

Research Article / Araştırma Makalesi

**THE TRANSFORMATION OF FAMILY STRUCTURE IN THE DIGITAL
SOCIETY: DIVORCE, SOCIAL MEDIA, AND SOCIAL SERVICE
INTERVENTION IN TURKEY**

Nurten Ebru ÖZDEMİR¹ , Ayşe KAYAALP² 

ABSTRACT

Digitalization has profoundly reshaped not only individuals' lifestyles but also the very structure of the family. Social media, in particular, has brought about substantial changes in how individuals communicate and establish relationships, leading to a variety of challenges within marital relationships. Reduced family privacy, increased digital jealousy, communication breakdown, and interactions in virtual environments have been identified as key factors contributing to the rise in divorce rates. The aim of this study is to examine the impact of digitalization on family structure. It also analyzes how social media influences the divorce process, and to explore the roles and intervention strategies that social work as a discipline can undertake in the face of these transformations. The research was conducted through a comprehensive literature review of existing papers, theses, and scholarly articles. Findings indicate that social workers provide crucial support to individuals and families during this process by offering counseling, crisis intervention, and initiatives to strengthen intra-family communication. In this context, it is suggested that closer monitoring of the effects of digitalization on family structures would be beneficial. Furthermore, the development of digital literacy, online counseling, and family-based preventive intervention strategies within the field of social work is considered essential.

Keywords: Family, Divorce, Digitalization, Social Work

JEL Classification: Z1, O3, I3, J0

**DİJİTAL TOPLUMDA AİLE YAPISININ DÖNÜŞÜMÜ: TÜRKİYE'DE
BOŞANMA, SOSYAL MEDYA VE SOSYAL HİZMET MÜDAHALESİ**

ÖZET

Dijitalleşme, bireylerin yaşam biçimlerini olduğu kadar aile yapısını da köklü bir şekilde dönüştürmektedir. Özellikle sosyal medya, bireylerin iletişim ve ilişki kurma biçimlerinde önemli değişimlere neden olmakta, bu durum evlilik ilişkileri üzerinde çeşitli sorunlara yol açmaktadır. Aile içinde mahremiyetin azalması, dijital kıskançlık, iletişim kopukluğu ve sanal dünyadaki etkileşimler, boşanma oranlarında artışa sebep olan temel faktörler arasında yer almaktadır. Bu çalışmanın amacı, dijitalleşmenin aile yapısına etkilerini incelemek, sosyal medyanın boşanma sürecini nasıl etkilediğini analiz etmek ve bu dönüşüm karşısında sosyal hizmet disiplininin üstlenebileceği rolleri ve müdahale yöntemlerini ortaya koymaktır. Araştırma literatür taranarak oluşturulmuş; var olan bildiri metinleri, tezler, makaleler incelenmiştir. Sosyal hizmet uzmanları süreçte bireylere ve ailelere yönelik danışmanlık,

¹ Asst. Prof., Bitlis Eren University, Bitlis, Türkiye, neozdemir@beu.edu.tr

² M.A. Student, Bitlis Eren University, Bitlis, Türkiye, shuaysekayaalp@gmail.com

kriz müdahalesi ve aile içi iletişimi güçlendirmeye yönelik çalışmalarla önemli bir destek sunduğu belirlenmiştir. Bu bağlamda, dijitalleşmenin aile yapısına etkilerinin daha yakından takip edilmesi ve sosyal hizmet alanında dijital okuryazarlık, çevrimiçi danışmanlık ve aile temelli önleyici müdahale stratejilerinin geliştirilmesinin yarar sağlayacağı düşünülmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Aile, Boşanma, Dijitalleşme, Sosyal Hizmet

JEL Sınıflandırması: Z1, O3, I3, J0

1. Introduction

The rapid changes and taking place in contemporary societies deeply affect various domains, ranging from governance and science to the economy and technology. Information and communication technologies have also been significantly influenced by this transformation, and particularly in recent years, rapid advancements in this field have led to the widespread use of the internet. With advances in internet technologies, social media has become an indispensable part of modern society (Jia, 2024: 27). As the internet permeates nearly every aspect of daily life, social media platforms have likewise emerged as integral components of everyday routines (Erol, 2022).

The proliferation of social media has profoundly influenced all dimensions of family life-while offering unprecedented opportunities, it has also posed significant challenges to traditional family structures and modes of interaction. The impact of social media on the family is a complex process: on the one hand, it reduces geographical barriers, enabling family members to strengthen their ties; on the other, it decreases the frequency of face-to-face interactions, thereby clearly reshaping the modes and prevalence of communication within modern families. In this context, a thorough examination of the evolving family structure in the age of social media holds both theoretical and practical significance (Jia, 2024: 27). The family, as one of the fundamental building blocks of social structure, is a universal institution present in all cultures (Işık, 2023). Hence, changes within the broader social structure inevitably affect the institution of the family. Social change, in turn, is regarded as one of the most complex and multifaceted topics in the social sciences. Broadly defined, social change refers to the processes of transformation, differentiation, or reshaping in the structure of society, its institutions, and its social relationships (Akbaş & Dursun, 2020). The a defining characteristic of the 21st century is the penetration of digitalization into all spheres of social life. Technological developments have transformed individuals' modes of communication, their social relationships, and daily practices, with social media platforms becoming among the most influential tools of this transformation. The effects of digital interaction on interpersonal relationships have, over time, generated profound shifts in family structures, particularly laying the groundwork for new dynamics of conflict within marital relationships (Kaya, 2022). Thus, over the past two decades, the rise of digital media has not only reshaped many dimensions of daily life but has also brought about fundamental changes in couple and family relationships (Eichenberg et al., 2017: 249). While traditional family structures were shaped within a framework emphasizing face-to-face communication and privacy, today couples increasingly experience problems such as increased jealousy, rising distrust, communication breakdown, and digital infidelity stemming from social media use (Gülнар & Öztat, 2020). These issues undermine marital bonds, contribute to rising divorce rates, and exert negative effects on children, extended family networks,

