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Digital Fatigue within the Family: Psychosocial Reflections of Constant Connectedness*

Aile İçinde Dijital Yorgunluk: Sürekli Bağlantılı Olmanın Psikososyal Yansımaları

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Abstract

The rapid integration of digital technologies into daily life has transformed how individuals connect and communicate, with emerging concerns about the psychosocial costs of constant connectivity. This study examines the relationship between digital fatigue and relationship satisfaction among married individuals in Türkiye, with attention to the associative roles of digital fatigue sub-dimensions and gender differences. Guided by Family Systems Theory (FST), the study employed Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) using data from 384 legally married adults (M_{age} = 37.42, *SD* = 8.17) collected via online survey. SEM results indicated that digital fatigue significantly and negatively associated with relationship satisfaction, with psychological fatigue (β = –.41, $p < .001$) emerging as the strongest associated factor, followed by digital addiction (β = –.32, $p < .01$), physical/mental fatigue (β = –.22, $p < .05$), and psychosomatic problems (β = –.17, $p < .05$). Multi-group analysis further revealed that the negative effect of psychological fatigue was significantly stronger for females. While the findings underscore the systemic impact of digital fatigue on relational well-being, limitations such as the cross-sectional design and reliance on self-report data should be considered in interpreting the results. In light of Türkiye's 2025 declaration as the "Year of the Family," the study suggests timely guidance for strengthening relational resilience in the digital age.

Keywords: Digital fatigue, relationship satisfaction, married individuals, Family Systems Theory

Paper Type: Research

Öz

Dijital tekolojilerin günlük hayata hızla dahil olması, bireylerin birbirleriyle bağlantı kurma ve iletişim kurma şekillerini dönüştürürken, sürekli bağlantılı olmanın yol açtığı psikososyal etkilere ilişkin endişeler de ortaya çıkmıştır. Bu çalışma, Türkiye'deki evli bireyler arasında dijital yorgunluk ve ilişki doyumu arasındaki ilişkiyi, dijital yorgunluğun alt boyutlarının ilişkisel rolleri ve cinsiyete göre farklılaşma durumları bağlamında incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Aile Sistemleri Teorisi (AST) çerçevesinde yapılandırılan araştırmada, 384 resmi olarak evli yetişkinden ($X_{yaş}$ = 37.42, *SS* = 8.17) çevrimiçi anket yoluyla elde edilen veriler üzerinde Yapısal Eşitlik Modeli (YEM) uygulanmıştır. Elde edilen bulgular, dijital yorgunluğun ilişki doyumu ile anlamlı ve negatif yönde ilişkili olduğunu ortaya koymuştur. Alt boyutlar düzeyinde, psikolojik yorgunluk (β = –.41, $p < .001$) ilişki doyumu ile en güçlü negatif ilişki gösteren değişken olarak öne çıkarken; bunu dijital bağımlılık (β = –.32, $p < .01$), fiziksel/zihinsel yorgunluk (β = –.22, $p < .05$) ve psikosomatik sorunlar (β = –.17, $p < .05$) izlemiştir. Çoklu grup analiz sonuçları, psikolojik yorgunluk ile ilişki doyumu arasındaki negatif ilişkinin kadınlar açısından anlamlı ölçüde daha güçlü olduğunu göstermiştir. Bulgular, dijital yorgunluğun ilişkisel iyi oluş üzerindeki sistemik etkilerini vurgulamakla beraber; kesitsel araştırma deseni ve özbildirim temelli veri toplama gibi sınırlılıkların sonuçların yorumlanmasında dikkate alınması gerektiğini göstermektedir. Türkiye'nin 2025 yılını "Aile Yılı" ilan etmesi bağlamında değerlendirildiğinde, bu çalışma dijital çağda ilişkisel dayanıklılığı güçlendirmeye yönelik zamanlı ve kuramsal temelli öneriler sunmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Dijital yorgunluk, ilişki doyumu, evli bireyler, Aile Sistemleri Teorisi

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Makale Türü: Araştırma

Introduction

The family has long been recognized as a fundamental and enduring institution, serving as the primary context for emotional bonding, socialization, and intergenerational continuity. While its structural forms have evolved across time and cultures, the family remains a critical space for identity formation and relational development (Bengtson, Acock, Allen, Dilworth-Anderson, & Klein, 2004, p. 93). However, the 21st century has brought unprecedented disruptions to traditional family dynamics, largely driven by technological advancements and the digitization of daily life. The widespread use of digital communication tools, smartphones, and artificial intelligence (AI) systems has increasingly blurred boundaries between work, social interaction, and private life (Kyalo, 2024, p. 4). Spaces once considered secluded for interpersonal intimacy and restorative disconnection, such as the home, are now saturated with constant notifications, digital stimuli, and remote obligations (Gergen, 2002, p. 230). Family members thus navigate a complicated interplay between physical presence and digital distraction, often struggling to maintain emotional availability within relationships meant to provide connection and support (Chamam, Forcella, Musio, Quinodoz, & Dimitrova, 2024, p. 2; Silva, 2025, p. 1).

The rise of constant connectedness—the expectation to be perpetually digitally available—has introduced new psychological, emotional, and relational challenges within families. Digital media not only reshape communication patterns but also affect attention, availability, and intimacy (Nabela & Rianto, 2020, p. 88). In many households, the line between engagement and detachment has become ambiguous, as members remain physically co-present but emotionally distracted. While technology provides convenience and entertainment, it also imposes cognitive and emotional fatigue, disrupting shared routines and diminishing face-to-face interaction quality (Kovan, 2023, p. 113; Sbarra, Briskin, & Slatcher, 2019, p. 596). These shifts signal a transformation in how families experience togetherness, negotiate roles, and cope with external stressors in a hyperconnected world. Understanding the psychosocial impact of digital saturation is particularly urgent in marital and committed partnerships, where relational satisfaction relies on attention, presence, and emotional reciprocity—qualities increasingly threatened by digital overload.

