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Negotiating Marital Tensions over Digital Practices in Wamena: An Interpretive Phenomenological Study

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how married couples in Wamena, Highland Papua, experience and negotiate marital tensions related to social media use and online gambling. Using an interpretive phenomenological approach, the researcher conducted in-depth interviews with 10 purposively selected Papuan Christian couples. The interview accounts were analyzed thematically and interpreted through Relational Dialectics Theory. Social media disputes centered on privacy, disclosure, trust, and time spent together, while disputes about online gambling concerned spending and responsibility for meeting household needs. Spouses described raising concerns, seeking explanations, and discussing changes in digital behavior. Some sought advice from relatives or turned to a pastor for guidance and prayer. The case summaries also mentioned customary mediation. For some spouses, Christian marriage vows and responsibilities toward their children gave meaning to their efforts to address disagreements. The findings show how spouses could remain committed to their marriage while asking for changes in online conduct and household spending.

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengkaji bagaimana pasangan suami istri di Wamena, Papua Pegunungan, mengalami dan menegosiasikan ketegangan perkawinan terkait penggunaan media sosial dan judi daring. Dengan pendekatan fenomenologi interpretatif, peneliti melakukan wawancara mendalam dengan 10 pasangan Kristen asal Papua yang dipilih secara purposif. Hasil wawancara dianalisis secara tematik dan ditafsirkan melalui Teori Dialektika Relasional. Perselisihan terkait media sosial berkisar pada privasi, keterbukaan, kepercayaan, dan waktu bersama, sedangkan perselisihan terkait judi daring menyangkut pengeluaran dan tanggung jawab untuk memenuhi kebutuhan rumah tangga. Partisipan menceritakan bagaimana mereka menyampaikan keberatan, meminta penjelasan, dan membahas perubahan perilaku digital. Sebagian meminta nasihat keluarga atau mencari bimbingan dan doa dari pendeta. Ringkasan kasus juga menyebut keterlibatan tokoh adat dalam mediasi. Bagi sebagian partisipan, janji perkawinan yang diucapkan di gereja dan tanggung jawab terhadap anak memberi makna pada upaya menghadapi perselisihan. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa komitmen mempertahankan perkawinan dapat berjalan seiring dengan tuntutan perubahan perilaku digital dan penggunaan uang rumah tangga.

1. INTRODUCTION

A smartphone can help spouses coordinate household needs during the day and become a point of disagreement when they are together at home. The difference lies partly in what each partner is doing and what the other expects at that moment. A systematic review by Tammisalo & Rotkirch (2022) found that using digital technology to communicate with family members was generally associated with better relationship outcomes, whereas technology-related interruptions during face-to-face interactions were generally associated with poorer outcomes. Daily reports from romantic partners likewise linked such interruptions to more conflict over technology use and less positive face-to-face interactions (McDaniel & Drouin, 2019). Research using objectively logged phone use has also distinguished between total daily use and use during time spent with a partner, underscoring the importance of when phone use occurs (McDaniel et al., 2025). Together, these studies suggest that understanding disagreements over phone use requires attention to what spouses

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are doing, when they are doing it, and how their partners interpret that behavior.

Social media can bring expectations about privacy and disclosure into everyday disagreements. Fox et al. (2014) showed how Facebook figured in the development, maintenance, and breakdown of romantic relationships, drawing attention to tensions between partners' interest in sharing their lives and their desire for autonomy. More recent longitudinal research by Métellus et al. (2025) linked social media jealousy to lower subsequent relationship satisfaction and examined the role of electronic partner surveillance. These studies help explain why an online interaction with another person may prompt one spouse to ask for reassurance, while the other experiences the request as an intrusion. They also raise a question about what happens after the disagreement begins. How do spouses decide what they should disclose to each other, and how do they respond when their expectations differ?

Online gambling raises related questions about honesty and trust, with more immediate implications for shared finances. In Indonesia, the Financial Transaction Reports and Analysis Center (PPATK, 2026) recorded IDR 22.05 trillion in online gambling deposits between January and June 2026. Research on gambling-related harm shows that its consequences can extend to partners and others close to the person who gambles (Tulloch et al., 2023). Järvinen-Tassopoulos (2020) documented how partners described financial difficulties, strained relationships, and challenges in seeking help. The present study uses the term *digital practices* to encompass both social media use and online gambling. A disagreement about a message can raise questions about privacy and fidelity, while spending household money on gambling can raise questions about disclosure, financial decision-making, and responsibility for meeting family needs.

