediating effects of spirituality and religious beliefs.

**Methods:** This study employed a descriptive-correlational design with a structural equation modeling approach. The statistical population included all married individuals aged 25 to 55 living in Tehran, Iran, who sought counseling services in two regions of Tehran during 2023 due to issues related to extramarital affairs. Using convenience sampling, a sample of 230 participants was selected based on the number of model components. Data were collected using the Attitude Toward Infidelity Scale (Whatley, 2006), the Religious Attitude Questionnaire (Glock and Stark, 1965), the Spiritual Assessment Inventory (Hall and Edwards, 1996), and Jahanbani's Social Networks Questionnaire (2018). Statistical analyses included Pearson's correlation coefficient and structural equation modeling, performed using SPSS version 26 and Amos version 24.

**Results:** Data from 230 participants, comprising 118 women (51.30%) and 112 men (48.69%) with a mean age of 38.55 years, were analyzed. Results from the structural equation modeling indicated a significant positive correlation between social network usage and extramarital relationships ( $t=3.29$ ,  $r=0.74$ ). Additionally, religious attitudes showed a significant negative correlation with extramarital relationships ( $t=1.39$ ,  $r=-0.32$ ), while spirituality was significantly positively correlated with extramarital relationships ( $t=1.20$ ,  $r=0.49$ ). Furthermore, both spirituality and religious attitudes served as mediators in the relationship between virtual space usage and marital relationships ( $t=2.29$ ,  $r=0.41$ ;  $t=1.98$ ,  $r=0.31$ ).

**Conclusion:** Given the inability to eliminate virtual environments and their influence on marital relationships, enhancing spirituality and religiosity may serve as an effective measure to prevent infidelity.

**Keywords:** Extramarital Affair, Spirituality, Religious Attitudes, Social Networking, Internet

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## Introduction

Social media encompasses various online networking platforms and serves as a comprehensive illustration of Web 2.0 technologies. The presence of the Internet, combined with social media platforms and mobile communication technologies, significantly impacts societal dynamics and personal relationships (1). Marriage is recognized as one of the most profound and revered human relationships, serving as a foundation for support, intimacy, and shared enjoyment. It fosters mutual interest and acceptance of the joint responsibilities that each partner holds toward the other, while also fulfilling psychological, physical, and social needs (2). In a normal marital relationship, the process of psychological transformation of husband and wife and the cycle of family transformation expands through the constructive interactions of spouses, and social norms generalize it (3). The family is the platform for the growth, peace and continuity of the life of its members, and any factor that disrupts the achievement of its goals can cause crisis and damage in this important institution. Currently, various social challenges pose significant risks to the family unit; consequently, any threat to the family constitutes a broader threat to society as a whole (4). Extramarital affairs, or infidelity, represent a significant challenge for couples, often precipitating crises within marital relationships. Infidelity is typically defined as the violation of the exclusive sexual agreement between two committed, married partners (5). In recent years, the widespread adoption of digital technologies has increasingly influenced the dynamics of intimate partnerships. The expansion of internet usage has introduced novel sources of conflict stemming from interactions within virtual environments, which has become a notable factor contributing to the rising number of consultations sought by couples (6).

The Internet, this amazing phenomenon, has created an important revolution in communication. Its main features are feedback and interaction. The Internet connects users

24 hours a day and now, as a postmodern medium, enables humans to overcome space and language (7). The advent of the Internet has revolutionized communication methods, introducing a new cultural landscape with distinct dimensions compared to traditional media. One significant aspect is the emergence of ethical issues in online communication (8).

Wide access to social networks and the possibility of easy communication have increased the possibility of extramarital relationships. In other words, media and social networks potentially provide a suitable platform for such relationships (9-11). It is believed that the three factors of availability, anonymity and affordability have made the Internet able to subvert the foundation of the family (12).