Connectedness, a state of emotional, cognitive, and physical attunement between individuals, has become increasingly complex in the digital age. Traditionally, relational connectedness refers to feeling emotionally close, understood, and mutually responsive within interpersonal relationships (Baumeister & Leary, 1995, p. 498). Digital connectedness, by contrast, emphasizes constant availability and interaction through technological devices, often at the expense of emotional intimacy (Baumeister & Leary, 1995, p. 498; Gergen, 2002, p. 230; Stafford, 2011, p. 279). This paradox—physical co-presence paired with emotional absence, or "absent presence"—can erode relational quality (Gergen, 2002, p. 230). Attentional loss caused by digital engagement directly affects communicative closeness, as partners' responsiveness and emotional attunement rely on sustained attention during daily interactions (Stafford, 2011, p. 280; Vangelisti, 2013, p. 279). In this context, digital fatigue emerges as an important mediator, disrupting emotional synchrony, reducing attentional availability, and weakening mutual regulation processes essential for maintaining connectedness in marital systems. Viewed through the lens of Family Systems Theory (FST), connectedness is a systemic property, sustained through patterns of emotional responsiveness, shared routines, and dyadic coordination (Bowen, 1993, p. 101). Disruptions to these patterns, particularly from prolonged digital engagement, can destabilize emotional equilibrium, undermining relational closeness over time.

Digital technologies, increasingly embedded in everyday routines, give rise to cognitive, emotional, and physical strain collectively referred to as digital fatigue. This state of exhaustion

results from prolonged digital engagement and is characterized by diminished attention, irritability, mental overload, and psychosomatic complaints (Supriyadi, Sulistiasih, Rahmi, Pramono, & Fahrudin, 2025, p. 1). Unlike traditional fatigue stemming from physical exertion or singular stressors, digital fatigue is multifaceted, arising from constant multitasking, information overload, screen exposure, and pressure to remain continuously connected (Ayyagari, Grover, & Purvis, 2011, p. 832). Scholars have conceptualized digital fatigue across several sub-dimensions: digital addiction (compulsive technology use), psychological fatigue (emotional exhaustion and irritability), physical/mental fatigue (concentration difficulties, burnout symptoms), and psychosomatic problems (headaches, muscle tension, sleep disturbances) resulting from device overuse (Tutar & Mutlu, 2024, p. 57).

Despite growing research on digital fatigue in workplace stress, online learning, and youth behavior, its implications within family contexts remain underexplored. Existing studies largely examine individual outcomes, such as academic disengagement (Gandarillas, Elvira-Zorzo, Pica-Miranda, & Correa-Concha, 2024, p. 2), work burnout (Ayyagari et al., 2011, p. 831), or digital dependency (Kuss & Griffiths, 2014, p. 2), without fully addressing relational consequences. Homes, once imagined as restorative and relational spaces, are now saturated with digital stimuli, creating tension between personal recovery and constant digital interaction (Gao et al., 2023, p. 2). By compromising emotional regulation and attentional capacity, digital fatigue can reduce relational presence, erode shared time, and ultimately impair relationship satisfaction (Kocyigit & Uzun, 2025, p. 3574).

Research on the impact of digital media on romantic and marital relationships has highlighted phenomena such as technoference—interpersonal disruptions caused by device use (McDaniel & Coyne, 2016, p. 86). Even brief interruptions, like checking a phone during a conversation, can diminish perceptions of attentiveness, responsiveness, and relational quality (Roberts & David, 2016, p. 134). Partners perceiving each other as distracted by technology often report lower relationship satisfaction, higher conflict, and reduced intimacy (Kovan, 2023, p. 114; McDaniel, Galovan, Cravens, & Drouin, 2018, p. 303; Pandey & Rao, 2023, p. 195). This absent presence, characterized by physical co-presence but emotional unavailability, can compromise relational bonds essential to intimate partnerships (Gergen, 2002, p. 230). In marriage, where consistent emotional engagement is critical, digital distraction acts as a subtle but persistent source of disconnection.

Within households, device overuse alters communication patterns and the emotional climate. Excessive screen time, particularly when unregulated, diminishes shared activities, disrupts routines such as meals or bedtime, and limits spontaneous connection (Vaterlaus, Patten, Roche, & Young, 2015, p. 152). Multitasking with phones during conversations or using devices to avoid conflict reinforces emotional withdrawal and avoidance-based coping (Coyne, Stockdale, Busby, Iverson, & Grant, 2014, p. 151). These patterns are particularly concerning in marital relationships, which rely on mutual presence, attentiveness, and emotional reciprocity. When digital engagement competes with or replaces interpersonal connection, it can gradually undermine trust and satisfaction (Kovan, 2023, p. 112; McDaniel & Drouin, 2019, p. 1). Yet, despite mounting evidence, few studies have examined the combined effects of digital fatigue and device overuse on married individuals from systemic or psychosocial perspectives. This gap is critical, as constant digital presence at home may amplify existing stressors and subtly reshape communication norms in long-term relationships.

1.1. Family Systems Theory (FST)

This study draws on Family Systems Theory (FST), a well-established framework developed by Bowen (1993, p. 101), to examine how digital fatigue shapes not only individual experiences but also relational dynamics within marital contexts. FST conceptualizes the family

as a multifaceted, emotionally interconnected system in which each member's behaviors, emotions, and stress responses influence others through patterns of interdependence and systemic feedback (Goldenberg, Stanton, & Goldenberg, 2016, p. 505). Within this framework, disruption in one part of the system—such as an individual's digital overload—can generate ripple effects that alter communication, emotional closeness, and overall relational equilibrium.

Central to FST are the principles of homeostasis, reciprocal influence, and circular causality. Homeostasis reflects the family's tendency to preserve stability and emotional balance (Becvar, Becvar, & Reif, 2023, p. 22; Minuchin, 2018, p. 60). Yet, digital fatigue—manifested in screen overuse, emotional burnout, and psychosomatic symptoms—can destabilize this equilibrium. For instance, when one partner withdraws emotionally due to constant digital stimulation, the couple's interactional rhythm may shift, producing patterns of avoidance, irritability, or detachment (Jain & Tyagi, 2024, p. 2; McDaniel & Drouin, 2019, p. 1). Such changes illustrate a systemic feedback loop: digital exhaustion fosters relational disengagement, which in turn intensifies further emotional strain.