Wamena, in Jayawijaya Regency, Highland Papua, provides a setting for examining how spouses handle these disagreements and whom they turn to for help. Ismail & Asso (2024) described how members of Muslim communities in Jayawijaya negotiate the relationship between customary practices (*adat*) and religious commitments in everyday life. In a different setting, Wenda & Purwanti (2023) documented how a Dani community in Ilaga, Puncak Regency, used *bakar batu* as part of a process for addressing community conflict. These studies provide regional context for examining how religious commitments and customary relationships enter accounts of conflict and reconciliation. The present study focuses on the experiences of Papuan Christian spouses in Wamena. It examines whom participants turn to, if anyone, when disagreements are difficult to manage within the marriage, and how they interpret the advice, prayer, or mediation they receive.

Relational dialectics theory provides the main lens for interpreting these experiences. From a dialogic perspective, the meaning of a relationship is shaped through communication in which different, sometimes competing, views of what the relationship should be come into play (Baxter & Norwood, 2015). Three tensions guide the interpretation of participants' accounts. *Openness and privacy* concern what spouses expect each other to disclose and what each considers personal. *Togetherness and autonomy* concern how spouses balance personal activities with expectations about time and attention at home. *Stability and change* concern how spouses understand their commitment to continuing the marriage while asking for changes in behavior. Research on relationship maintenance also helps explain how couples respond to these tensions, express commitment, and draw on their social networks (Ogolsky & Stafford, 2023).

Studies of social media and phone use have documented disagreements about privacy, surveillance, and attention, while gambling research has examined financial and relational harm to partners and families (Fox et al., 2014; McDaniel & Drouin, 2019; Métellus et al., 2025; Tulloch et al., 2023). Read together, these studies leave room for closer examination of how spouses interpret different kinds of digitally related conflict, what they try to negotiate, and what role other people play in that negotiation. An interpretive phenomenological approach allows this study to examine what a disagreement means to each spouse, how spouses describe their responses, and how they make sense of the involvement of people they trust.

Drawing on in-depth interviews with 10 married couples in Wamena, this study examines how spouses experience and interpret tensions related to social media use and online gambling, how they negotiate those tensions, and what role they attribute to relatives, religious leaders, or customary figures when they seek support. The study contributes to research on interpersonal communication by showing how spouses understand privacy, shared responsibilities, and marital commitment through everyday disputes over digital practices and the conversations that follow.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES

2.1. Relational Dialectics Theory

Relational Dialectics Theory (RDT) explains how people give meaning to their relationships through communication. Baxter & Montgomery (1996) describe close relationships as involving recurring tensions between competing orientations, such as the desire for closeness and the desire for autonomy. Baxter & Norwood (2015) place greater emphasis on how competing ways of understanding a relationship are expressed in talk. In marriage, for example, one spouse may understand openness about online interactions as a sign of trust, while the other may regard respect for personal privacy as an expression of that same trust. The disagreement concerns both what should be disclosed and what each spouse believes trust requires.

This study uses three dialectical tensions to interpret spouses' accounts. *Openness and privacy* concern what spouses expect each other to disclose about online interactions, device access, or spending. *Togetherness and autonomy* concern how spouses understand the place of individual digital activities alongside time and attention devoted to the family. *Stability and change* concern how spouses understand their commitment to the marriage while questioning routines or behaviors they believe need to change. These tensions guide interpretation by helping identify the expectations expressed in each account. A single disagreement may involve several tensions. For example, a dispute about online gambling may involve both disclosure of spending and a demand to change how household money is managed.