and the broader social structure. The rapid diffusion of digitalization has affected not only Turkish families but has also appeared similarly across different cultural contexts worldwide. A sociological study conducted in India examined the multifaceted influence of social media on family structures, highlighting the scope of this transformation. Social media has been found to significantly shape young people's thought patterns, value systems, and familial roles, while simultaneously leading to reduced face-to-face interaction, increased intergenerational conflicts, and weakened family bonds. Increased time spent on social media encourages individuals to compare their lives with those of others, thereby fostering feelings of jealousy, inadequacy, and emotional disconnection. Moreover, the sense of freedom offered by social media has also influenced decisions concerning marriage and divorce, weakening traditional family values while prioritizing individual preferences (Rawat et al., 2023). Thus, social media emerges as a factor threatening family ties and intra-family relationships.

Understanding how digitalization influences the institution of marriage, analyzing the digital factors that contribute to divorce, and developing interventions that address the psychosocial challenges individuals experience throughout this process fall within the scope of the social work profession. Social workers play an active role both in post-divorce support and in preventive services aimed at supporting marital communication, fostering digital literacy, and strengthening family structures (Yüce & Yaman, 2022). Post-divorce family structures, shaped by the tools of the digital society, encounter both opportunities for reorganization and various adjustment challenges. Shared custody arrangements, for instance, raise issues such as communication, planning, managing the transfer of children's belongings between households, identity construction, and a sense of belonging. Technology can act as both a facilitator and a source of complication in these processes. Digital calendars, messaging applications, and social media platforms may reduce direct conflict between parents and enable children to maintain continuity of identity across households. However, information leaks and breaches of trust within shared digital systems can further strain parental relationships (Odom et al., 2010). Accordingly, it is essential to design support systems for divorced families in digital environments with both practical and social work-oriented considerations

In this context, this study aims to examine the transformation that digitalization has brought about in family structures, to analyze the effects of social media on divorce, and to discuss intervention opportunities from a social work perspective.

2. Theoretical Framework

Understanding the transformation of family structures in digital society, particularly the impact of social media on marital relationships necessitates engagement with multiple theoretical perspectives. This study draws upon Family Systems Theory, Attachment Theory, Socio-Technical Systems Theory, and the Multilevel Conceptual Framework of Digital Family Life developed by Qian & Hu (2024).

This framework addresses the effects of digitalization on family relationships at the micro (individual practices and relationships), mezzo (online communities and norms), and macro (economic, cultural, and political systems) levels. Through this multidimensional lens, it becomes possible to assess the transformation of marital relationships shaped by social media in a more comprehensive manner.

2.1. A Multilevel Conceptual Framework of Digital Family Life

Digitalization transforms not only interpersonal relationships within contemporary family structures but also the broader social, economic, and cultural contexts in which these relationships are embedded. Qian & Hu (2024) propose a multilevel conceptual framework encompassing micro, mezzo, and macro levels to explain the impacts of digitalization on family life.

At the micro level, the ways in which individuals establish families online, carry out caregiving and economic functions, and maintain communication require reconsideration. At the mezzo level, online support networks and social media groups provide platforms for sharing experiences, thereby collectively shaping family dynamics.

At the macro level, economic systems, cultural patterns, and political regulations influence family practices both directly and indirectly through digital technologies. This framework provides a holistic perspective on the family by addressing both individual attachments and structural consequences of digital platforms, such as issues of privacy, care labor, and the transformation of family roles (Qian & Hu, 2024).

2.2. According to Family Systems Theory

According to Family Systems Theory, the family is a dynamic system composed of individuals who interact with one another and are influenced by all forms of external and internal interventions. Within this framework, digitalization—and particularly the increasing use of social media—has triggered significant transformations in family dynamics. The theory emphasizes that the family must be understood as a whole, wherein the relationships among family members are mutually interactive (Minuchin, 1974; Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2013). Consequently, any change within the family directly affects the entire system. The recent intensification of digitalization and the increasing reliance on social media have substantially influenced these systemic interactions. Specifically, greater time spent online has introduced challenges such as communication breakdowns, diminished privacy, trust issues, and digital jealousy. When one family member becomes heavily engaged in digital life, their interaction with other members tends to weaken, thereby weakening cohesion, disrupting boundaries, and altering roles within the family system. In this regard, social media can be conceptualized as an external factor that disrupts in the functioning of the system. Family Systems Theory suggests that such external factors may disrupt the balance among family members and necessitate the reorganization of the system. However, when digitalization unfolds with such intensity and rapidity that it hinders reorganization, the system may undermine stability, potentially leading to divorce. As one of these external environmental factors, social media significantly affects intra-family communication, the perception of roles, and emotional bonds. The disruption of balance within the system may result in outcomes such as divorce, violence, jealousy, diminished privacy, and the erosion of the fundamental building blocks of the family as an institution (Işık, 2023).