The engagement of couples in cyberspace has altered their expectations of one another and, in some cases, has led to mutual discouragement within the relationship. Under these circumstances, individuals may experience a sense of entrapment within their marital bonds (11). Consequently, the expansion of the Internet and the proliferation of digital media tools are increasingly recognized as potential risk factors affecting intimate relationships (13). Individuals inhabit these digital environments in ways that demonstrate the Internet is not merely a separate virtual realm but rather an extension of real life; for many, cyberspace serves as an additional venue for social interaction and relationship formation. Thus, virtual spaces are integrated into daily life rather than existing as isolated or exotic domains (14). Given the complexity of modern life and the multifaceted dependencies people have on digital media, it is nearly impossible to eliminate media and virtual environments from everyday existence (15). Nonetheless, it is unrealistic to assume that cyberspace alone can fulfill all emerging human needs (16). Therefore, it is important to identify factors that may inhibit the development of extramarital relationships online. Among various determinants, research highlights spirituality and religious commitment as

significant protective factors against marital infidelity (17, 18).

Since religion and spirituality are two different concepts and are sometimes used interchangeably, it is important to first clarify their definitions. Spirituality is characterized as a dynamic and motivating force that affirms life. It entails a continuous pursuit of meaning, purpose, and existential understanding (19). This concept involves the exploration of ultimate truths and sacred realities that hold personal significance. Moreover, spirituality constitutes a fundamental aspect of human experience that individuals bring into therapeutic contexts, encompassing their beliefs, behaviors, experiences, values, interpersonal relationships, and spiritual challenges (20). Spirituality represents humanity's attempt to communicate with the self, God, nature, and others. Research findings indicate that spirituality aids in resolving everyday problems and can be viewed as a set of capacities that enhance well-being and adaptability. Mental health professionals have increasingly recognized the significance of spirituality in human life over the past decades (21).

Spirituality can be effective in preventing many problems in the family environment, including conflicts, disagreements and marital dissatisfaction. It provides a sense of purpose, meaning and commitment to marriage and helps couples feel that their bond is 'meant to be' and 'a gift from God.' This strengthens their marital bond, and adherence to spiritual beliefs is associated with a lower likelihood of marital infidelity (22). Researchers have found that the factors associated with spirituality can promote greater fidelity and commitment within marriage (23). Spirituality appears to increase marital faithfulness and the ability of couples to emphasize the resolution of conflicts in their relationship (24).

Another important concept is religion and religious beliefs. According to Emile Durkheim (1858–1917), religion represents a form of transcendent spirituality that is inherently intertwined with both individual and social existence. Religion can contribute

positively to addressing social issues, as it empowers individuals by enhancing their sense of strength and capacity to overcome challenges (25).

Although little research has examined how religion may specifically influence marital infidelity (26), religion is a strong predictor of healthy family functioning (17, 27). Studying marital fidelity is very important, as it is a vital aspect of a healthy marriage. Research findings indicate that using religion as a foundation for marriage is inversely related to the likelihood of sexual infidelity; in other words, people who marry based on religious beliefs are more likely to remain faithful to their spouse (17, 26, 27).

Religious involvement has been shown to foster feelings of hope, social connectedness, emotional tranquility, self-regulation, spiritual intimacy, and facilitate coping with life challenges (28). According to theoretical frameworks and empirical studies, the positive health outcomes observed among individuals engaged in religious practices are largely attributed to their adoption of health-promoting behaviors and lifestyles that align with their religious doctrines (29). Belief in the existence of God has been associated with a decrease in negative and undesirable behaviors (30) and a reduction in engagement in irresponsible actions (31). Although previous cases have been documented, research indicates that religiosity—particularly when defined by interpersonal dimensions—as well as the stage and type of marriage, can exert varying influences on couples. The interplay between religiosity and marital relationships is complex and multifactorial, necessitating a comprehensive evaluation of diverse contributing factors. Given that virtual environments are an inescapable aspect of modern life, and recognizing that religion and spirituality may offer valuable resources for addressing challenges related to extramarital interactions within these virtual spaces (32), it is imperative to explore these dynamics further.

Additional research in this domain is essential, as it has the potential to yield

important insights into the role of religious beliefs and practices in addressing the challenges posed by cyberspace to marital fidelity. Expanding investigations in this area could enhance understanding of how faith-based factors contribute to mitigating the impact of online environments on the stability of marital relationships. A survey of existing literature reveals that, to date, no research conducted in Iran has specifically investigated the influence of spirituality and religious beliefs on extramarital relationships within the context of cyberspace. Furthermore, considering that marital infidelity represents a multifaceted phenomenon garnering growing scholarly interest, examining this issue in the digital realm—where interactions are often mediated and complicated by online platforms—is especially critical. In the proposed model, we examine the dynamics of marital infidelity and its association with the use of virtual networks. Additionally, considering the significant influence of spirituality and religious beliefs on interpersonal relationships and commitment, exploring the interplay between spiritual and religious factors may provide valuable insights for reinforcing marital bonds and addressing challenges posed by technological advancements. The current study was designed to examine the influence of spirituality and religious attitudes on the relationship between extramarital affairs and social networks. Specifically, it addressed the question of how virtual environments impact extramarital relationships, considering the mediating effects of spirituality and religious beliefs. The conceptual framework guiding

this research is illustrated in Figure 1.