2.2. Computer-Mediated Communication and Digital Practices in Marriage

Computer-mediated communication (CMC) concerns interpersonal interaction through digital channels such as messaging applications and social networking sites. Its relevance to marriage depends on who is communicating, for what purpose, and under what circumstances. High et al. (2023) found that associations between CMC and well-being varied across communication contexts and patterns of use. In family relationships, Tammisalo & Rotkirch (2022) found that technology used to communicate with family members was generally associated with more favorable relationship outcomes, whereas technology-related interruptions during face-to-face interaction were generally associated with less favorable outcomes. This distinction helps explain how spouses can value a messaging application for coordinating household matters and still disagree when phone use interrupts time together.

The study uses *digital practices* as the broader term for social media use and online gambling. CMC helps explain how messaging, social media interaction, and the visibility of a partner's online activity can figure in disputes over attention, privacy, and trust. Online gambling enters the analysis as a digital practice with consequences for household finances. Its significance for marital communication lies in how spouses discuss or discover spending, interpret a partner's decisions, and negotiate who is responsible for meeting family needs. This distinction allows the study to examine why a disputed social media interaction and an unreported gambling expense can both raise questions about trust while giving spouses different issues to negotiate.

2.3. Interpersonal Communication and Marital Conflict Negotiation

Marital conflict becomes a communication issue when spouses express or respond to differences in expectations about privacy, attention, or shared responsibilities. Negotiation refers here to how spouses raise a concern, seek an explanation, respond to a partner's account, or discuss changes they consider necessary. Overall & McNulty (2017) show that the implications of communication during conflict depend on the nature of the problem and the circumstances in which partners address it. Accordingly, a direct objection to the use of household money for gambling may have a different purpose from a request for reassurance about an online interaction. The analysis examines how participants understood these exchanges and what, if anything, they reported agreeing to afterward.

Negotiation can also involve people outside the couple. When a participant describes turning to a relative, a pastor, or a customary leader, the analysis considers who sought help, what form it took, and how the participant interpreted it. A relative's advice, a pastor's prayer, and a customary leader's mediation can serve different purposes. Keeping these forms of involvement distinct helps identify what each person contributed to the exchange and whether the spouse who described it viewed that contribution as helpful.

2.4. Relationship Maintenance and the Meaning of Marital Commitment

Relationship maintenance concerns the actions and processes through which partners sustain a relationship and attend to its quality over time (Ogolsky & Stafford, 2023). Stafford & Canary (1991) identified five commonly studied strategies: *positivity*, *openness*, *assurances*, *sharing tasks*, and *social networks*. In the present study, these concepts help interpret accounts of spouses discussing concerns, reaffirming commitment, revisiting household responsibilities, or seeking support. They also help distinguish an action from the meaning participants give it. For instance, asking a pastor to pray for a couple may be understood as seeking outside support and as reaffirming a commitment that the spouse associates with marriage vows. journals.sagepub.com

Taken together, the framework guides the analysis from the digital practice at issue to the competing expectations it brings into view, the conversations or support sought in response, and the meaning spouses assign to those efforts. RDT explains how participants give meaning to these tensions, while relationship maintenance research helps interpret what spouses describe doing to sustain their marriage. This makes it possible to examine how spouses continue to negotiate privacy, attention, and financial responsibility even after they have reaffirmed their commitment to the relationship.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

3.1. Research Design

This study used a qualitative design with an interpretive phenomenological approach to examine how married couples in Wamena, Jayawijaya Regency, Highland Papua, experienced and made sense of marital tensions related to digital practices. The inquiry focused on disagreements involving social media use and online gambling, how spouses communicated in response to those disagreements, and how they understood efforts to sustain their marriage. An interpretive phenomenological approach was appropriate because the study sought to understand what these experiences meant to spouses from their own perspectives (Smith et al., 2022).

3.2. Research Setting and Participants

The study involved 10 Papuan Christian couples who were married at the time of the study and lived in Wamena. Couples were selected purposively based on their experience of marital disagreements related to social media or other digital activities, including online gambling. This selection aligned with the study's focus on spouses who could describe such disagreements from firsthand experience. Each couple was assigned a code from P1 to P10. When interview excerpts are presented, the speaker is identified as the wife or husband alongside the couple code.

3.3. Data Collection

Data were collected through in-depth interviews and documentation. The researcher conducted the interviews using an interview guide. The interviews elicited accounts of the digital activities at issue, how spouses understood the disagreements, and what they did in response. The inquiry covered communication between spouses and, where participants reported seeking help, the involvement of relatives, religious leaders, or customary figures. These accounts provided the basis for examining what spouses viewed as a breach of trust, a matter of personal privacy, or a shared household responsibility.