2.3. Attachment Theory

Attachment Theory was developed in the 1950s by the British psychiatrist John Bowlby. The theory posits that the bonds individuals form with their primary caregivers in early childhood shape their emotional and social relationships later in life. In the context of digitali-

zation, social media platforms enable continuous online interaction between individuals, while simultaneously reshaping attachment systems. Privacy violations, emotional distancing, and digital jealousy that arise in online environments may trigger insecure attachment styles, thus weakening the bond between partners (Bowlby, 2012). Research suggests that individuals with anxious or avoidant attachment styles are more likely to experience heightened stress in digital interactions.

2.4. Socio-Technical Systems Theory

Socio-Technical Systems Theory was developed in the 1950s by Eric Trist and Fred Emery. The theory emphasizes that technological systems and social systems are interdependent and continuously interact (Trist & Bamforth, 1951). With the rapid advancement of digitalization, this theory provides an important framework for understanding the impact of technological tools on social structures. The socio-technical approach argues that technology is not merely a tool, but a force that shapes social relations, communication patterns, and institutions. In this regard, the institution of marriage is likewise influenced by digital transformation: the ways how spouses communicate, how often they interact, and how they define privacy boundaries may in turn increase the risk of divorce (Abbas & Michael, n.d.).

3. Digital Society And Social Media: New Lifestyles

Technological developments today affect not only individual life but also social structures in profound ways. Rapid advances in information and communication technologies have transformed every aspect of society, fundamentally altering traditional ways of life. This transformation has given rise to the concept of the “digital society,” in which individuals remain continuously online through social media platforms, access information instantly, and maintain their social interactions within digital environments (Bozkurt et al., 2021).

Social media platforms are digital spaces for communication and content sharing (Dızman, 2019). With its continuously expanding scope, social media has become an indispensable part of everyday life (Erol, 2022). Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter (now X), TikTok, Tinder, and Muzz play active roles not only in expressing opinions, engaging with others, and following current events but also in processes of identity construction. These platforms have transformed into spaces where both individual and collective identities are established, maintained, and questioned. However, the multifaceted environment that social media offers also blurs the boundaries of private life, alters perceptions of privacy, and generates new forms of conflict in relationships. Relationships formed or sustained through social media may weaken the emotional bonds formed in face-to-face interactions, while also increasing behaviors such as digital jealousy and partner surveillance. Such dynamics often trigger trust issues in emotionally based relationships, thereby creating vulnerabilities in institutional unions such as marriage (Yüksel, 2021).

Particularly with the widespread use of platforms like TikTok, it has been observed that lifestyles that conflict with traditional Turkish family values are being adopted. The influence of virtual lifestyles displayed on such platforms appears to push aside one of the most fundamental principles of the Turkish family privacy while simultaneously narrowing the boundaries of personal space (Erol, 2022). In the digital society, individuals’ relationship with social media

is no longer just a communication preference but a social reality that shapes lifestyle, value systems, and relationship patterns. Therefore, understanding the effects of digital interactions at both the individual and social levels is especially important for disciplines such as social work, which examine the transformation of family and marriage institutions (Kaya, 2022). The digitalization process has gone beyond influencing individual life practices and has brought about profound transformations in family structures. In particular, the institution of marriage is directly affected by new forms of communication shaped by social media, with spousal bonds increasingly being redefined through digital interactions. Today, digitalization continues to shape individuals' social relationships and marital preferences. In this context, "Islamic dating" platforms mirroring traditional arranged marriage practices have gained popularity, especially among Muslims living in Western countries. These platforms allow users to seek partners while respecting their religious sensitivities. However, due to factors such as anonymity and the culture of rapid consumption, these methods of digital matchmaking also pose risks, including trust issues and superficial relationships. Nonetheless, for many users, particularly during the pandemic when social interactions were restricted, these platforms provided a viable alternative for seeking marriage partners (Kandemir, 2022).

Table 1: Countries Where TikTok is Completely Banned

Country	Ban Date	Reason
India	June 2020	National security; permanent ban along with 58 China-based applications
Afghanistan	April 2022	Cultural restrictions
Iran	May 2018	Government policy ban
Jordan	Dec 2022	Rising violence among youth
Kyrgyzstan	Aug 2023	Claimed harm to children's mental health
Nepal	Nov 2023	Disruption of social harmony; partially reopened in Aug 2024
Somalia	Aug 2023	"Horrific" content and misinformation; banned alongside Telegram & 1XBet
Uzbekistan	July 2021	Blocked under data localization law
USA	2025	National security concerns; full ban

Sources: ExpressVPN (2024); The Indian Express (2024); Wikipedia contributors (2024).