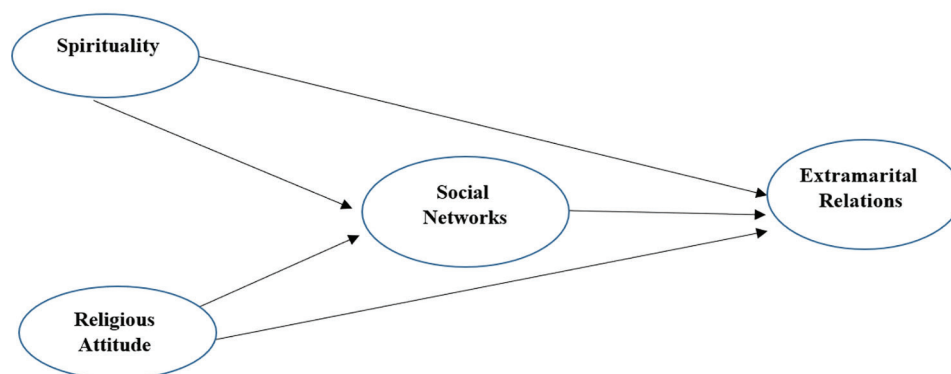
## Methods

### *Study Design and Setting*

The present study employed a descriptive correlational design utilizing structural equation modeling. The target population comprised married individuals aged 25 to 55 residing in Tehran, Iran, who sought services at counseling centers in two designated regions of Tehran during 2023 due to issues related to extramarital affairs. Five counseling centers consented to participate in the study and provided the required data for analysis.

### *Participants and Sampling*

The sample size was determined following the guideline of including 15 participants per predictor variable, reflecting the methodological similarities between structural equation modeling and multivariate regression analyses (33). Generally, it is advised that sample sizes for structural equation modeling should range from 2.5 to 7 times the number of components in the model (34, 35). To account for potential participant dropout, an initial pool of 250 individuals was recruited using convenience sampling. Ultimately, 230 participants were enrolled, matching the number of model components. Eligibility criteria required participants to be aged between 25 and 55 years, have no prior history of psychoactive substance use or addiction, possess a smartphone, and provide informed consent. Individuals who discontinued the questionnaire or failed to respond to more than 20% of the items were excluded from the final data analysis.



**Figure 1:** The conceptual framework illustrating the association between extramarital relationships and social networks



### Tools / Instruments

Four validated questionnaires were utilized in the present research:

**Q1. Attitude Toward Infidelity Scale:** The questionnaire was designed by Whatley (2006) to assess individuals' cognitive and emotional responses regarding issues of marital infidelity. The scale consists of 12 items, each rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree). The items are designed without any correct or incorrect responses. In items 1, 3, 4, 9, 10, and 11, responses were scored from 1 point for 'strongly disagree' to 7 points for 'strongly agree' (36). Items 2, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 12 were reverse scored, meaning their scoring scale was inverted. The total possible score ranged from a minimum of 12 to a maximum of 84. A score of 48 indicates an intermediate position between acceptance and rejection of infidelity, with higher scores corresponding to an increased likelihood of infidelity. The structural validity of the questionnaire was assessed using item-total score correlations, yielding correlation coefficients ranging from 0.75 to 0.87, all significant at the 0.01 level. The psychometric properties of this scale have been evaluated in Iran, where confirmatory factor analysis supported a first-order factorial structure. Reliability was demonstrated through internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.71, and test-retest reliability of 0.87. Additionally, reliability assessment via Cronbach's alpha in another study produced a coefficient of 0.81 (37). Another report indicated a Cronbach's alpha of 0.85 for this scale (38), while the present study found a coefficient of 0.79.