3.4. Data Analysis and Trustworthiness

The researcher first organized the interview material and then grouped accounts into themes relevant to the research questions. The analysis interpreted what the experiences meant to participants by examining how they described the disagreement, what they expected of their spouse, and how they responded. The interpretation drew on relational dialectics theory to examine tensions between openness and privacy, togetherness and autonomy, and stability and change. These concepts helped connect participants' accounts of specific disagreements with the broader meanings they attached to trust, responsibility, and marital commitment. The study used source triangulation to assess the credibility of its interpretations. Interview excerpts are presented in the findings to show how the interpretations are grounded in participants' accounts. Each quotation is attributed to the spouse who provided it, so readers can distinguish an individual account from a view expressed by both spouses.

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Study Context and Participant Characteristics

The study was conducted in Wamena, Jayawijaya Regency, Highland Papua, and involved 10 Papuan Christian married couples. The couples had been married for 4 to 21 years. Their accounts offer insight into how spouses understood disagreements about social media and online gambling, what they did in response, and whom they approached when they wanted help. Some accounts focused on conversations between spouses, while others brought relatives, pastors, or customary leaders into the discussion.

Figures 1 and 2 provide visual context for the discussion of conflict and mediation. The images come from publicly posted videos. The analysis of how the couples in this study negotiated disagreements draws on the interview accounts and case summaries presented below.



Figure 1. Marital Conflict Resolution in Papua

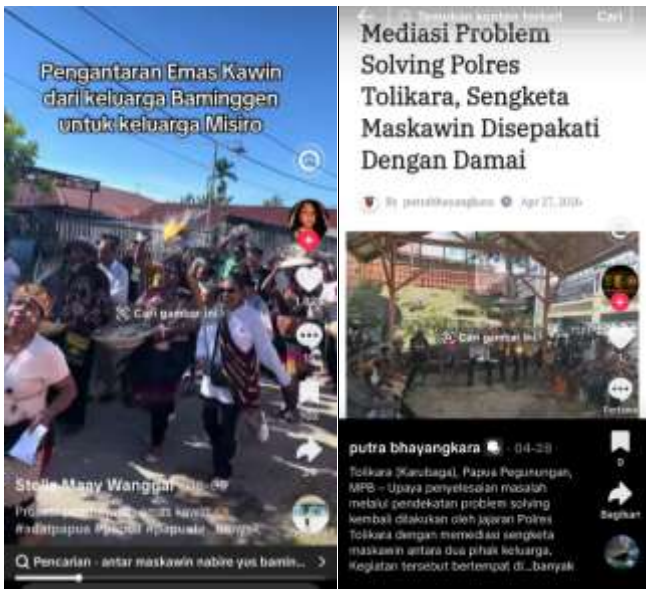


Figure 2. Dowry Payment and Mediation

Table 1 presents each couple's length of marriage, the spouses' occupations and reported digital activities, and the disagreements described in the case material. WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok appeared across the profiles. The concerns associated with these platforms varied. Some accounts described uncertainty about a spouse's online interactions. Others focused on attention and time together. Accounts involving online gambling raised questions about the use of money intended for household needs.

Table 1. Participant Characteristics, Digital Practices, and Reported Marital Concerns