The global restrictions on TikTok, as illustrated in the table, highlight the extent to which digital platforms are intertwined with national security, cultural values, and social well-being. Countries such as India (2020) and the United States (2025) imposed full bans citing national security concerns, framing social media platforms as not only sites of entertainment but also potential threats to political sovereignty. Other nations, including Afghanistan (2022) and Iran (2018), restricted TikTok on the basis of cultural and moral considerations, underscoring the perception that such platforms conflict with traditional family values and societal norms. Similarly, Jordan (2022), Kyrgyzstan (2023), and Somalia (2023) justified bans due to youth violence, psychological harm, and harmful content, prompting concerns about the platform's role in shaping socialization processes among younger generations. Nepal (2023) temporarily banned TikTok for "disrupting social harmony," later reopening it partially in 2024, while Uzbekistan (2021) blocked the platform under data localization laws, revealing how digital

governance also intersects with state regulatory frameworks. In the context of family transformation in the digital society, these bans demonstrate that states perceive digital media not only as technological tools but also as social institutions capable of reshaping interpersonal relationships, family practices, and collective values. The rationale for bans ranging from mental health concerns to erosion of cultural norms—is closely tied to anxieties about how platforms like TikTok influence family cohesion, generational communication, and marital stability. For instance, the promotion of lifestyles perceived as incompatible with local traditions, coupled with the blurring of privacy boundaries, has been linked to increased family conflicts and marital breakdowns. From a social work perspective, such bans pose critical questions: How can families be supported in navigating the tensions between digital engagement and traditional structures? What preventive interventions can address issues like digital jealousy, reduced family communication, or shifting gender roles facilitated by social media? Rather than viewing bans solely as regulatory acts, bans can also be interpreted as attempts to protect the social fabric and family integrity from the destabilizing effects of rapid digitalization. However, prohibition alone may not resolve underlying issues. Social work practice, therefore, has an essential role in mediating these tensions through family counseling, digital literacy education, and advocacy for healthier patterns of online engagement and support for families adapting to digital realities without losing cohesion.

Table 2: Countries/Regions Where TikTok is Partially Banned or Restricted

Country/Region	Type of Ban/Restriction	Details
Australia	Partial	Banned on federal government devices
Canada	Partial	2024: TikTok offices closed; app accessible for general use
European Union	Partial	Banned on devices of Parliament, Commission, and Council employees
United Kingdom	Partial	Banned on government employees' devices
France	Partial	Banned on government devices for all "entertainment" apps (incl. TikTok)
New Zealand	Partial	Banned on MPs' and parliamentary staff devices
Norway	Partial	Banned on parliamentary work devices; local gov. employees advised to remove
Taiwan	Partial	Banned on public sector devices since 2022
China	Alternative use	TikTok inaccessible; local version Douyin used instead

Sources: ExpressVPN (2024); The Indian Express (2024); Wikipedia contributors (2024).

The data presented in the table illustrate that, unlike countries opting for complete bans, several states and regions have adopted partial restrictions on TikTok, primarily targeting government institutions and public officials. For instance, Australia, the United Kingdom, France, New Zealand, Norway, Taiwan, and the European Union have implemented bans limited to government or parliamentary devices, framing the issue largely as a matter of cybersecurity and data protection. Similarly, Canada closed TikTok's local offices in 2024 while keeping the platform accessible to the public, and China allows only its domestic version, Douyin, under-

scoring a strategy of strict regulatory control rather than outright prohibition. In the broader context of family transformation in the digital society, these selective restrictions reveal an important tension: governments recognize the potential risks associated with social media particularly in terms of data privacy, surveillance, and political influence yet they refrain from full bans because of the platform's deep integration into everyday life and family interactions. This ambivalent stance reflects the dual role of platforms like TikTok: on the one hand, they raise legitimate concerns about national security and individual privacy; on the other, they function as spaces where individuals and families construct identities, maintain relationships, and negotiate cultural norms.

From the perspective of family dynamics and divorce the partial restrictions signal that while governments prioritize safeguarding state institutions, the effects of digital platforms on private life remain largely unregulated. Families continue to face challenges such as digital jealousy, blurred boundaries of privacy, and shifting expectations within marriage, which may increase relational conflicts and even divorce risks. These unresolved issues highlight the gap between state-level digital governance and the lived realities of family dynamics.

For social work intervention, the persistence of widespread public access to TikTok, despite institutional restrictions, underscores the necessity of proactive engagement. Social workers must address how digital platforms influence communication patterns, emotional bonds, and conflict within families. This includes fostering digital literacy, supporting couples in negotiating online boundaries, and developing culturally sensitive approaches to balance traditional values with digital practices. Ultimately, partial bans may mitigate risks at the institutional level, but the transformations within families and the vulnerabilities they produce demand direct attention through social work practice.

These bans are typically justified on the grounds of data security, child protection, and social stability. Governments have voiced concerns regarding TikTok's content moderation policies, the privacy of user data, and the platform's impact on youth.