**Q2. Religious Attitude Questionnaire:** The questionnaire developed by Glock and Stark in 1965 was designed to evaluate religious attitudes and beliefs through multiple dimensions of religiosity, including belief, ritual, experience, and knowledge (39). Its application has extended to standardizing the measurement of these constructs across various countries in Europe, America, Africa, and Asia, as well as among adherents of Christianity and Islam. This questionnaire

has 26 items with a Likert scale ranging from 'Completely Disagree' to 'Completely Agree'. In determining religiosity, it is assumed that 50 percent between the two scales shows average religiosity, so scores 0-26 indicate weak religiosity, 26-78 indicate moderate religiosity and 104-78 indicate high religiosity (40). In this study, the Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was employed to assess the construct validity of the questionnaire, yielding a Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) of 0.057. The findings indicate that the questionnaire possesses strong content validity (41). The Cronbach's alpha coefficient was also reported as 0.84 (42), while the current study found a coefficient of 0.79.

**Q3. Spirituality Questionnaire:** This questionnaire consists of 47 items derived from the study conducted by Paya Hall and Edwards (1996) (43). Responses are measured using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 'Strongly Agree' to 'Strongly Disagree'. The questionnaire yields scores ranging from 47 to 235. It has been standardized within the Iranian population, exhibiting a construct validity coefficient of 87.4 (44). Furthermore, content validity was evaluated in an independent study where five psychology experts assessed the congruence between the questionnaire items and the construct of spirituality. Results demonstrated that most spirituality-related items received positive evaluations, and there was a significant correlation between the experts' ratings of spirituality definitions and the questionnaire subscales, supporting the instrument's satisfactory content validity. Moreover, the questionnaire demonstrated high internal consistency, with a reported Cronbach's alpha of 0.93 (45).

**Q4. Social Network Questionnaire:** The questionnaire, originally developed in Persian by Jahanbani (2018), comprises 19 items (46). It is structured as a three-dimensional instrument assessing frequency of use (items 1-5), type of use (items 6-12), and users' trust level in networks (items 13-19). Responses are recorded on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Very Low) to 5 (Very High). Total scores range from 19 to 95, with higher scores

on each subscale reflecting greater difficulties related to that dimension. Previous studies reported a Cronbach's alpha of 0.85 for this questionnaire (39), while the current study found a reliability coefficient of 0.73.

### Data Collection

Five counseling centers located in two different regions of Tehran, Iran, participated in this study. Married individuals seeking assistance for issues related to extramarital affairs and who consented to take part were identified and contacted. These participants received a link to the questionnaire through WhatsApp or other social media platforms, along with details about the study's purpose and assurances that their responses would remain confidential. Completing the online questionnaire took each participant approximately 45 to 60 minutes.

### Data Analysis

To analyze the collected data, Pearson's correlation coefficient and structural equation modeling were used. structural equation modeling was employed for its capacity to assess complex interrelationships among variables. Data analyses were conducted using SPSS version 26 and Amos version 24. Prior to testing the research's conceptual model, key assumptions—including the presence of missing data, detection of outliers, and assessment of variable distribution normality—were thoroughly evaluated. Additionally, multiple fit indices were utilized to assess the adequacy of the model fit.

**Ethics** - Participants took part in the study entirely on a voluntary basis, without any pressure or compulsion. The objectives

of the research were clearly communicated to them in advance. Due to the sensitive topic of extramarital affairs, strict confidentiality was guaranteed, and all responses were gathered anonymously. The study fully complied with ethical guidelines set by the Research Committee of Payame Noor University, Iran.

### Results

The study comprised a total of 230 individuals, with females representing 51.30% (n=118) and males accounting for 48.69% (n=112) of the sample. The mean age of the participants was 38.55 years. Detailed demographic characteristics are presented in Table 1.

To determine the relationship between the research variables, Pearson's correlation coefficient test was used which is presented in Table 2. Also, the descriptive data of research variables such as mean and standard deviation are reported in Table 2.

As presented in Table 2, the social networks variable exhibited the highest dispersion in the scores and the extramarital relationships variable showed the least dispersion in the scores. Also, considering that the coefficients of skewness and kurtosis are between -2 and +2, it indicates the normal distribution of the research variables.

