

The Impact of Digital Technology on Self-Management Skills of Married Couples Through Online Counseling Services

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ABSTRACT:

The rapid development of digital technology has significantly changed the field of counseling services, including support for married couples in developing their self-expression abilities. This study examines how digital technology influences the self-expression skills of married couples through the use of online counseling services. A qualitative research design was applied, using in-depth interviews with 12 couples who had experience participating in online counseling sessions. The results show that digital technology improves access to counseling services and helps couples better recognize their emotions, communicate more effectively, and handle conflicts in a more constructive way. In addition, flexible appointment arrangements and a more comfortable counseling setting were found to support the enhancement of self-expression skills. Nevertheless, several limitations were also identified, such as technical issues, reduced emotional closeness with counselors, and concerns regarding data privacy. Overall, digital technology has strong potential to strengthen the self-expression abilities of married couples through online counseling, as long as the services are carefully designed with attention to emotional support, security, and appropriate technological use. The findings of this study provide useful insights for developing more effective digital counseling approaches within marital relationships.

Keywords: digital technology, online counseling, self-expression, married couples, marital relationships

1. Introduction

Over the last decade, the rapid advancement of digital technology has significantly transformed the ways in which individuals communicate, interact, and access various services, including psychological and counseling support. This transformation has been particularly evident in the field of mental health services, where traditional face-to-face counseling has

increasingly been complemented or replaced by digital platforms. (Norazlina, 2020) the emergence of digital communication tools such as Zoom, Google Meet, and specialized counseling applications has greatly expanded access to psychological assistance, removing geographical barriers that previously limited service delivery. As a result, individuals are now able to receive professional support regardless

of their physical location, which marks a major shift in the accessibility of counseling services.

In addition to overcoming spatial limitations, digital counseling also addresses challenges related to time and cost efficiency. Many individuals who previously avoided counseling due to busy schedules, transportation difficulties, or financial constraints can now access services more easily through online platforms. This development has made counseling more inclusive and adaptable to modern lifestyles. Furthermore, the flexibility offered by digital counseling has contributed to its growing popularity among various social groups, including married couples who face relational challenges.

In recent years, online counseling has become an increasingly preferred option for married couples experiencing difficulties in their relationships. This trend became especially noticeable during the COVID-19 pandemic, when restrictions on physical interaction made in-person counseling sessions difficult or impossible to conduct. In this period, the demand for online counseling continues to grow. This is largely due to the increasing pressures of modern life, such as demanding work schedules, financial stress, and limited quality time between partners, all of which can negatively affect marital relationships.

One of the most significant advantages of online counseling is its flexibility in terms of time and location. Couples no longer need to travel to counseling centers, as they can participate in sessions from the comfort of their own homes or any other convenient environment. (Ahmad, 2021) highlights that this level of convenience contributes to a more relaxed atmosphere, which may encourage clients to express their emotions more openly. Individuals who may feel anxious, embarrassed, or uncomfortable in face-to-face settings often find it easier to communicate in a virtual environment. This observation is consistent with psychological theories that emphasize the importance of creating a safe and supportive space for emotional expression, which is essential for

behavioral change and self-awareness development (Corey, 2016).

Moreover, online counseling allows couples to access professional support in a more timely manner. In traditional counseling systems, clients often need to wait for available appointments, which can take days or even weeks. In contrast, digital platforms provide faster access to counselors, enabling early intervention when conflicts arise. (Mejah et al., 2019) notes that timely psychological intervention plays a crucial role in preventing conflict escalation and reducing the risk of long-term relational damage. This immediate accessibility is particularly beneficial for married couples, as unresolved conflicts can quickly intensify if not addressed appropriately.

Despite its numerous advantages, online counseling also presents several challenges that must be carefully considered. One of the primary concerns is data privacy and confidentiality. Since counseling sessions are conducted through digital platforms, there is always a potential risk of data breaches or unauthorized access to sensitive information. In addition, technical issues such as unstable internet connections, software limitations, and device compatibility problems can disrupt the counseling process and reduce its effectiveness. Another limitation involves the reduced ability of counselors to observe non-verbal cues, such as body language, facial expressions, and subtle emotional signals, which are often important in understanding clients' emotional states (Zakaria, 2022).

These limitations indicate that online counseling cannot fully replace traditional face-to-face interactions in all situations. Instead, it should be viewed as a complementary approach that requires adaptation from both counselors and clients. Counselors must develop new strategies to interpret digital communication effectively, while clients need to become comfortable expressing themselves in virtual environments. Therefore, successful implementation of online counseling depends on mutual understanding and adjustment between both parties.