Circular causality further explains how digital fatigue undermines relational processes. One partner's fatigue may reduce emotional availability, prompting withdrawal or frustration in the other, which then deepens disconnection (King & DeLongis, 2014, p. 461). In marital systems, where mutual regulation—the ability to co-manage emotions and stress—is central to relationship satisfaction, this mechanism is especially salient. Thus, digital fatigue emerges not only as an individual stressor but also as a system-level disruptor that reshapes the emotional climate of intimate relationships (Becvar et al., 2023, p. 67). Although prior studies have primarily addressed digital fatigue as an individual phenomenon, focusing on symptoms such as cognitive overload and emotional exhaustion (Ayyagari et al., 2011, p. 831; Supriyadi et al., 2025, p. 1), its systemic implications remain underexplored. This study addresses this gap by analyzing how digital strain undermines relational homeostasis through its effects on shared routines, emotional availability, and direct communication. From an interactional standpoint, digital fatigue fragments partners' attention, reduces opportunities for emotional disclosure, and weakens conflict-management dialogues (Coyne et al., 2014, p. 151; Gottman & Levenson, 1992, p. 221). Such communicative disruptions highlight that digital fatigue is not only an individual burden but also a relational communication challenge within marital systems.

Building on this framework, the present study conceptualizes relationship satisfaction as more than an individual evaluation; it is viewed as an outcome of systemic communication processes within marital dynamics. Satisfaction arises through mechanisms such as emotional expression, conflict management, attentional availability, and shared routines (Fincham & Beach, 2010, p. 631; Karney & Bradbury, 1995, p. 3). Prior research shows that marital satisfaction is closely tied to dyadic communication patterns, including constructive emotional expression, effective conflict resolution, and attentional responsiveness (Gottman & Levenson, 1992, p. 221; Laurenceau, Barrett, & Pietromonaco, 1998, p. 1240). Digital fatigue, by limiting partners' capacity to sustain these processes, is therefore expected to impair not only individual perceptions of satisfaction but also the systemic quality of marital interaction (Coyne et al., 2014, p. 151; McDaniel & Drouin, 2019, p. 1). In line with FST, this research treats relationship satisfaction as a system-level outcome rather than a collection of isolated individual symptoms. By examining four sub-dimensions of digital fatigue—digital addiction, psychological fatigue, physical/mental fatigue, and psychosomatic symptoms—it seeks to identify how systemic stress translates into measurable relational outcomes in married life.

The Turkish context provides an important setting for this analysis. Digital technologies are deeply integrated into everyday family routines, with recent reports indicating high smartphone penetration and extensive screen exposure among both adults and youth (Bilgi

Teknolojileri ve İletişim Kurumu [BTK], 2024, p. 7; Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu [TÜİK], 2024, p. 1). Turkish individuals rely heavily on mobile messaging and social media for social and relational maintenance, often blurring boundaries between work and family life (Ünal, 2018, p. 551). Moreover, cultural values emphasizing familial closeness and collectivism may intensify the psychosocial impact of digital fatigue, especially in marital settings where emotional availability and mutual responsiveness are socially expected but digitally disrupted. Locally grounded research is therefore essential for understanding how digital strain operates within Türkiye's evolving family landscape.

Gender adds another critical dimension. Studies suggest that males and females differ both in digital usage patterns and relational expectations. Females often report higher levels of digital multitasking, online communication demands, and techno-stress compared to males (Derks & Bakker, 2014, p. 417; Turel & Serenko, 2012, p. 514). At the same time, females' relational well-being is more closely tied to emotional presence and responsiveness, whereas males' satisfaction is often linked to instrumental support and conflict avoidance (Doss, Rhoades, Stanley, & Markman, 2009, p. 18; Vaterlaus et al., 2015, p. 152). These distinctions suggest that digital fatigue may be differentially associated with marital satisfaction for males and females—more strongly disrupting emotional connectedness for females while interfering with stress regulation or role expectations for males. Accordingly, examining whether the associative relationship between digital fatigue and marital satisfaction differs by gender is both empirically relevant and theoretically meaningful, particularly in Türkiye, where gendered marital roles remain socially salient.

Considering the cultural and structural significance of marriage in Turkish society, and especially the national designation of 2025 as the "Year of the Family," this theoretical framing gains particular relevance. As families in Türkiye face increasing psychosocial strain from digital saturation, FST presents a contextually sensitive lens for examining how digital fatigue reshapes interactional norms, weakens dyadic regulation, and disrupts emotional synchrony within marital partnerships. The primary aim of this study is to examine the association between digital fatigue and relationship satisfaction among married individuals. Beyond the overall association, the study also investigates the distinct contributions of its sub-dimensions, including digital addiction, psychological fatigue, physical/mental fatigue, and psychosomatic symptoms. Recognizing potential gender differences in both digital strain and relational dynamics, the study further explores whether these structural relationships differ by gender. Through this multidimensional and culturally grounded approach, the research seeks to contribute a theoretically strong and empirically relevant perspective to the growing field of digital well-being and family research. Although the study is guided by research questions (RQ_s) rather than formal hypotheses, each RQ reflects a theoretically grounded and testable assumption:

RQ_1. Is digital fatigue significantly and negatively associated with relationship satisfaction among married individuals?

RQ_2. Among the sub-dimensions of digital fatigue (digital addiction, psychological fatigue, physical/mental fatigue, psychosomatic problems), which shows the strongest negative association with relationship satisfaction?

RQ_3. Does the structural relationship between digital fatigue and relationship satisfaction differ by gender?

2. Method

This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional, and relational research design, using structural equation modeling (SEM) to examine associative relationships between digital fatigue and relationship satisfaction among married individuals.