To determine the correlation among the research variables, Pearson's correlation coefficient test was employed (Table 2). The results indicated correlation values ranging from -0.18 to +0.76, with the highest correlation observed between spirituality and extramarital relationships, and the weakest between spirituality and social networks.

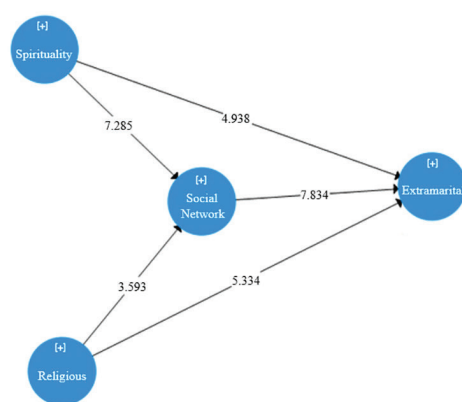
**Table 1:** Demographic characteristics of participants

Variables		Frequency
		N (%)
Gender	Female	118 (51.30)
	Male	112 (48.70)
Educational Level	Diploma	44 (19.13)
	BSc	146 (63.47)
	MSc/PhD.	40 (17.40)
Age (Year)	Female	Mean±SD (38.55±1.44)
	Male	Mean±SD (40.23±1.86)

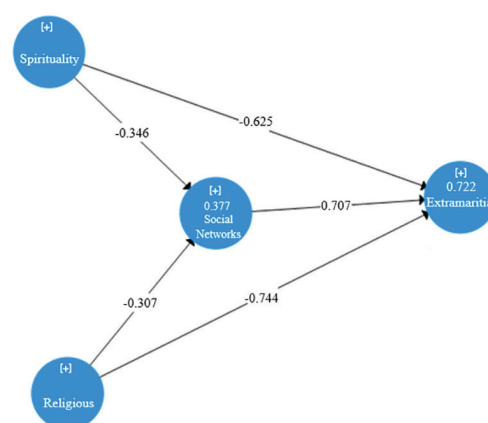
**Table 2:** Correlation matrix of research variables and Descriptive statistics pertaining to the variables studied

Variables	Statistics	1	2	3	4	Mean±SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Extramarital relation	Pearson Correlation	1				39.47±1.42	1.32	0.93
	P-value							
Social networks	Pearson Correlation	0.42**	1			65.12±4.37	1.57	1.06
	P-value	0.001						
Spirituality	Pearson Correlation	-0.18**	0.19**	1		62.73±1.96	1.15	0.98
	P-value	0.02	0.02					
Religious attitudes	Pearson Correlation	0.20**	0.22**	0.76**	1	81.33±2.27	0.92	1.18
	P-value	0.019	0.018	0.000				

\*P&lt;0.05; \*\*P&lt;0.01



Correlation between extramarital relationships and social networks in T-value status



Correlation between extramarital relationships and social networks in standard status

**Figure 2:** Structural model exploring correlation between extramarital relationships and social networks**Table 3:** Estimated coefficients of direct effect and indirect effect

Parameter routes	T	P-value	Standardized Parameter
Religious attitude --> social networks	3.593	0.001	-0.625
spirituality --> social networks	7.285	0.01	-0.346
Social networks --> extramarital relations	7.834	0.001	0.707
Religious attitude --> extramarital relations	5.334	0.001	-0.744
Religious attitude-> social networks -> extramarital relations	2.57	0.002	0.217
Spirituality -> social networks -> extramarital relations	2.90	0.001	0.245

To evaluate the influence of virtual space on extramarital relationships, mediated by spirituality and religious attitudes, structural equation modeling was conducted using SmartPLS software. The research's structural model is illustrated in Figure 2.

Additionally, several valid indicators were employed to check the research's model fit, with the findings presented in Tables 3 and 4.