In the context of married couples, the effectiveness of online counseling in improving emotional regulation and conflict management is influenced by several psychological factors, including openness, emotional maturity, trust in the counselor, and confidence in the digital platform being used. When these factors are present, couples are more likely to engage actively in the counseling process and benefit from the support provided. With appropriate technological infrastructure and a counseling approach tailored to digital interaction, online counseling has the potential to enhance self-management skills and improve relationship quality.

Self-management refers to an individual's ability to regulate emotions, thoughts, and behaviors in response to challenging situations. This skill includes recognizing emotional triggers, managing stress effectively, controlling impulsive reactions, and making rational decisions based on thoughtful reflection (Mejah et al., 2019). Within marital relationships, self-management is especially important because couples frequently encounter emotionally charged situations that require patience, understanding, and effective communication.

Mejah et al., (2019), the inability to manage emotions such as anger, jealousy, or disappointment can lead to frequent misunderstandings, ineffective communication patterns, and in severe cases, marital breakdown. Therefore, self-management is not only essential for individual emotional stability but also plays a key role in maintaining harmony and strengthening relationship resilience. Couples who possess strong self-management skills are generally more capable of resolving conflicts constructively and maintaining healthier communication patterns.

In the digital era, technological advancements have created new opportunities for couples to develop these skills through professional guidance. Online counseling services allow married partners to access psychological support without facing logistical challenges such as transportation costs, scheduling difficulties, or

childcare responsibilities (Ahmad, 2021). The flexibility of these services enables couples to choose suitable times for counseling sessions, which helps reduce additional stress and increases participation rates.

Furthermore, digital counseling environments often create a sense of psychological comfort that encourages greater openness in sharing personal and emotional experiences (Norazlina, 2020). (Zakaria, 2022) emphasizes that a non-threatening and supportive environment is essential for effective self-disclosure, which is a key component in the counseling process. When clients feel safe, they are more likely to explore their emotions honestly and engage deeply in the therapeutic process.

However, achieving successful outcomes in online counseling also requires a high level of personal commitment from clients. (Corey, 2016) explains that meaningful behavioral change depends on intrinsic motivation, willingness to reflect on personal issues, and consistent practice of strategies learned during counseling sessions. Without active engagement from both partners, the effectiveness of counseling may be limited. Therefore, the success of online counseling is not determined solely by technology but also by the psychological readiness and participation of the individuals involved.

Overall, digital technology serves not only as a medium for delivering counseling services but also as a powerful tool for empowering individuals to improve emotional regulation, behavioral control, and cognitive awareness. When implemented effectively, online counseling can significantly contribute to enhancing the psychosocial well-being of married couples and strengthening their relational stability.

2. Methodology

This study used a qualitative research approach with a phenomenological design. The phenomenological method was selected because it allows the researcher to explore and understand the lived experiences of married

couples in managing themselves through online counseling services (Creswell, 2013). This approach focuses on how individuals interpret and give meaning to their experiences, making it suitable for examining emotional processes and self-management within marital relationships.

The participants consisted of six married couples who had experience participating in online counseling sessions. They were chosen using purposive sampling. (Palinkas et al., 2015), purposive sampling is a technique used to select participants based on specific criteria relevant to the research objectives. In this study, the criteria required participants to have completed at least five online counseling sessions and to be willing to voluntarily share their personal experiences in detail.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted online using platforms such as Zoom and Google Meet. This method was selected because it provides a balance between structure and flexibility, allowing the researcher to guide the discussion while also giving participants the opportunity to express their experiences freely and in depth (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). With participants' consent, all interviews were recorded and later transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy in data processing.

The data analysis process used thematic analysis to identify, analyze, and interpret patterns within the qualitative data. Thematic analysis was chosen because of its flexibility and effectiveness in organizing complex data into meaningful themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The process involved repeated reading of the interview transcripts, open coding of relevant statements, and grouping similar codes into broader categories that represent key themes.

To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, methodological triangulation was applied. This involved comparing and combining data from multiple sources, including interview results, indirect observations during counseling interactions, and supporting documentation related to the participants' counseling experiences (Patton, 1999). This

process helped strengthen the validity of the findings by ensuring consistency across different data sources.