2.1. Participants and Procedure

The study sample consisted of married individuals residing in Türkiye, selected through a convenience sampling method. This approach was deemed appropriate due to the accessibility of participants through digital platforms and the online administration of the data collection tool. The inclusion criteria required participants to be legally married and currently living with their spouse. Individuals who were divorced, separated, unmarried, or cohabiting without formal marriage were excluded to ensure that the findings reflected dynamics within traditional marital structures.

Data were collected via Google Forms, and the survey link was distributed through social media platforms to reach a broad and diverse adult population. Participants were informed about the study's purpose, confidentiality measures, and their right to withdraw at any time. A total of 384 married individuals participated in the study (52.1% were female). Participants ranged in age from 21 to 61 years (M_{age} = 37.42, *SD* = 8.17), with an average marriage duration of 11.6 years (*SD* = 7.5). Participants reported the number of their children, with 63.8% having at least two. Regarding digital behavior, participants' average daily device usage was 5.4 hours (*SD* = 2.1). The most common purposes for digital device usage were reported as follows: 39.6% social media, 29.2% work**,** 18.5% games/entertainment, and 12.7% other. All participants resided in Türkiye and met the eligibility criteria of being legally married and cohabiting with a spouse at the time of data collection. It is important to note that data were collected from individual participants rather than matched couples. Accordingly, relationship satisfaction in this study reflects each participant's subjective perception of relational quality, rather than a dyadic or couple-level measure. This individual-level operationalization is consistent with prior research that examined marital satisfaction as a personal evaluation (e.g., Fincham & Beach, 2010, p. 631; Karney & Bradbury, 1995, p. 3). Prior to data collection, ethical approval was obtained from Atatürk University Social and Human Sciences Ethics Committee (No: E-56785782-050.02.04-2500164712; 06/16). Participation was voluntary, and all participants provided informed consent before completing the questionnaire.

2.2. Measurements

2.2.1. Digital Fatigue Scale

Digital fatigue was measured using a scale developed by Tutar and Mutlu (2024, p. 57), which assesses individuals' perceptions of digital fatigue across psychological, behavioral, and physical domains. The scale consists of 28 items rated on a five-point Likert type (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree), and includes four sub-dimensions: digital addiction (12 items; e.g., *"I have difficulty establishing face-to-face relationships due to being online for a long time"*; Cronbach's α = .94), psychological fatigue (7 items; e.g., *"I worry about missing digital content when I am offline"*; Cronbach's α = .90), physical/mental fatigue (5 items; e.g., *"I sometimes experience back pain due to digital fatigue"*; Cronbach's α = .88), and psychosomatic problems (4 items; e.g., *"I have insomnia due to being online for a long time"*; Cronbach's α = .79). Higher scores indicate greater perceived digital fatigue. In the present study, overall internal consistency was excellent (Cronbach's α = .96).

2.2.2. Relationship Satisfaction Scale

Relationship satisfaction was assessed using a scale developed by Hendrick (1988, p. 94) and adapted into Turkish by Curun (2001, p. 79). The scale includes 7 items, each rated on a five-point Likert type (1 = very low, 5 = very high), yielding a total score that reflects the respondent's overall evaluation of their relationship. Items cover different aspects of relational quality, such as satisfaction, regret, and expectations. An example item is *"How often do you wish your relationship had never started?"* Higher total scores indicate greater relationship satisfaction, whereas lower scores indicate dissatisfaction. The original scale demonstrated strong psychometric properties, with item-total correlations ranging from .57 to .76. In the Turkish

adaptation, the scale explained 52% of the total variance, and Cronbach's α was .86, confirming its reliability in the Turkish cultural context. In the present study, Cronbach's α was .83, indicating satisfactory reliability.

2.2.3. Demographic Information Form

This form, developed by the researcher, was used to collect participants' background information. The form included questions on age, gender, duration of marriage, number of children, average daily digital device usage, and the primary purpose of digital device use (e.g., social media, work, games/entertainment, other). These variables were reported in descriptive statistics to contextualize sample characteristics but were not incorporated as control or moderator variables in the structural model. This decision was made to maintain a theoretical focus on the associative role of digital fatigue dimensions in relationship satisfaction and to avoid model over-parameterization, which could undermine parsimony in SEM analyses.

2.3. Data Analysis

All statistical analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS (v.23) and AMOS (v.23). Descriptive statistics were calculated for demographic variables and scale items. Prior to model testing, assumptions of normality, linearity, and multicollinearity were examined to ensure the appropriateness of the multivariate analysis. To assess the construct validity of the measurement instruments, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was performed on the Digital Fatigue Scale and the Relationship Satisfaction Scale. Although both scales have previously demonstrated validity and reliability in Turkish samples, CFA was conducted in the present study to reconfirm their factorial structures within the specific context of married adults in Türkiye. This step ensured that the measurement models were both theoretically consistent and empirically valid for the current dataset, thereby providing a strong foundation for subsequent SEM analyses. Model fit was evaluated using multiple fit indices, including the chi-square/degrees of freedom ratio (χ^2/df), the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), the Tucker–Lewis Index (TLI), the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), and the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR).

Following confirmation of the measurement model, SEM was employed to test the hypothesized associations between digital fatigue and relationship satisfaction (RQ_1). To explore the differential associative contributions of each component of digital fatigue (RQ_2), four sub-dimensions were modeled as separate latent variables in the structural path analysis. Finally, Multi-Group SEM was conducted to investigate whether the structural relationship between digital fatigue and relationship satisfaction differed by gender (RQ_3). Measurement invariance and structural path invariance were assessed through chi-square difference tests and critical ratio comparisons between male and female sub-groups.

3. Results

Descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, skewness, kurtosis, and Pearson correlation coefficients, were calculated for the main variables in the model. As shown in Table 1, skewness and kurtosis values were within acceptable ranges (±1.5), indicating no major deviations from normality (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013, p. 78). Correlation analysis also showed statistically significant relationships between sub-dimensions of digital fatigue and relationship satisfaction. Psychological fatigue showed the strongest negative correlation with relationship satisfaction ($r = –.49$, $p < .01$), indicating that as emotional and cognitive exhaustion from digital engagement increases, marital satisfaction decreases significantly. Digital addiction was negatively associated with relationship satisfaction ($r = –.37$, $p < .01$), suggesting that compulsive digital use hinders emotional availability between partners. Similarly, physical/mental fatigue ($r = –.34$, $p < .01$) and psychosomatic problems ($r = –.31$, $p < .01$) were moderately and negatively related to relationship satisfaction. Inter-correlations among digital

fatigue sub-dimensions were positive and significant (r = .36 to .46, p < .01), supporting their conceptual relatedness while indicating distinct contributions.