4. The Transformation of Family Structure and the Institution of Marriage

Social structures are in a constant process of transformation throughout history, shaped by economic, cultural, and technological developments (Bayer, 2013). The family, as the most fundamental and significant social institution, has existed in every society across time. As the cornerstone of social structure, the family has undergone a profound transformation in recent years, particularly with the rapid expansion of social media platforms. This transformation has also affected the Turkish family structure, as in many other societies. Traditionally based on love, respect, tolerance, loyalty, and moral values, the Turkish family has been shaped around these principles from past to present. However, since the 2000s, with social media becoming central to daily life, visible changes have taken place within the family structure, and this process continues to intensify today (Erol, 2022). Within this transformation, the institution of marriage has also undergone a significant shift. Once considered the cornerstone of social order, economic solidarity, and cultural continuity, marriage today is increasingly perceived as a form of partnership centered on emotional satisfaction, individual happiness, and mutual understanding. This shift has led to changes in expectations from marriage, a decline in patience and tolerance, and the emergence of more fragile relationships.

Advancements in science and technology have accelerated the spread of digital devices such as computers, mobile phones, smartwatches, and tablets into every aspect of daily life (Akbaş & Dursun, 2020). With the opportunities offered by the digital society, individuals now build relationships in virtual environments or maintain existing ones through social media. This situation has narrowed the sphere of privacy between couples, increased communication problems, and created an environment open to third-party interference. Social media activities such as posts, likes, time spent online, and visibility on digital platforms may trigger issues such as distrust, jealousy, and conflict within marriages. One of the main drivers behind the recent transformations observed in Turkish family structure is the widespread use of social media platforms and the tendency to conflate the virtual with reality (Erol, 2022). Furthermore, treating the virtual world as “real” has fostered comparisons between spouses, families, and lifestyles. Consequently, this has led to conflicts regarding the concepts of family and marriage, often culminating in divorce, violence, and even homicide.

With globalization in the 1980s, world economies became more open, and the exchange of knowledge and technology accelerated. The spread of the internet in the 1990s laid the foundation for digital transformation. Particularly in the 2000s, the proliferation of mobile technologies, broadband internet, and digital platforms made digitalization an integral part of social life. The rapid growth of technology companies, facilitated by economic globalization, made digital devices accessible to all. As a result, digitalization radically changed individuals’ daily lives, work practices, and social relationships (Yücel & Adiloğlu, 2019). Today, the widespread availability of internet access has dramatically increased social media use. In Turkey, while the internet penetration rate was below 10% in 2000, it rose to 85.96% by 2023. Similarly, social media users accounted for 73.1% of the total population in 2023. This demonstrates the extent to which digitalization has been integrated into daily life and profoundly impacts social structures (DataReportal, 2023; World Bank, 2023). Although the innovations of the modern era offer numerous opportunities, they also have adverse effects on family communication peer relationships, and parent-child interactions. The internet—and social media in particular—occupy a large share of individuals’ time (Güleç, 2018). The transformation of family structure not only affects individuals but also children and the broader social fabric. The increase in divorce rates, the rise of single-parent households, and changes in parent-child relationships are among the major factors that directly influence children’s social and emotional development. For families to function in a healthy way, intra-family communication must be sufficient, qualitative, and effective. Face-to-face communication is particularly valuable in strengthening emotional bonds. Active listening, mutual understanding, the development of responsibility, acts of sacrifice, and cooperation among family members ensure the continuation of family life on solid foundations (Erol, 2022).

In this context, understanding the dynamics of the digital society and their impact on family structure and the institution of marriage is crucial. Early identification of the challenges faced by individuals and families bears great importance for the implementation of social policies and the practice of social work.

5. Social Media and Divorce

Social media has become a form of communication that occupies a significant place in individuals' daily lives by maintaining their continuous engagement with digital platforms. It is widely and extensively used both in Turkey and across the world (Erol, 2022). This digital sphere not only facilitates access to information but also profoundly influences interpersonal relationships. Particularly in close relationships such as marriage, the impact of social media is evident in both positive and negative ways.

The widespread use of social media affects not only family relationships but also contributes to the escalation of various intra-family problems (Güleç, 2018). Recent studies have found that social media use can pose threats to fundamental marital values such as trust, privacy, and loyalty. Extended time spent on social media, digital jealousy, spouses monitoring each other online, access to past relationship content, and the ease of communicating with third parties can all create an atmosphere of conflict and mistrust within marriages (Akbaş & Dursun, 2020). Violations of marital boundaries through social media posts are also common. Disapproval of each other's online behaviors, expectations regarding profile transparency, and the public exposure of private matters often exacerbate communication problems. Such digital-based conflicts gradually reduce relationship satisfaction and constitute factors that accelerate divorce decisions. In these cases, scholars argue that social workers should examine couples' social media use habits during interventions and take this factor into account when developing conflict resolution strategies. Excessive social media use, particularly when it reaches the level of digital addiction, results in decreased face-to-face communication between spouses, heightened jealousy, reduced privacy, emotional distancing, and the replacement of physical togetherness with online interactions. This process weakens the institution of marriage, destabilizes family unity, and drives individuals to seek divorce as a solution. Specifically, lack of communication, jealousy, reduced privacy, emotional detachment, and the loss of mutual understanding undermine couples' ability to resolve problems together, thereby damaging the marital relationship. Social media functions both as a source of conflict and an escape mechanism from relational issues. As spouses spend more time in virtual spaces rather than engaging in face-to-face communication, emotional bonds weaken, while digital jealousy, privacy violations, and trust issues become more visible. Unrealistic expectations, the negative influence of social networks, and insufficient problem-solving skills further frame divorce as a viable solution. Yet, divorce is not only an emotional rupture but also a serious life event with economic, social, and psychological consequences. Its impact is particularly detrimental to children. Therefore, social work interventions are vital not only in preventing divorce but also in ensuring that, when unavoidable, the process is managed constructively. Social workers contribute to individuals' ability to make sound decisions by strengthening family communication, supporting conflict resolution, and providing family counseling services. Moreover, individuals seeking family counseling in Turkey can conveniently schedule appointments via the e-Government system, which facilitates faster and easier access to professional support.