In addition, member checking was conducted as part of the validation process. Participants were given the opportunity to review the preliminary findings and provide feedback on whether the interpretations accurately reflected their experiences. This step is important in qualitative research as it helps reduce researcher bias and improves the accuracy of the results (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Overall, this research design was chosen to gain an in-depth understanding of how married couples experience self-management development through online counseling. The combination of phenomenological inquiry, purposive sampling, semi-structured interviews, and thematic analysis provided a comprehensive framework for exploring the emotional and behavioral dynamics of participants in a digital counseling context.

3. Results

3.1. Increased Self-Awareness

The majority of participants in this study reported a clear and meaningful improvement in their self-awareness after engaging in online counseling sessions. Self-awareness refers to an individual's ability to recognize, understand, and reflect on their own emotions, thoughts, and behaviors. This capacity enables individuals to respond more appropriately and adaptively in interpersonal and relational situations (Goleman, 1998). Within the context of marriage, self-awareness plays a crucial role because it allows partners to identify recurring emotional and behavioral patterns, which is an essential step toward improving communication and resolving conflicts constructively.

Ahmad, (2021) emphasizes that the integration of digital technology into counseling services creates a more comfortable and less intimidating environment for clients. Online counseling platforms are generally perceived as more private, flexible, and less judgmental compared to traditional face-to-face sessions. This

environment encourages individuals to express their emotions more openly, particularly when discussing sensitive or personal marital issues. The findings of this study are consistent with this perspective, as participants reported that online counseling helped them feel more at ease in sharing their thoughts and emotions. As a result, they were better able to identify negative emotional reactions, communication breakdowns, and underlying sources of conflict within their marital relationships.

In addition to facilitating emotional expression, digital technology also supports the development of self-reflection skills. Various digital tools such as online journals, mindfulness applications, and structured communication platforms used during counseling sessions allow couples to monitor and evaluate their emotional responses more systematically (Sweeny & Howell, 2017). These tools encourage individuals to observe their behavior patterns over time, which contributes to deeper self-understanding. By consistently engaging in such reflective practices, couples gradually develop stronger emotional awareness and become more conscious of how their actions influence their partner and the relationship as a whole.

Moreover, self-awareness is further strengthened through continuous interaction and support provided outside formal counseling sessions. (Norazlina, 2020) highlights that counselors can maintain communication with clients through digital means such as messaging applications, emails, or dedicated support platforms. This ongoing communication allows counselors to provide feedback, reinforcement, and emotional support even after the formal session has ended. For married couples, this continuous guidance is particularly valuable, as it helps them apply self-management strategies in real-life situations more consistently. It also enables them to seek clarification or assistance when new emotional or relational challenges emerge between sessions.

Another important aspect identified in this study is the role of real-time reflection in enhancing emotional understanding. Participants noted that

the ability to revisit counseling discussions through digital records or notes helped them better analyze their emotional reactions and communication patterns. This process encouraged more deliberate self-evaluation and supported gradual behavioral improvement. Over time, such reflective practices contributed to more stable emotional regulation and improved interpersonal understanding between partners.

Overall, the findings suggest that technology-based online counseling serves as an effective medium for enhancing self-awareness among married couples. Beyond its practical advantages such as flexibility, accessibility, and convenience, online counseling also creates a psychologically safe space that promotes openness, reflection, and emotional growth. By combining professional guidance with digital tools, couples are able to develop a deeper understanding of themselves and their partners. This ultimately strengthens their self-management abilities and contributes positively to the quality and stability of their marital relationships.

3.2. Improved Communication Skills

One of the most significant themes identified in this study is the improvement of communication skills among married couples after participating in online counseling sessions. Participants consistently reported positive changes in the way they communicate with their partners, particularly in terms of active listening, clarity in expressing emotions, and the ability to show empathy during interactions. These improvements were seen as essential in reducing misunderstandings and enhancing the overall quality of marital relationships.

Norazlina, (2020) explains that digital counseling platforms provide couples with additional time and space to reflect before responding to their partner. This reflective pause plays an important role in shaping more thoughtful and controlled communication patterns. Unlike face-to-face interactions, where responses may be immediate and emotionally driven, online communication especially through written messages or

scheduled video calls encourages individuals to process information more carefully. As a result, couples become more attentive to the meaning behind their partner's words and are able to respond in a calmer and more rational manner. This process reduces impulsive reactions that are often triggered by emotional stress.