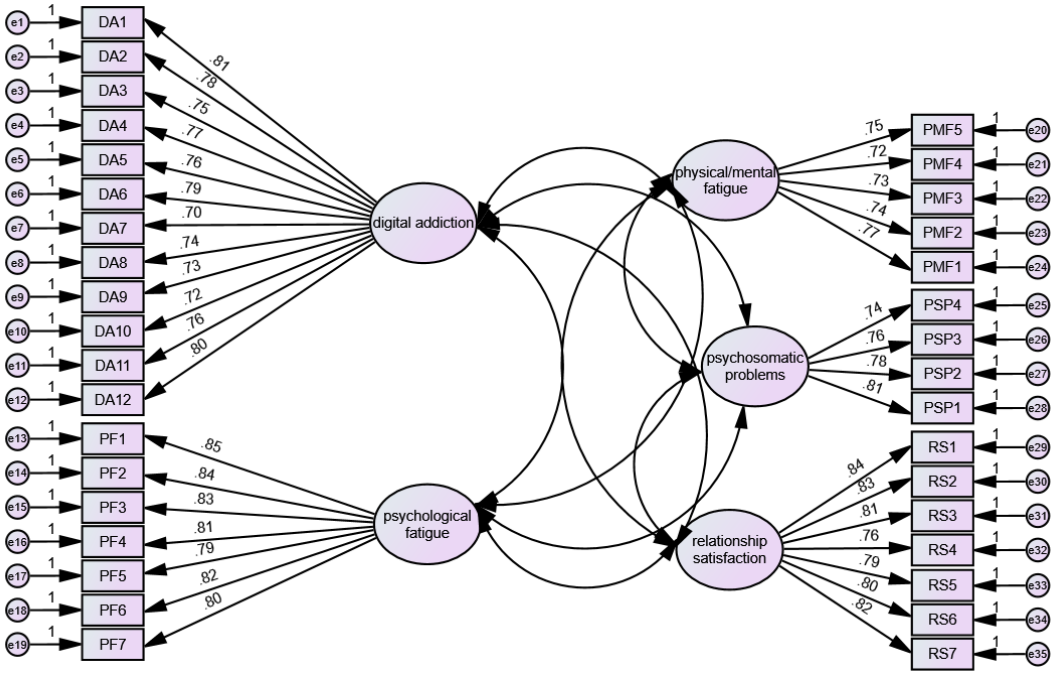
Table 1. Descriptive statistics, normality, and correlation coefficients among variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
1.Digital addiction	—				
2.Psychological fatigue	.41**				
3.Physical/mental fatigue	.39**	.46**			
4.Psychosomatic problems	.36**	.42**	.44**		
5.Relationship satisfaction	-.37**	-.49**	-.34**	-.31**	
M	3.12	3.56	3.08	2.87	3.91
SD	.84	.77	.88	.79	.66
Skewness	-.34	-.28	-.11	-.22	-.21
Kurtosis	-.41	-.36	-.44	-.35	-.58

Note. N = 384, < .01**

CFA was conducted to assess the measurement model comprising five latent constructs: digital addiction, psychological fatigue, physical/mental fatigue, psychosomatic problems, and relationship satisfaction. As shown in Figure 1, each latent construct was represented by multiple observed indicators with standardized factor loadings ranging from .70 to .85, exceeding the recommended threshold of .50 (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2014, p. 100).

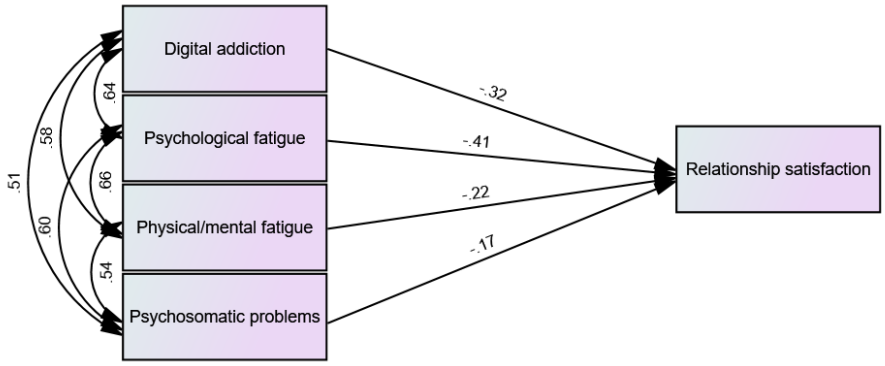
Figure 1. Measurement model: CFA of digital fatigue and relationship satisfaction



Model fit indices indicated good fit to the data: $\chi^2(344) = 712.45$, p < .001; $\chi^2/df = 2.07$, CFI = .95, TLI = .94, RMSEA = .053, and SRMR = .041, consistent with accepted standards (Hu & Bentler, 1999, p. 6). Moreover, Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values supported convergent validity: digital addiction = .58, psychological fatigue = .67, physical/mental fatigue = .55, psychosomatic problems = .61, and relationship satisfaction = .63—all above the .50 criterion (Fornell & Larcker, 1981, p. 46). Composite Reliability (CR) values further confirmed internal consistency: digital addiction = .94, psychological fatigue = .93, physical/mental fatigue = .87, psychosomatic problems = .86, and relationship satisfaction = .91.

To test the hypothesized associations between digital fatigue and relationship satisfaction, SEM was conducted. The model included four latent factors (digital addiction, psychological fatigue, physical/mental fatigue, and psychosomatic problems) and one outcome, relationship satisfaction, as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2. SEM of digital fatigue and relationship satisfaction



Note. Standardized path coefficients (β) are shown for the direct effects of sub-dimensions of digital fatigue on relationship satisfaction. All effects were statistically significant ($p < .01$).