Clayton (2013) identified a notable relationship between the duration of social media use and both marital dissatisfaction and the consideration of divorce. As daily social media use increases, so does the proportion of participants reporting marital dissatisfaction and considering divorce. While only 15% of individuals using social media for 0–1 hours daily reported

marital dissatisfaction, this figure increased to 62% among those using it for 5 hours or more. Similarly, the proportion of participants considering divorce increased from 5% among 0–1 hour users to 51% among those spending 5 hours or more on social media. These findings indicate that social media use is not merely a leisure activity but also a potential risk factor that can weaken relationships and intensify communication problems between couples. Constant online engagement reduces face-to-face interaction and emotional closeness between spouses, while jealousy, privacy violations, and trust issues experienced in virtual spaces further magnify these negative effects. Consequently, social media use has shifted from being an individual habit to a societal factor influencing marital relationships. In this regard, it is essential that social workers adopt a holistic assessment of social media use within family counseling processes, as such an approach may play a critical role in safeguarding marriages.

Table 3. The Relationship Between Social Media Use and Divorce Rates (Sample Research Data)

Social Media Use (Daily Duration)	Marital Dissatisfaction (%)	Participants Considering Divorce (%)
0–1 hour	15%	5%
1–3 hours	34%	20%
3–5 hours	49%	38%
5+ hours	62%	51%

Sources: Clayton et al. (2013)

6. Social Work Intervention and Preventive Approaches

As family structures transform in the digital society, the role of social workers has become more multifaceted. In particular, marital problems and divorce processes linked to social media require support not only on a psychological level but also on social, economic, and legal levels. In this context, the social work profession offers significant areas of intervention in terms of empowering individuals, improving intra-family communication, and safeguarding social cohesion.

Table 4. Divorce Statistics in 2024 and Areas of Social Work Intervention

Type of Statistic	Value	Area of Social Work Intervention
Number of Divorced Couples	187,343	Marriage counseling, psychosocial support
Crude Divorce Rate (per thousand)	2.19	Family communication and conflict resolution
Divorce Rate within First 5 Years	33.7%	Pre-marital education, early intervention
Divorce Rate within 6–10 Years	21.3%	Crisis intervention, intra-family support services
Number of Foreign Brides	29,115	Cultural adaptation support, family integration
Child Custody (Mother)	74.4%	Child protection, parental support programs
Child Custody (Father)	25.6%	Parental equality, fatherhood support programs

Source: Turkish Statistical Institute, 2024; Ministry of Family and Social Services, 2023

The 2024 divorce statistics highlight the scale of changes occurring in family structures. Nationwide, 187,343 couples divorced, underscoring the vulnerability of the institution of marriage. The crude divorce rate of 2.19 per thousand indicates that approximately two in every thousand people divorced within a year. The 33.7% divorce rate within the first five years of marriage is particularly noteworthy, emphasizing the importance of early years in terms of crises and adaptation. This underscores the significance of pre-marital education programs and early intervention strategies in social work practices. When these years, characterized by heightened conflict and crisis, are supported by well-structured family counseling processes, evidence suggests that conflicts can be constructively resolved through communication. The 21.3% divorce rate occurring within 6–10 years of marriage, on the other hand, highlights the necessity of effective crisis intervention and intra-family support services to address accumulated problems. Additionally, the data indicating 29,115 foreign brides and 5,923 foreign grooms point to the challenges posed by cultural differences within families and the need for social workers to pay greater attention to cultural integration processes.

Custody statistics reveal that 74.4% of custody decisions were granted to mothers, while 25.6% went to fathers. This highlights the need for both child protection services and parental support programs that promote fathers' active participation in parenting roles. Taken together, these figures indicate that social work interventions cover a broad range, including marriage counseling, development of communication skills within families, crisis management, cultural adaptation, and child-centered services. In this context, it is argued that the implementation of both preventive and intervention strategies by social workers is critical in supporting the family institution and reducing divorce rates. When working with couples at risk of divorce, social workers must employ both preventive and intervention strategies. Preventive services include pre-marital counseling, digital awareness training, healthy communication workshops, and social media literacy programs. These initiatives aim to help couples consciously manage their digital behaviors and establish healthy digital boundaries (Yüce & Yaman, 2022).