Supporting this (Derks et al., 2008), communication, such as text messaging and email, often enhances the clarity of emotional expression. This is because individuals tend to be more deliberate in selecting their words when communicating in written form. In marital relationships, this becomes particularly valuable, as clear and respectful communication is essential for resolving conflicts effectively. Through digital platforms, couples are more likely to express their feelings in a structured and non-confrontational way, which helps reduce tension and prevents misunderstandings from escalating.

In addition, online counseling sessions often incorporate therapeutic communication techniques such as reflection, paraphrasing, and emotional validation. (Ahmad, 2021) notes that these techniques help couples improve both their expressive and receptive communication skills. Counselors may also integrate digital tools such as guided communication exercises, interactive worksheets, and mobile applications designed to support emotional expression and dialogue between partners. These structured interventions provide couples with practical opportunities to practice healthier communication patterns in a safe and supportive environment.

Participants in this study also reported that after undergoing online counseling, they developed a stronger understanding of the importance of open and balanced communication within their marriage. They learned to listen more actively without interrupting their partner and to respect turn-taking during discussions, particularly when addressing conflicts or sensitive issues. This improvement in communication behavior contributed to a stronger sense of mutual respect and emotional understanding between

partners. Over time, couples became more aware of how their communication style directly influenced the emotional climate of their relationship.

Furthermore, these findings align with (Goleman, 1995) concept of emotional intelligence, which highlights the connection between emotional awareness and effective interpersonal communication. As couples developed greater emotional control and empathy, they were better able to understand each other's perspectives and respond more constructively during disagreements. This shift not only reduced the frequency of intense conflicts but also improved their ability to resolve issues in a calm and cooperative manner.

Overall, the study indicates that digital technology in online counseling plays a crucial role in enhancing communication skills among married couples. By offering flexible, reflective, and structured communication opportunities, online counseling helps couples build stronger interaction patterns. These improvements contribute not only to better conflict management but also to increased emotional closeness, trust, and long-term stability within marital relationships.

3.3. Conflict Management Strategies

The findings of this study indicate that married couples experienced significant improvements in their conflict management strategies after participating in online counseling sessions. Participants reported that they became more aware of the importance of regulating emotional reactions during disagreements and applying structured techniques learned in counseling to prevent conflicts from escalating into more serious arguments. This change reflects a gradual shift from impulsive responses toward more controlled and reflective behavior when dealing with marital issues.

One of the most commonly reported strategies was the use of deep breathing techniques to manage anger and emotional tension during conflict situations. Couples also highlighted the importance of adopting collaborative problem-

solving approaches, which emphasize negotiation, mutual understanding, and compromise rather than confrontation. (Mejah et al., 2019) supports these findings by explaining that online counseling can enhance couples' conflict management abilities through structured exercises such as guided problem-solving tasks and emotion regulation training conducted in virtual environments. These methods allow couples to practice responding to conflict in a calmer and more constructive manner, thereby reducing the likelihood of unnecessary escalation.

In addition, Bodenmann, (2005) emphasizes that training in stress and conflict management plays a crucial role in reducing relational tension and improving overall marital satisfaction. In online counseling settings, techniques such as self-reflection exercises and virtual role-playing activities are often used to help couples simulate real-life conflict situations. These activities provide a safe and controlled space where partners can experiment with new communication and behavioral strategies. Through this process, couples gain deeper insight into both their own emotional reactions and those of their partners, which ultimately strengthens empathy and understanding within the relationship.

Another important finding from this study is that online counseling provides couples with the opportunity to create emotional distance during intense conflicts. Participants noted that when discussions became too heated, the online format allowed them to pause temporarily, step away from the conversation, and regain emotional stability. This ability to take a break is more difficult in face-to-face counseling or real-life arguments, where emotional pressure is often continuous. (Moore, 2003) highlights the importance of such "time-outs" in conflict management, explaining that short breaks can help individuals reduce anger, restore calmness, and return to discussions with a more rational mindset.

Furthermore, counselor guidance plays a significant role in shaping healthier

communication patterns during conflict situations. Ahmad, (2021) notes that counselors often introduce structured communication tools such as neutral phrases, communication scripts, and guided sentence patterns to help couples avoid hurtful or aggressive language. These techniques encourage partners to express their feelings in a respectful and solution-oriented manner, ensuring that discussions remain focused on resolving issues rather than blaming one another. As a result, couples are able to maintain emotional connection even during disagreements.