Four sub-dimensions of digital fatigue were specified to directly associated with relationship satisfaction, and covariances were included among the associations to account for shared variance. Standardized path coefficients showed that psychological fatigue showed the strongest negative association of relationship satisfaction (β = –.41, $p < .001$), followed by digital addiction (β = –.32, $p < .001$), physical/mental fatigue (β = –.22, $p < .001$), and psychosomatic problems (β = –.17, $p < .01$). All paths were statistically significant, confirming that higher levels of digital fatigue are associated with lower relationship satisfaction. The dimensions were significantly intercorrelated, with standardized covariances ranging from .51 to .66, suggesting moderate to strong associations among the sub-dimensions.

To identify which sub-dimensions of digital fatigue had the strongest associations with relationship satisfaction, direct effects of each latent variable were examined through SEM. The model tested the associative effects of digital addiction, psychological fatigue, physical/mental fatigue, and psychosomatic problems on relationship satisfaction simultaneously (see Table 2).

Table 2. SEM results: Standardized path coefficients associating digital fatigue sub-dimensions with relationship satisfaction

Dimensions	β	SE	CR	*p*
Digital addiction	-.32	.05	-6.40	< .001
Psychological fatigue	-.41	.04	-7.92	< .001
Physical/mental fatigue	-.22	.05	-4.15	< .001
Psychosomatic problems	-.17	.06	-2.83	< .01

Note. β = standardized regression coefficient; SE = standard error; CR = critical ratio.

Results indicated that four sub-dimensions of digital fatigue significantly and negatively associated with relationship satisfaction. Psychological fatigue emerged as the strongest associated factor (β = –.41, $p < .001$), followed by digital addiction (β = –.32, $p < .001$), physical/mental fatigue (β = –.22, $p < .001$), and psychosomatic problems (β = –.17, $p < .01$). These findings suggest that married individuals experiencing higher levels of psychological exhaustion related to digital life are more likely to report lower satisfaction in their relationships. The critical ratios (CRs) for all factors exceeded the |1.96| threshold, indicating statistical

significance at the conventional levels. The model supports that the multidimensional experience of digital fatigue is inversely associated with relational quality, with psychological fatigue having the most pronounced impact.

To examine whether the structural relationship between digital fatigue and relationship satisfaction varied by gender, a multi-group SEM was employed. Separate models were tested for male and female participants, comparing path coefficients from four sub-dimensions of digital fatigue to relationship satisfaction. The analysis followed a stepwise procedure: first, a configural model was tested to establish baseline fit across groups without constraining paths. Next, a structural weights model was tested by constraining path coefficients to be equal across genders. Model comparisons were made using the chi-square difference test ($\Delta\chi^2$) and examination of CRs to assess whether structural paths differed significantly between male and female participants (cf. Table 3).

Table 3. Multi-group SEM results: Standardized path coefficients by gender and critical ratios

Paths	Male (β)	Female (β)	CR	*p*
Digital Addiction → Relationship Satisfaction	-.30	-.33	1.11	.267
Psychological Fatigue → Relationship Satisfaction	-.32	-.47	**2.71**	**.007**
Physical/Mental Fatigue → Relationship Satisfaction	-.21	-.23	.84	.401
Psychosomatic Problems → Relationship Satisfaction	-.19	-.16	1.03	.303

Note. β = standardized path coefficient. CR = critical ratio for testing gender differences. *p*-values are based on z-distribution comparisons of unstandardized estimates. Bold value indicates statistically significant group differences ($p < .01$).

The configural model showed acceptable fit to the data ($\chi^2 = 1486.32$, df = 690, CFI = .93, TLI = .91, RMSEA = .058), indicating that the hypothesized structure was valid across gender groups. When structural path coefficients were constrained to equality, model fit decreased slightly ($\chi^2 = 1522.46$, df = 698, CFI = .92, TLI = .90, RMSEA = .060). The chi-square difference test was statistically significant ($\Delta\chi^2 = 36.14$, $\Delta df = 8$, $p < .01$), suggesting that at least one of the structural paths differed across gender.

Examination of CRs for differences revealed that the path from psychological fatigue to relationship satisfaction differed significantly between males and females (CR = 2.71, $p < .01$), with a stronger effect for females (β = –.47) compared to males (β = –.32). No other path differences were statistically significant. These findings indicate that while digital fatigue negatively affects relationship satisfaction for both genders, females are more psychologically impacted, particularly by emotional and cognitive demands of digital overload in family and relational life.

4. Discussion

This study aimed to investigate the associative relationship between digital fatigue and relationship satisfaction among married individuals in Türkiye, with a particular focus on the role of its sub-dimensions and gender differences. Findings demonstrated that digital fatigue significantly and negatively associated with relationship satisfaction, with all four sub-dimensions contributing to this relationship. Among these, psychological fatigue (β = -.41) emerged as the most salient associated factor, followed by digital addiction (β = -.32), physical/mental fatigue (β = -.22), and psychosomatic problems (β = -.17), based on standardized path coefficients in SEM. Importantly, multi-group SEM showed that the path from psychological fatigue to relationship satisfaction was significantly stronger for females than for males. This suggests that emotional

and cognitive exhaustion associated with constant digital connectivity may be linked to lower relationship satisfaction more severely for females in marital contexts.