Couple	Years married	Occupation, husband and wife	Husband's digital activities	Wife's digital activities	Reported concerns
P1	10	Civil servant and private-sector worker	WhatsApp, Facebook, TikTok	WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram	The wife described suspicion and recurring arguments about her husband's communication with other women on Facebook.
P2	9	Both private-sector workers	WhatsApp, Instagram, online gambling	Facebook, TikTok	The wife reported receiving less attention and handling some household tasks alone. She also linked her husband's gambling to difficulty meeting family needs.
P3	4	Both private-sector workers	WhatsApp, Facebook	WhatsApp, Instagram, TikTok	The husband reported feeling suspicious about his wife's activities on TikTok.
P4	7	Civil servant and private-sector worker	WhatsApp, Facebook	WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram	The wife interpreted a WhatsApp interaction as a possible indication that her husband was involved with someone else.
P5	15	Private-sector worker and homemaker	WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, online gambling[a]	WhatsApp, Facebook, TikTok	The case summary linked the husband's gambling to financial losses and difficulty meeting household needs.
P6	17	Private-sector worker and homemaker	WhatsApp, TikTok, online gambling	WhatsApp, TikTok, Instagram	The wife distinguished her husband's routine social media use from gambling expenditure that affected the household budget.
P7	21	Civil servant and homemaker	WhatsApp, TikTok, Instagram	WhatsApp, Facebook	The case summary described disagreements about openness in social media use. The husband also raised concerns about how phone use affected household tasks.
P8	20	Both private-sector workers	WhatsApp, TikTok	WhatsApp, Instagram	The wife associated her husband's phone use with less family time and uncertainty about whom he might be contacting.
P9	12	Civil servant and homemaker	WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, online gambling	WhatsApp, TikTok	The case summary linked gambling to unmet household needs and reported difficulties in communication between spouses.
P10	15	Private-sector worker and civil servant	WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, online gambling	WhatsApp, TikTok	The case summary described reduced family time and financial strain. The wife recounted arguments over money intended for household needs.

Note. The table draws on the study interviews and case summaries. [a]For P5, online gambling appears in the original description of the conflict. The original activity column lists WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram.

4.2. Social Media Use, Family Time, and Privacy

The interviews show how social media could be an ordinary part of married life and still become a point of disagreement. The wife in P2 described using social media "to watch entertainment and interact with other users" (P2, wife). Her husband similarly described watching reels or short videos on Facebook and Instagram when relaxing. Both accounts point to the role of social media in everyday leisure. Elsewhere in the interview material, the wife raised concerns about the attention and practical support she received at home. Her account shifts the focus from which platforms the spouses used to what she expected from her husband while they were at home.

In P8, reduced family time also prompted questions about trust:

> *My husband spends more time on his cellphone. My child and I feel there is less time to be together in our own home and it raises suspicions, is my husband communicating with another woman? (P8, wife)*

The participant first described the loss of time together as a family. Her uncertainty about what her husband was doing on his phone added another concern. In P1, the wife identified a particular online interaction as the source of recurring arguments:

> *I feel uncomfortable when my husband communicates with other women on Facebook. This makes me suspicious and we often fight. (P1, wife)*

In P8, the wife's suspicion emerged alongside a perceived loss of family time. In P1, the concern centered on an interaction the wife reported knowing about. Both accounts show how spouses can attach relational meaning to what happens on a screen. They also show why it matters to distinguish what a participant says happened from what the participant suspected.

From a computer-mediated communication perspective, the contrast between routine leisure and perceived interruption is consistent with Tammisalo & Rotkirch (2022), who distinguish communication through digital media from technology use that interrupts face-to-face interaction. Fox et al. (2014) likewise describe social networking sites as settings where partners negotiate closeness and autonomy. In the present study, P8's account foregrounds *togetherness and autonomy*, while P1's account raises questions about *openness and privacy*. The accounts give access to what each participant understood to be at stake. A spouse's own understanding of what should remain private needs to be established from that spouse's account where it is available.

4.3. Online Gambling and Responsibility for Household Finances

The wife in P6 drew a clear distinction between two activities her husband carried out online:

> *My husband often uses social media, but for me, it is not something I need to worry about, but online gambling makes our living needs unstable, because most of the money, my husband uses for gambling. (P6, wife)*

For this participant, routine social media use was acceptable. Gambling became a marital issue because she associated it with difficulty meeting the family's needs. The wife in P2 described a related experience:

> *Sometimes activities in the house, I do it myself, lack of attention from my husband, and the family's needs are not met properly because my husband often plays online gambling. (P2, wife)*

The two accounts differ in emphasis. P6's wife drew attention to where household money went. P2's wife described financial strain alongside household tasks and the attention she expected from her husband. P10's wife also spoke of arguments over money she had intended to use for household needs. In these accounts, gambling brought questions of spending and family responsibility into conversations about what spouses owed one another.