Overall, the findings suggest that technology-based online counseling is highly effective in improving conflict management skills among married couples. With consistent guidance from counselors and the application of structured therapeutic techniques, couples become more capable of handling disagreements in a mature and constructive way. They learn to manage emotions more effectively, communicate more respectfully, and work together to find solutions. Ultimately, these improvements contribute to stronger emotional bonds, reduced conflict intensity, and greater stability in marital relationships.

3.4. Challenges and Limitations

Although technology-based online counseling provides many advantages for married couples, this study also identified several challenges and limitations that affect the overall effectiveness of the service. These issues highlight that, despite its growing use and practicality, online counseling still faces obstacles that need to be addressed to ensure better outcomes for clients.

One of the main challenges reported by participants is technical disruption during counseling sessions. Problems such as unstable internet connections, delayed audio, unclear video quality, and difficulties in accessing digital platforms were commonly experienced. These technical issues often interrupt the flow of communication between couples and counselors, making it harder to maintain smooth and meaningful interaction. (Zakaria, 2022)

notes that such disruptions can reduce the quality of counseling sessions because important emotional expressions, tone of voice, and verbal cues may be lost or misunderstood when connectivity problems occur. As a result, the counseling process may become less effective, especially when discussing emotionally sensitive marital issues.

Another limitation highlighted in this study is the reduced sense of emotional closeness compared to face-to-face counseling. While online platforms allow visual and verbal communication, many participants felt that interactions through screens do not fully replicate the emotional presence of a counselor in a physical setting. Norazlina, (2020) explains that direct physical presence plays an important role in building trust, empathy, and therapeutic rapport between counselors and clients. Without this presence, some couples reported feeling less emotionally connected or less supported, which can influence their level of openness during counseling sessions.

Data privacy and confidentiality concerns were also significant among participants. Many couples expressed worry about the security of their personal information and the possibility of sensitive conversations being exposed online. Zakaria, (2022) emphasizes that although many digital counseling platforms provide security systems, users often lack sufficient understanding of how their data is protected. This uncertainty can lead to hesitation in sharing deeply personal or sensitive marital problems. Fear of hacking, data leaks, or unauthorized access may reduce client trust and limit full participation in the counseling process.

In addition, environmental distractions at home were identified as another challenge affecting online counseling effectiveness. Participants reported interruptions from family members, children, household activities, and background noise during sessions. Ahmad, (2021) explains that an uncontrolled home environment can reduce concentration and emotional engagement during counseling. Unlike professional counseling rooms, which provide privacy and a

calm atmosphere, home settings are not always suitable for discussing sensitive emotional issues. These distractions can make it difficult for couples to focus fully on the counseling process.

Given these limitations, improvements in technological infrastructure are essential. Stable and high-speed internet access, as well as more reliable and user-friendly counseling platforms, are needed to reduce technical interruptions. Strengthening data security systems and increasing transparency regarding privacy protection can also help build trust among users. Furthermore, educating clients about safe digital practices may reduce anxiety related to confidentiality issues.

4. Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that technology-based online counseling can contribute positively to the improvement of marital relationships, particularly in terms of self-awareness, communication skills, and conflict management strategies. However, the findings also reveal several technological, emotional, and privacy-related challenges that may limit the effectiveness of online counseling. These findings indicate that the effectiveness of online counseling should not be assessed solely from its accessibility and convenience, but also from its capacity to create a supportive therapeutic environment for couples.

4.1. Online Counseling and Increased Self-Awareness

The first major finding indicates that online counseling contributes to increased self-awareness among married couples. Participants reported becoming more capable of recognizing their own emotions, thoughts, and behavioral responses during marital interactions. This finding is important because self-awareness represents a fundamental component of emotional intelligence and plays an important role in how individuals regulate their behavior within interpersonal relationships.

The finding is consistent with (Goleman, 1995) view that self-awareness enables individuals to understand their emotional conditions and

recognize how emotions influence their thoughts and behaviors. In the context of marriage, greater self-awareness allows individuals to identify patterns such as anger, defensiveness, avoidance, or excessive emotional reactions before these responses negatively affect their partners. Therefore, the improvement in self-awareness identified in this study can be interpreted as an important initial mechanism through which online counseling contributes to healthier marital relationships.

The findings also support Ahmad, (2021) argument that digital counseling can create a more comfortable environment for clients to discuss sensitive personal problems. The flexibility and perceived privacy of online counseling may reduce psychological barriers that sometimes prevent individuals from openly expressing their emotions. In marital counseling, this condition is particularly relevant because couples often need to discuss highly personal issues, including emotional dissatisfaction, communication problems, financial difficulties, and recurring conflicts.