At the intervention stage, social workers provide marriage counseling, individual psychosocial support, group counseling, and specialized child-focused programs. The primary goals of social work intervention in divorce processes include facilitating healthy communication between spouses, minimizing the negative impact on children, and supporting the adaptation of individuals to new life circumstances. In cases where marital problems involve social media related violence, digital bullying, or violations of privacy, social workers also assume guiding and referral roles. Multidimensional approaches such as facilitating access to legal support, managing crises, and collaborating with support groups further strengthen the effectiveness of social work during divorce. Accurately analyzing the transformations in family structures brought about by digital society and restructuring social work interventions accordingly are considered essential for enhancing both individual and societal well-being.

Social workers increasingly implement projects that prioritize preventive interventions in response to the challenges digitalization poses to family structures. These initiatives aim not only to minimize the negative effects of digital technologies on family dynamics but also to enhance awareness among family members regarding potential risks in digital environments. In evaluating preventive social work interventions, it is crucial to move beyond small-scale, localized initiatives and examine both international and national large-scale programs that provide

more systematic approaches. At the international level, several organizations have developed comprehensive strategies addressing the intersection of digitalization and family well-being. UNICEF's Child Online Protection Programs emphasize children's rights in the digital era and provide global guidelines for families to ensure safe internet use. Similarly, the European Union's Better Internet for Kids (BIK) Strategy focuses on media literacy, parental guidance, and the promoting safer digital environments for children and families. In addition, UNESCO's Media and Information Literacy framework aims to equip individuals of all ages with critical thinking skills that enable them to navigate digital spaces responsibly. Collectively, these initiatives provide structural frameworks for managing digital risks and promoting healthy digital practices, which can subsequently be adapted and contextualized by national governments. In Turkey, comparable large-scale interventions have also been introduced to mitigate the adverse effects of digitalization on families. The Ministry of Family and Social Services, in collaboration with the Information and Communication Technologies Authority (BTK), has launched nationwide digital literacy campaigns to raise awareness about online safety and privacy among families. The Ministry of National Education (MEB) has further integrated media literacy and safe internet use modules into school curricula, with the dual aim of strengthening children's critical thinking abilities and reducing dependence on digital technologies. Additionally, BTK's Safe Internet Service provides the necessary technical infrastructure for families to monitor children's internet usage and restrict access to harmful content. These national measures reflect a shift from localized initiatives to coordinated, systemic interventions that target not only children but also parents, educators, and broader communities. Within this broader framework, social workers play a pivotal role in contextualizing and implementing international standards and national policies at the community and family levels. By bridging global and national strategies with local realities, social work interventions help foster sustainable digital awareness and promote healthier family dynamics in an increasingly digitalized society.

Alongside these comprehensive programs, several local initiatives in Turkey exemplify how preventive interventions can be tailored to specific community contexts. The project "Protect What You Cherish from Digital Exposure", jointly implemented by the Ministry of Family and Social Services and the Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTÜK), seeks to raise awareness about children's digital privacy and encourages parents to exercise caution when sharing content about children online. Conducted over two years, the initiative emphasizes parental responsibility in the use of digital platforms (RTÜK, 2023). Another example is the "Peers over Screens" project, organized by the Mardin Provincial Directorate of Family and Social Services, which aims to reduce children's screen time while enhancing social interaction. Through home visits, families are informed about children's digital habits and guided toward healthier practices (Mardin ASHİM, 2025). Similarly, the "Conscious Steps in the Digital World" program, coordinated by the Ankara Mamak Social Service Center, provides families and children with training on topics such as "Family and the Internet" and "Responsible Media Use," highlighting the broader impact of digital media on family relationships (ASHB, 2025).

Taken together, these projects, whether international, national, or local illustrate the centrality of preventive interventions in addressing the risks of digitalization for families. By raising awareness, fostering responsible digital behaviors, and strengthening family resilience, social workers contribute significantly to mitigating the negative effects of digital environments. Ultimately, these initiatives underscore the importance of coordinated, multi-level strategies

that integrate global frameworks with national policies and local practices to ensure sustainable and positive digital engagement for families.

6. Recommendations and Conclusion

With the transformation of social life through digitalization, family structures have also become increasingly vulnerable to the effects of digitalization. While social media facilitates interpersonal communication, within marital relationships, it may lead to adverse outcomes such as violations of privacy, erosion of trust, digital jealousy, and communication breakdowns. The reviewed literature indicates that both the duration and nature of social media use decrease marital satisfaction and increase the likelihood of divorce consideration. This study contributes to the literature in the fields of family sociology and communication by offering new perspectives for understanding the transformation of family structures in the social media age and by providing key reference points for family education, family policies, and social work practices. At the same time, this study employed a literature review method to examine the impact of social media on family boundaries, power dynamics, and emotional identities. It is observed that with increasing social media use, individuals' perceptions of privacy are reshaped, while power relations and emotional bonds within families are also redefined. Furthermore, couples who engage in more intensive digital interactions experience marital conflicts more frequently, which in turn undermines marital commitment. As social media continues to spread globally, its influence on family structures will deepen further. Therefore, the continuous monitoring and investigation of this issue remain crucial both theoretically and practically, in order to ensure family cohesion and support social stability.