Descriptive statistics further contextualize these findings: participants reported moderate levels of digital addiction (M = 3.12, *SD* = .84), physical/mental fatigue (M = 3.08, *SD* = .88), and psychosomatic problems (M = 2.87, *SD* = .79), whereas psychological fatigue showed the highest mean score (M = 3.56, *SD* = .77). This pattern suggests that although digital fatigue manifests across multiple domains, its most pronounced form among married individuals in this sample is psychological exhaustion, reflecting a common and salient experience of emotional and cognitive strain due to digital life. In contrast, lower averages of psychosomatic complaints and physical/mental fatigue indicate that bodily consequences of digital strain may be present but less pervasive compared to its psychological counterpart. Relationship satisfaction was moderately high overall (M = 3.91, *SD* = .66), indicating a generally preserved sense of relational quality in the sample. However, the variance observed in relationship satisfaction scores implies that for a considerable subgroup of participants, digital fatigue—particularly in its psychological dimension—may already be exerting a destabilizing effect on relational/marital well-being. Taken together, these patterns indicate that while digital fatigue is not uniformly problematic across married individuals, its elevated psychological dimension highlights a vulnerability that could intensify under prolonged or unregulated digital engagement. Thus, thought together, descriptive and SEM results highlight not only the statistical robustness of psychological fatigue as the most strongly associated factor, alongside its elevated prevalence as a lived relational risk factor.

Findings of this study emphasize the growing psychological and relational cost of digital fatigue in marital contexts, aligning with literature suggesting that constant digital engagement disrupts intimate relationships (Hertlein & Blumer, 2013, p. 210; McDaniel & Coyne, 2016, p. 86; Sbarra et al., 2019, p. 596). Among the examined sub-dimensions, psychological fatigue was the most significant negative association of relationship satisfaction. This interpretation is supported by SEM results, in which psychological fatigue showed the strongest path coefficient among the digital fatigue sub-dimensions. This dimension, characterized by emotional exhaustion, cognitive overload, and anxiety linked to constant connectivity, may mirror what the literature conceptualized as technoference—the interruption of interpersonal interactions due to digital device use (McDaniel & Drouin, 2019, p. 1). Individuals overwhelmed by digital demands may become emotionally unavailable, distracted, or less engaged in the relational sphere, thereby reducing opportunities for intimacy, responsiveness, and mutual attunement (Roberts & David, 2016, p. 135).

Furthermore, these findings are supported by research on digital stress spillover, which suggests that cognitive load and anxiety generated in online spaces can transfer into offline emotional environments such as romantic partnerships (Ben-Ze’ev., 2004, p. 69). For example, frequent worry about unread messages or digital content can reduce attentional capacity and presence in face-to-face communication, leading to emotional disconnection (Kovan, 2023, p. 112). In this context, psychological fatigue becomes not just an individual strain but a relational threat, particularly in marriages where emotional intimacy and sustained responsiveness are essential to satisfaction (Randall & Bodenmann, 2009, p. 107). The fact that digital addiction and physical/mental fatigue also emerged as significant, albeit weaker, associated factors suggest a multidimensional erosion of relational quality resulting from excessive or dysregulated device use.

These findings can also be interpreted as significant through the lens of FST, which views the family as an interdependent emotional unit where individual experiences inevitably affect the broader system. Digital fatigue, especially in its psychological form, can be understood as a systemic stressor originating at the individual level but reverberating throughout the marital dyad (Ceco, Taşkın, Uygun, Erus, & Satıcı, 2025, p. 178; Doerr, Nater, Ehlert, & Ditzen, 2018, p. 135).

Emotional disengagement or irritability stemming from digital overload may disrupt the couple's interactional patterns, communication dynamics, and emotional reciprocity (Bouffard, Giglio, & Zheng, 2022, p. 1526). In this regard, relationship satisfaction can be seen not only as an individual cognitive evaluation but also as a reflection of dyadic communication quality and interactional attunement between spouses (Gottman & Levenson, 1992, p. 221; Laurenceau et al., 1998, p. 1240). Thus, digital fatigue may exert its most damaging effects when it disrupts the communicative processes such as responsiveness, attentiveness, and conflict regulation that sustain marital closeness. In this sense, digital stress functions similarly to other systemic pressures (e.g., economic strain or work-family conflict), with the potential to destabilize homeostasis and reduce relational functioning if not properly addressed (Becvar et al., 2023, p. 22; Minuchin, 2018, p. 60).

Gender-based findings showed that psychological fatigue had a significantly stronger negative effect on relationship satisfaction for females than for males. This may reflect enduring gendered dynamics in emotional labor, multitasking, and digital caregiving roles within the household (Kovan, Usta, & Ormancı, 2021, p. 30). Research has shown that females are more likely to assume responsibility for maintaining emotional connectedness, monitoring digital communication within the family (e.g., with children or extended kin), and managing the invisible workload associated with digital life (Borelli, Nelson-Coffey, River, Birken, & Moss-Racusin, 2017, p. 357; McDaniel, Galovan, & Drouin, 2021, p. 641). These roles may increase susceptibility to psychological fatigue, particularly when digital environments are saturated with relational, parental, and professional demands. Besides, prior studies have found that females report higher sensitivity to technoference—the experience of being interrupted by a partner's device use—and are more negatively affected by digital distractions in intimate relationships (McDaniel, 2015, p. 230; McDaniel & Coyne, 2016, p. 86). The greater emotional and cognitive burden associated with being 'digitally available' at all times may thus lead females to experience more pronounced fatigue, which in turn undermines relational satisfaction (Bhati, Pal, & Talwar, 2022, p. 332; Han, 2024, p. 3). From a systemic perspective, this supports the idea that gendered experiences of digital stress can introduce asymmetry into marital functioning, affecting the emotional reciprocity and stability of the dyadic unit (Bodenmann, Pihet, & Kayser, 2006, p. 486).

Collectively, these results provide important insights into the paradoxical role of constant connectedness in marital life. While digital connectedness ensures perpetual accessibility and facilitates ongoing interaction, the present findings show that it can simultaneously erode relational connectedness—the emotional presence, attentional availability, and dyadic reciprocity that sustain marital satisfaction (Baumeister & Leary, 1995, p. 498; Gergen, 2002, p. 230; Stafford, 2011, p. 279). In line with the notion of absent presence (Gergen, 2002, p. 230), psychological fatigue emerged as the strongest risk factor, indicating that the cognitive overload and emotional exhaustion produced by constant connectivity compromise spouses' ability to remain engaged and responsive to one another. From a FST perspective, this disruption of connectedness reflects not only individual strain but also systemic disequilibrium, as digital fatigue reverberates through interactional patterns and undermines relational homeostasis (Becvar et al., 2023, p. 22; Minuchin, 2018, p. 60). Accordingly, the study advances the understanding that constant digital connectedness, rather than uniformly enhancing closeness, may paradoxically destabilize the very sense of relational connectedness that families rely on for emotional security and marital well-being.