Furthermore, the use of digital tools for reflection may strengthen the self-awareness process. Online journals, digital notes, mindfulness applications, and structured counseling exercises provide opportunities for couples to monitor their emotional experiences beyond the counseling session. As suggested by Sweeny & Howell, (2017), reflective practices can encourage individuals to evaluate their experiences and develop a deeper understanding of their own behavioral patterns.

Thus, the finding suggests that the contribution of online counseling is not limited to the counseling session itself. Its digital characteristics allow reflection and therapeutic engagement to continue before and after formal counseling sessions. This creates an opportunity for couples to develop self-awareness as an ongoing process rather than as a temporary outcome of counseling.

From a theoretical perspective, this finding reinforces the importance of emotional

awareness as a foundation for interpersonal relationship development. From a practical perspective, counselors should integrate structured self-reflection activities into online counseling programs. Such activities can include emotional journals, self-assessment exercises, reflection questions, and digital monitoring of emotional responses.

4.2. Online Counseling and Improved Communication Skills

The second major finding concerns the improvement of communication skills among married couples. Participants reported improvements in active listening, emotional expression, empathy, and respect for conversational turn-taking. These findings indicate that online counseling can function not only as a medium for delivering counseling services but also as a structured environment in which couples learn and practice healthier communication patterns.

This finding supports Norazlina, (2020) argument that digital counseling provides clients with additional opportunities to reflect before responding. The relatively structured nature of online interactions can reduce immediate emotional reactions and encourage more deliberate responses. This is particularly important in marital conflicts, where impulsive statements can intensify disagreements and create additional emotional wounds.

The finding is also consistent with (Derks et al., 2008), who explain that computer-mediated communication may influence how individuals express emotions because users have greater opportunity to select and formulate their words. In the context of marital counseling, this characteristic can be beneficial when couples are learning to communicate difficult emotions without using aggressive, blaming, or confrontational language.

The role of the counselor is also important in explaining this finding. Online counseling enables counselors to introduce specific communication techniques, including active listening, paraphrasing, emotional validation,

and structured dialogue. Through repeated practice, couples can gradually replace ineffective communication patterns with more constructive behaviors.

The findings can also be understood through (Goleman, 1995) concept of emotional intelligence. Effective communication requires not only the ability to express one's own feelings but also the capacity to recognize and respond appropriately to the emotions of others. Therefore, the improvement in communication identified in this study may be associated with the simultaneous development of emotional awareness, emotional regulation, and empathy.

The implication for practice is that online marital counseling should not rely solely on verbal discussions between counselors and clients. Counseling programs should incorporate interactive communication exercises, role-playing, guided dialogue, and digital worksheets. These techniques can provide couples with opportunities to practice communication skills and receive immediate feedback from counselors.

4.3. Online Counseling and Conflict Management Strategies

The third finding demonstrates that online counseling helps married couples develop more constructive conflict management strategies. Participants reported greater awareness of emotional regulation, the use of breathing techniques, collaborative problem-solving, compromise, and temporary pauses when conflicts became emotionally intense.

This finding indicates a shift from reactive conflict management toward more reflective and collaborative approaches. Rather than immediately responding to anger or frustration, couples learned to regulate their emotions before continuing the discussion. Such changes are particularly important because unresolved emotional reactions can transform relatively minor disagreements into more serious marital conflicts.

The finding is consistent with Salleh's (2019) argument that online counseling can provide

structured exercises for emotion regulation and problem solving. Virtual counseling environments allow couples to practice these techniques with professional guidance and subsequently apply them in their daily lives.

The importance of stress and conflict management is also supported by Bodenmann (2005), who emphasizes that effective coping with stress and conflict is closely associated with relationship quality and marital satisfaction. From this perspective, the improvement observed among participants suggests that online counseling may contribute to marital stability by strengthening couples' capacity to manage stressful interactions.

Another important finding is the use of temporary breaks or "time-outs" during emotionally intense disagreements. Moore (2003) emphasizes that taking a short break can help reduce emotional arousal and provide individuals with an opportunity to regain self-control. In this study, participants perceived the online environment as providing greater opportunities to pause and regulate emotions before resuming discussions.