The first index examined was the Standardized Root Mean Square residual

(SRMR), which was calculated as 31.2, indicating a close fit of the model. The Comparative Fit Index (CFI), which compares the model of interest to a null model, was 92.0, indicating a very good fit. The Goodness of Fit Index (GFI), which measures the proportion of variance and covariance explained by the model, was 94.0, which is higher than the acceptable threshold of 90.0, indicating a good fit. The Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI), which adjusts the GFI for model complexity and degrees of freedom, was

**Table 4:** The final fit indicators of the research

Index	Estimation	Optimal values
( $\chi^2/df$ )	2.04	<3
TLI ( (Tucker-Lewis Index))	0.93	>0.90
CFI (Comparative Fit Index)	0.92	>0.90
GFI (Goodness of Fit Index)	0.91	>0.90
NFI (Normed Fit Index)	0.94	>0.90
AGFI (Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index)	0.93	>0.90
RMSEA (Root Mean Square Error of Approximation)	0.06	<0.08

94.0, indicating a good fit. The Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), which measures the discrepancy between the model and the data, was 06.0, indicating a good fit. Taken together, these metrics suggest an acceptable fit for the final model.

## Discussion

The current study aimed to investigate the role of virtual networks on extramarital relationships, considering the mediating effects of spirituality and religious attitudes. The findings indicated that spirituality and religious attitude have a negative correlation with extramarital relationships, suggesting that individuals with higher levels of spirituality and stronger religious attitudes tend to engage less in such relationships. Conversely, the correlation between the use of virtual networks and extramarital relationships was positive and significant, implying that increased engagement with virtual networks corresponds to higher involvement in extramarital affairs. Spirituality and religious beliefs also served as mediators in the relationship between virtual social networks and extramarital affairs, with this connection being statistically significant.

Research indicates a link between social networks and extramarital affairs. The results of this study correspond with several previous investigations (47-49, 51, 52), though they differ from the findings of González-Rivera and colleagues (50). In the study conducted by González-Rivera and colleagues (2019), it was shown that infidelity-related behaviors on social media were more strongly associated with lower sexual satisfaction and emotional intimacy than social media use itself.

However, several studies have been carried out to predict attitudes toward extramarital relationships by examining factors such as social network usage, personality traits, and fundamental incompatibility patterns. One study involving 50 married individuals found a significant correlation between the extent of social media use and attitudes toward extramarital affairs (47). Additionally, another study revealed that the length of time spent on virtual social networks is linked to the likelihood of infidelity, with couples who spend more time online being more prone to engaging in unfaithful behavior (49). The results of the current study support these findings, suggesting that when couples face relationship difficulties, instead of seeking solutions or therapy, they often turn to virtual spaces to fill emotional voids. Due to characteristics such as anonymity, the virtual environment facilitates the development of extramarital relationships (51). Another study examined the relationship between social network usage, feelings of loneliness, and marital infidelity. The findings indicated that the extent of social network use is a significant predictor of marital infidelity. Specifically, individuals who frequently use social networks, often driven by loneliness, are more prone to engaging in extramarital affairs (52). This association between social media use and infidelity can be understood through the lens of dependency theory concerning virtual media and social networks. According to this theory, mass communication tools are essential to society, as people rely on them to fulfill various social functions. Rooted in functionalist perspectives, the theory suggests that audiences depend on media



to understand their surroundings, transmit cultural values, find entertainment, and interpret social issues.

Moreover, social networks enable people to maintain social connections in a virtual, non-physical manner, allowing communication without the need for physical presence or group settings. These platforms offer users opportunities to share ideas, express their personalities, interact with others, and sustain relationships. Today, social networks have become deeply embedded in daily life due to the convenience they provide (51). However, despite these benefits, cyberspace can also inflict social harm, particularly damaging family relationships. It facilitates easy communication between men and women outside of marriage, especially when individuals feel dissatisfied with their marital bonds. The ease of access promotes secretive interactions, making social networks one of the most active venues for dating the opposite sex. Given the private and secure nature of these platforms, monitoring or controlling such interactions is challenging.

One significant finding of the present research was the strong relationship between religious attitudes, aligning with the results of earlier investigations (27, 28, 38, 53). For instance, a study of 763 couples who had been married for at least 12 years found that greater religiosity was associated with a lower likelihood of infidelity in their marriages (53). However, the influence of religiosity on the chances of divorce is more nuanced. It seems that religiosity indirectly decreases the likelihood of divorce by enhancing marital satisfaction (18).

In research carried out by Yousefi and colleagues, which explored the relationship between religious beliefs, social trust, and couples' perspectives on infidelity, a strong negative correlation was identified between attitudes toward infidelity and beliefs about communication (38). The findings also revealed that negative perceptions of betrayal were closely linked to both religious attitudes and levels of social trust. Specifically, the correlation between attitudes toward marital

infidelity and religious beliefs was found to be 61% (38). Similarly, another study determined that stronger religious attitudes are significantly associated with lower rates of marital infidelity, indicating that as religious commitment increases, the likelihood of infidelity decreases (28).