4.1. Theoretical and Practical Implications

At a theoretical level, this study extends the application of FST to the digital era by conceptualizing psychological fatigue not merely as an individual strain but as a systemic disruptor of marital connectedness. By differentiating between digital connectedness and relational connectedness, the findings highlight how constant digital availability may paradoxically weaken emotional reciprocity and dyadic homeostasis. Observed gender-specific

effects further expand theoretical understanding of asymmetry in systemic stress processes, suggesting that digital fatigue may function similarly to other relational stressors such as economic strain or work–family conflict.

At a practical level, the study underscores the need for preventive and psychoeducational interventions addressing digital strain in marital relationships. Mental health professionals and couples' counselors/therapists can integrate modules on digital hygiene, emotional self-regulation in the context of screen fatigue, and the relational impact of technoference. Concrete strategies include establishing 'screen-free family hours' during meals or before bedtime, negotiating clear boundaries around work-related digital use at home, and designing shared digital routines (e.g., co-viewing media, engaging in online leisure together) to promote connection rather than isolation. Because psychological fatigue emerged as both the most strongly associated factor with lower relationship satisfaction and the most prevalent form of digital strain, interventions can particularly focus on reducing cognitive overload and emotional exhaustion. Helping couples manage work-related digital intrusions, create technology-free relational time, and transform individual device use into shared relational activities may buffer against burnout and relational disengagement. In cultures experiencing rapid digitalization, where technology adoption may outpace the development of healthy relational norms, such strategies are especially important for sustaining marital well-being.

4.2. Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

While this study provides valuable insights into the psychosocial impact of digital fatigue within marital relationships, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, all data were collected through self-report measures at a single point in time, which may introduce biases such as social desirability or recall errors. In particular, constructs such as relationship satisfaction and digital fatigue reflect individual evaluations rather than objective couple-level dynamics. Accordingly, the theoretical implications of this study should be interpreted at the perceptual level of individual spouses, and generalizations to dyadic interaction patterns should be made with caution. Second, the cross-sectional design limits the ability to infer causality. Although SEM analyses revealed significant associations, the direction of these relationships cannot be definitively determined. For example, while psychological fatigue may undermine relationship satisfaction, lower satisfaction may likewise contribute to greater digital exhaustion. Thus, the current findings should be viewed as identifying potential risk mechanisms rather than confirming causal pathways.

Furthermore, the sample consisted of married adults residing in Türkiye, which may limit the cultural generalizability of the findings. Because digital norms, gender roles, and marital expectations vary across societies, the relational impact of digital fatigue may differ in other cultural contexts. Future research can therefore employ longitudinal, experimental, dyadic, or diary-based designs to track how digital fatigue and relationship satisfaction evolve over time, allowing for stronger inferences about causality and temporal dynamics. Expanding samples to include broader relational groups, such as divorced individuals, remarried couples, or cohabiting partners, could also provide comparative insights into how digital fatigue manifests across diverse family and relationship structures. Besides, future studies can examine potential mediating/moderating mechanisms, such as emotional regulation difficulties, perceived partner responsiveness, or experiences of technoference, to better clarify the psychological processes linking digital overload to relational outcomes. Lastly, intervention-based research is considered necessary to test the effectiveness of strategies such as digital detox programs, technology-free marital routines, and relational digital hygiene practices aimed at reducing psychological fatigue and enhancing marital well-being in an increasingly connected world.

Conclusion

This study offers a comprehensive examination of the interplay between digital fatigue and relationship satisfaction among married individuals in Türkiye, addressing both the overall associative relationship and the role of specific sub-dimensions and gender differences. By demonstrating that digital fatigue exerts a multidimensional and predominantly negative impact on marital well-being, the findings contribute to a deeper understanding of how constant digital connectivity reshapes intimate life. The finding that psychological fatigue emerged as the most strongly associated factor with diminished satisfaction underscores the primacy of cognitive and emotional strain over somatic or behavioral aspects of digital overload. From a theoretical standpoint, this supports applying FST to technology-driven stressors, highlighting how intrapersonal experiences reverberate across dyadic processes and disrupt patterns of responsiveness and emotional attunement. On a practical level, the results underscore the urgency of equipping couples and practitioners with concrete strategies for digital hygiene—such as setting boundaries for technology use, designating screen-free periods, and cultivating shared digital routines—to mitigate the risks of relational disengagement. At the same time, the observed gender asymmetry suggests that interventions should be sensitive to the unequal distribution of emotional labor and digital caregiving roles, which make females particularly vulnerable to the relational costs of digital fatigue. Despite relying on cross-sectional and self-report data, this research provides timely insights into the evolving psychosocial landscape of marriage in rapidly digitalizing societies. By integrating descriptive prevalence patterns with robust SEM analyses, the study illuminates digital fatigue as a salient relational risk factor while laying the groundwork for future longitudinal and cross-cultural investigations. Ultimately, the findings affirm that safeguarding relational and marital satisfaction in the digital era requires a dual focus on individual well-being and systemic relational dynamics, reinforcing the need for culturally grounded policies and preventive practices to sustain family resilience in an increasingly connected world.

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ETİK ve BİLİMSEL İLKELER SORUMLULUK BEYANI

Bu çalışmanın tüm hazırlanma süreçlerinde etik kurallara ve bilimsel atıf gösterme ilkelerine riayet edildiğini yazar(lar) beyan eder. Aksi bir durumun tespiti halinde Afyon Kocatepe Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi'nin hiçbir sorumluluğu olmayıp, tüm sorumluluk makale yazarlarına aittir. Yazarlar etik kurul izni gerektiren çalışmalarda, izinle ilgili bilgileri (kurul adı, tarih ve sayı no) yöntem bölümünde ve ayrıca burada belirtmişlerdir.

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