Figure 1: Crude Divorce Rate in Turkey



Source: Turkish Statistical Institute, 2024

Between 2000 and 2023, the observed increase in crude divorce rates in Turkey serves as a significant indicator of the impact of digitalization, social media use, and broader social transformations on family structures. An analysis of divorce trends in Turkey between 2000 and 2023 reveals a consistent and significant increase in crude divorce rates. In 2000, the rate stood at 1.4 per thousand, rising to 1.6 per thousand in 2010, 2.1 per thousand in 2020, and finally 2.2 per thousand in 2023. Over the course of 23 years, this represents an approximate 57 percent increase, highlighting a notable transformation in the dynamics of marital stability in Turkish society.

This upward trajectory cannot be attributed to a sole causal factor. Structural conditions such as economic fluctuations, unemployment, increasing living costs, transformations in gender roles, and rapid urbanization play a decisive role in shaping divorce dynamics. Nevertheless, the marked acceleration in divorce rates particularly after 2010 has drawn attention to the influence of digitalization and the widespread use of social media on family structures and intimate relationships. The relationship between digitalization and divorce should not be understood in terms of direct causality; rather, digital technologies act as mediating factors that intensify existing vulnerabilities within marriages. Social media platforms have fundamentally reshaped patterns of marital communication and interaction, leading to the erosion of traditional values such as trust, privacy, and commitment. As a result, factors such as misunderstandings, jealousy, digital infidelity, and the pressure of constant online visibility have become increasingly common, contributing to heightened risks of marital dissolution.

At the same time, the socio-economic context remains a critical dimension of the issue. Periods of economic instability, rising inflation, and growing financial stress place substantial pressure on households. When combined with the comparative culture fostered by social media where individuals are frequently exposed to seemingly “happier” or “more successful” lifestyles economic stress can amplify dissatisfaction and incompatibility within marriages. In this sense, digitalization should not be interpreted as an isolated cause of divorce but rather as a catalyst that accelerates the manifestation of underlying socio-economic tensions and magnifies their impact on family life.

Given these intertwined dynamics, addressing the rise in divorce requires a multidimensional approach. Research indicates that early-stage social service interventions play a crucial role in mitigating conflicts before they escalate. The discipline of social work, therefore, assumes preventive, protective, and restorative functions in responding to family challenges shaped by the digital era. In particular, pre-marital digital awareness training, couple counseling, psychosocial support services, and protective-preventive programs for children represent fundamental areas of intervention.

In conclusion, the steady increase in divorce rates in Turkey between 2000 and 2023 reflects the combined influence of economic hardship, shifting social dynamics, and the transformative effects of digitalization. While digital technologies have altered the nature of communication and intimacy within families, economic pressures remain a primary driver of marital instability. A holistic framework that integrates digital literacy initiatives, socio-economic support mechanisms, and family-centered social services is therefore essential. Such a comprehensive strategy would not only help mitigate the risks associated with divorce but also contribute to the protection of family integrity and the promotion of broader social well-being.

Digital literacy education is particularly important for strengthening the cognitive and critical thinking skills of all family members, especially young individuals, with respect to social media use. Such training should enable individuals to use social media in a rational, balanced, and conscious manner, prevent excessive dependency, and promote an appropriate understanding of privacy in order to safeguard personal and family information. At the societal level, the expansion of media literacy programs tailored to different age groups can help individuals learn about the mechanisms of social media, its potential risks, and safe practices for its use. Furthermore, fostering a positive and healthy online culture within families is considered a critical approach to safeguarding family unity in a digital society. Family members may establish shared rules regarding social media use to prevent excessive dependence and its adverse effects on relationships. For instance, setting limits on usage time, determining the type of content to be shared, or restricting mobile device use during family gatherings can strengthen face-to-face communication and interaction. Within this framework, social service interventions should be reinforced through various family-oriented programs, including:

Family Digital Literacy and Education Programs: Training for couples and parents to raise awareness of the potential negative effects of social media, supported by content that enhances communication skills and encourages responsible behavior in digital environments.

Strengthening Early Intervention and Counseling Services: Social workers and psychologists should develop proactive strategies to identify family conflicts at an early stage and provide individual or group counseling that addresses social media-related challenges.

Public Awareness and Information Campaigns: Collaborative initiatives between media outlets and social service institutions should be implemented to raise awareness about the impact of digital technologies on family relationships, particularly targeting young couples and parents.

Policy and Legal Regulations: Legal frameworks should ensure that social media and digital evidence are evaluated fairly and transparently in divorce proceedings. Digital awareness and training should also be expanded within family courts and social service units.

Research and Monitoring Activities: The digital transformation of family structures should be continuously monitored through sociological and psychological research, allowing social service interventions to be updated in line with current needs and to enhance their effectiveness.

Diversification of Family Support Programs: Programs should be developed to strengthen social skills, conflict resolution abilities, and healthy interactions with digital media for both parents and children.

Finally, the impact of social media on different family types should also be considered. Special studies on single-parent families, restructured families, or post-divorce families are essential to understand their distinct experiences. Such research can shed light on the effects of social media on family members' mental health, family functionality, and parent-child relationships, thereby enabling the development of more targeted social service policies and intervention models. This holistic approach will not only contribute to reducing divorce rates but also play a significant role in protecting family integrity and enhancing societal well-being.

Conflict of Interests

There is no conflict of interest between the authors or any third-party individuals or institutions.

Ethics Committee Approval

This research does not have a part that needs approval of the ethics committee.

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