However, a "time-out" should not be interpreted as avoiding the problem. Rather, it should be implemented as a structured strategy in which partners agree to temporarily pause the discussion and return to the issue after emotional intensity has decreased. Counselors therefore have an important role in teaching couples how to use this strategy appropriately.

The findings have practical implications for online marital counseling programs. Counselors should provide couples with concrete conflict-management protocols, such as identifying emotional triggers, applying breathing techniques, using neutral communication statements, taking structured time-outs, and returning to collaborative problem-solving. Such interventions can make online counseling more practical and applicable to couples' everyday lives.

4.4. Challenges and Limitations of Online Counseling

Although the findings demonstrate several positive outcomes, the study also identifies important limitations. Technical disruptions, reduced emotional closeness, privacy concerns, and environmental distractions may influence the quality of online counseling.

Technical problems represent one of the most significant limitations. Unstable internet connections, poor audio or video quality, and platform accessibility problems can interrupt communication between counselors and couples. These disruptions are particularly problematic when counseling involves emotionally sensitive discussions because counselors may miss important verbal and non-verbal cues. This finding supports Zakaria, (2022) argument that technological limitations can reduce the quality of digital counseling interactions.

The reduced sense of emotional closeness is another important limitation. Although video-based counseling allows visual interaction, it does not completely reproduce the interpersonal experience of face-to-face counseling. Norazlina, (2020) emphasizes the importance of direct interaction in developing trust, empathy, and therapeutic rapport. Therefore, online counseling may be highly useful for accessibility and continuity of service, but it may not be equally effective for every couple or every counseling situation.

Privacy and confidentiality represent another major concern. Participants expressed anxiety about the possibility of data leaks, unauthorized access, or exposure of sensitive marital information. This concern is particularly important because trust is a central element of counseling. If clients do not feel that their information is secure, they may become reluctant to disclose important information to the counselor. Consequently, technological security and clear privacy policies should be considered integral components of online counseling services rather than merely technical issues.

The home environment also presents challenges. Background noise, interruptions from children or family members, and the absence of a private space may reduce concentration and emotional engagement. Ahmad, (2021) highlights that an uncontrolled environment can interfere with the counseling process. Therefore, successful online counseling requires not only a reliable technological platform but also an appropriate physical and psychological environment.

4.5. Theoretical, Practical, and Policy Implications

The findings of this study have several implications. Theoretically, the study strengthens the argument that technology-mediated counseling can support psychological and relational processes such as self-awareness, emotional regulation, communication, and conflict management. Online counseling should therefore be understood not merely as a digital substitute for conventional counseling but as a distinct counseling environment with particular characteristics and mechanisms.

Practically, counselors should develop online counseling programs that combine professional counseling techniques with digital tools. Self-reflection journals, communication exercises, emotional monitoring, virtual role-playing, and structured conflict-management activities can increase the effectiveness of counseling interventions. Counselors should also provide clear guidance regarding privacy, session preparation, and appropriate communication environments.

From a policy perspective, institutions providing online counseling services should establish clear standards concerning data protection, confidentiality, counselor competency, technological infrastructure, and emergency procedures. Reliable internet connectivity and secure digital platforms are essential to ensure that technological limitations do not undermine counseling outcomes.

The findings also suggest that online counseling should not necessarily replace face-to-face counseling in all situations. Instead, a hybrid

model may be considered in which online counseling is used for accessibility, follow-up, monitoring, and routine support, while face-to-face counseling remains available for situations requiring intensive interpersonal interaction.

4.6. Limitations of the Study

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the findings are based primarily on participants' reported experiences. Therefore, improvements in self-awareness, communication, and conflict management may partly reflect subjective perceptions rather than objectively measured behavioral changes.

Second, the study focuses specifically on married couples who participated in online counseling. The findings may therefore not be directly generalizable to all couples, particularly those with different levels of relationship conflict, technological literacy, or access to digital infrastructure.

Third, technological conditions may vary significantly among participants. Differences in internet stability, devices, digital literacy, and access to private spaces can influence the counseling experience. Consequently, some outcomes may be influenced not only by counseling techniques but also by the quality of the technological environment.

Fourth, the study identifies several benefits of online counseling but does not establish whether these improvements are maintained over a long period. Longitudinal research would therefore be useful to determine whether improvements in communication, emotional regulation, and conflict management remain stable after counseling has ended.

Future research should consider combining qualitative participant experiences with quantitative measures of marital satisfaction, emotional intelligence, communication effectiveness, and conflict-management behavior. Comparative studies between online, face-to-face, and hybrid counseling would also provide a more comprehensive understanding of

the relative effectiveness of different counseling modalities.