In contrast to the results of the current study, previous research has indicated that a religious attitude can help decrease instances of infidelity. This is because such attitudes emphasize the importance and sanctity of marriage while condemning extramarital relationships. One explanation for this is that individuals who believe in a constant divine presence, such as God, and recognize that their religion strictly prohibits marital infidelity, are more likely to be deterred from engaging in such behavior. Therefore, religious beliefs can serve as a powerful deterrent and an effective criterion for preventing extramarital affairs.

Another outcome of the current study is the notable association between spirituality and involvement in extramarital relationships. The results align with those reported in other studies (21, 22).

Research comparing two groups of married individuals—those engaged in extramarital relationships and those who are not—revealed significant differences in spirituality and attachment styles. Specifically, individuals involved in extramarital relationships tend to exhibit lower levels of spirituality (54).

Another study investigating a causal model that predicts couples' attitudes toward infidelity, considering attachment styles and spirituality, found a significant link between spirituality and infidelity (55). This result can be explained by the idea that spirituality fosters a sense of responsibility and internal commitment, enabling individuals to better regulate their impulses and psychological responses.

Commitment to ethical behavior, such as refraining from extramarital affairs, often stems from individuals' sense of responsibility and inner dedication. Consequently, spirituality can serve as a deterrent against engaging in extramarital

relationships. Rather than encouraging a focus on material possessions, spirituality emphasizes the importance of non-material values and directs people's enjoyment towards intangible aspects of life.

Overall, the results support the main hypothesis of the research. While there is a significant relationship between the use of virtual spaces and extramarital involvement, spirituality and religious commitment appear to mitigate the risk of infidelity within marriages.

### *Limitations and Suggestions*

This study has certain limitations, such as relying on self-report questionnaires, which are inherently prone to some degree of error. Additionally, due to the restricted sample size, caution should be exercised when attempting to generalize the results to broader populations. To address these limitations, future research is recommended to incorporate other data collection methods, like interviews, alongside questionnaires. Moreover, similar studies should be conducted with diverse samples, including individuals from various cultural backgrounds and age groups.

Based on the findings of this study, it is important to emphasize proper education regarding the use of social networks and to raise awareness among couples about how virtual environments can gradually impact their relationships. Implementing various training programs aimed at enhancing spirituality and fostering a positive outlook can improve communication between partners, ultimately leading to greater marital satisfaction. Lifestyle changes supported by spirituality and strengthened religious attitudes, guided by experts in these areas, are also advised as preventive measures against extramarital affairs.

### **Conclusion**

The results of this study indicate that the unique characteristics of virtual environments can facilitate infidelity among couples. Conversely, the allure of these virtual spaces,

coupled with the complexities of societal conditions, makes it challenging to eliminate their influence. However, a key finding of the current study is that spirituality and religiosity serve as important factors in addressing infidelity in online spaces and in reducing marital unfaithfulness. Several explanations can be offered for this connection. One explanation is that religious beliefs and spirituality prohibit extramarital affairs. While couples often hide such relationships, individuals with strong religious faith tend to feel that a higher power is watching their actions, which can discourage them from engaging in infidelity.

### **Acknowledgments**

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### **Authors' Contribution**

KhP led the design and conceptual framework of the study, in addition to gathering and analyzing the data. She also prepared the initial draft of the manuscript. AM and KhP oversaw the methodology and the data analysis process. EA and MM were responsible for conducting the data analysis. Each author provided important constructive feedback and gave their approval for the final version of the manuscript.

### **Conflict of Interest**

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

### **Ethical Considerations**

This research received approval from the Research Committee of Payame Noor University, Iran, under the code IR.PNU.REC.1403.508. Participants in the study responded to the questionnaires completely voluntarily, freely, and without any coercion. The purpose of the research was clearly explained to them beforehand. Given the sensitive nature of the information regarding extramarital affairs, participants were assured of strict confidentiality, with all responses collected anonymously. All ethical standards

were thoroughly observed, including adherence to the authors' rights.

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### Availability of Data and Materials

All the data of the current research are available upon reasonable request from the corresponding author.

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