4.7. Overall Interpretation

Overall, the findings demonstrate that technology-based online counseling has considerable potential to support healthier marital relationships. Its contribution is particularly evident in strengthening self-awareness, improving communication skills, and developing more constructive conflict-management strategies. These benefits appear to emerge through a combination of psychological safety, structured counseling techniques, digital reflection, flexible interaction, and continued counselor support.

At the same time, online counseling should not be viewed as a universally superior alternative to conventional counseling. Technical disruptions, privacy concerns, limited emotional presence, and environmental distractions can reduce its effectiveness. Therefore, the success of online marital counseling depends on the interaction between counseling quality, technological infrastructure, counselor competency, client readiness, and the surrounding environment.

The central implication of this study is that technology can expand the accessibility and continuity of marital counseling, but technology itself does not guarantee therapeutic success. Effective online counseling requires the integration of appropriate psychological interventions, skilled counselors, secure digital systems, and supportive conditions for couples. When these elements are properly combined, online counseling can become an important complementary approach for strengthening communication, emotional regulation, conflict management, and long-term marital relationship quality.

5. Conclusion

Overall, the integration of digital technology into online counseling services has shown a positive contribution to the development of self-management skills among married couples. The findings of this study indicate that online counseling assists couples in strengthening self-

awareness, enhancing communication abilities, and building more adaptive and constructive conflict management strategies. These outcomes suggest that online counseling can function as a valuable medium for supporting couples in dealing with various challenges within their marital relationships.

Through online counseling sessions, couples are able to express their thoughts and emotions in a setting that feels more comfortable and less pressuring. The digital environment often provides a sense of privacy and emotional safety, which encourages openness in sharing personal concerns. In addition, participants reported improvements in their ability to practice active listening and apply cooperative problem-solving approaches when facing relationship difficulties. As communication becomes more open, structured, and respectful, couples are better able to understand each other's perspectives and gradually develop a more balanced and harmonious relationship.

Despite these positive outcomes, the study also identifies several limitations associated with online counseling. These include technical problems such as unstable internet connections and platform errors, the limited sense of emotional presence compared to face-to-face interaction, and ongoing concerns regarding data protection and confidentiality. If these issues are not properly managed, they may reduce the overall effectiveness of counseling services and hinder the quality of interaction between counselors and clients. Therefore, it is important that such challenges are addressed in order to ensure a more stable, secure, and effective counseling experience for users.

Based on these findings, this study suggests that future development of digital counseling services should adopt a more comprehensive approach. This includes integrating emotional and psychological considerations with technological improvements, as well as strengthening data security systems to protect client confidentiality. Attention should also be given to improving the quality of virtual interaction so that emotional connection

between counselors and clients can be better maintained in online settings.

In conclusion, when supported by appropriate technological infrastructure and careful attention to emotional and ethical aspects, online counseling has strong potential to become a sustainable and effective alternative for supporting marital relationships. With a more holistic and well-balanced approach, digital counseling services can play an important role in helping couples improve communication, manage conflicts, and achieve greater emotional well-being in their relationships

Other Information

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Author Contribution Statement

The author was responsible for the conceptualization of the study, development of the research methodology, participant recruitment, data collection, data analysis, interpretation of findings, manuscript preparation, revision, and final approval of the article.

Data Availability Statement

The data supporting this study were obtained primarily from semi-structured interviews with married couples who had participated in technology-based online counseling,

supplemented by relevant supporting documentation. Due to the confidential and sensitive nature of the participants' personal and marital experiences, the interview data are not publicly available. Non-identifiable supporting materials may be made available by the author upon reasonable request, subject to ethical and confidentiality considerations.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest related to the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

Ethics Statement

Participation in this study was voluntary. All participants were informed about the academic purpose of the research, the procedures involved, and their right to participate or

withdraw from the study. Informed consent was obtained before data collection. The confidentiality and privacy of participants were maintained throughout the research process, and all identifying information was removed or anonymized in the reporting of the findings.

AI Usage Statement

AI-based language assistance was used solely to support the improvement of English language clarity, grammar, sentence structure, organization, and paraphrasing during manuscript preparation. AI tools were not used to generate or fabricate research data, participant responses, research findings, or interpretations. The author remains fully responsible for the accuracy, originality, interpretation, ethical integrity, and final content of the manuscript.

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