Previous research has documented financial and relational harm reported by partners and others close to people who gamble (Järvinen-Tassopoulos, 2020; Tulloch et al., 2023). The accounts from Wamena give this issue a specific communication dimension. Spouses had to address who could make spending decisions, which expenses needed to be discussed, and how family needs should be prioritized. Through the lens of Relational Dialectics Theory (RDT), these accounts bring *openness and privacy* into questions of spending disclosure. They also illustrate *stability and change* when a spouse expresses commitment to the marriage while asking for a change in how money is used (Baxter & Norwood, 2015).

4.4. Negotiating Conflict Within and Beyond the Couple

Participants described responding to disagreements by voicing concerns, seeking explanations, listening to one another, and discussing changes in digital behavior. The husband in P7, for example, described how he brought up phone use when he thought it was interfering with household tasks:

> *If I see my wife using social media too much, I usually immediately reprimand her, so that my wife can see what is needed and needs to be done in the house. (P7, husband)*

His account conveys how he expressed an expectation about household work. The excerpt leaves open how his wife understood the reprimand and whether a shared agreement followed. That distinction matters in interpreting negotiation. Raising an issue is one part of the process. How the other spouse responds and whether both accept a proposed change can shape what happens next. Overall & McNulty (2017) similarly emphasize that the implications of direct communication depend on the nature of the problem and the circumstances in which partners address it.

The wife in P10 described how people outside the marriage became involved in a dispute about household money:

> *We sometimes fight, because my husband spends money that I should use for household needs. However, sometimes my parents give advice to me and my husband, so that we can resolve the problem well, so that dangerous things do not happen, besides my parents, sometimes I ask for help from a pastor to give advice and pray for me and my husband. (P10, wife)*

Two forms of involvement are visible in this account. Her parents offered advice to both spouses. She also approached a pastor for advice and prayer. The case summaries mention customary leaders facilitating dialogue in some disputes, but they provide less detail about those exchanges than the P10 quotation provides about family and pastoral support. Regional research gives context to this distinction. Wenda & Purwanti (2023) describe customary dialogue in community conflict in Ilaga, Puncak Regency. The evidence about customary involvement in the marriages studied here comes from the Wamena case accounts.

Table 2. Reported Forms of Marital Conflict Negotiation

Form of negotiation	Reported action	Issue or purpose
Direct communication between spouses	Raising complaints, asking for explanations, discussing digital activities, or listening to a spouse's account	Clarifying concerns about phone use, online interactions, or household duties
Compromise and adjustment	Discussing limits on digital activities or changes in what spouses disclose to each other	Addressing differing expectations about privacy, personal time, or household responsibilities
Family involvement	Receiving advice from parents or other relatives	Seeking help in discussing the disagreement and considering how to respond
Pastoral support	Asking a pastor for advice or prayer, as described by P10's wife	Seeking guidance and support within a shared religious context
Customary mediation	Involving a customary figure to facilitate dialogue, as reported in the case summaries	Bringing a third party into a disagreement that was difficult to discuss within the marriage
Reaffirming marital commitment	Reflecting on conduct, discussing changes, or describing efforts to rebuild trust	Expressing an intention to sustain the relationship while addressing the conflict

Note. The table summarizes reported actions and their stated or apparent purposes. The accounts provide varying detail about what happened after each response.

4.5. Relational Tensions Across the Cases

The case accounts show how several concerns could arise in the same disagreement. For P8's wife, time together became linked to uncertainty about whom her husband was contacting. In P6 and P10, the immediate concern was spending, but that concern also raised questions about communication and shared responsibility. RDT helps interpret these accounts by bringing attention to the meaning spouses assigned to privacy, family time, and commitment (Baxter & Norwood, 2015). Table 3 connects those tensions to the case evidence and to the kinds of responses described in the interviews and case summaries.

Table 3. Relational Tensions and Reported Negotiation Responses

Relational tension	How it appeared in the accounts	Reported response or issue negotiated
Openness and privacy	Online interactions raised questions about what a spouse should disclose. P1's wife described arguments about Facebook communication.	Participants described asking for explanations and discussing greater openness about digital activities. In P1, the quotation establishes the wife's concern and the occurrence of arguments.
Togetherness and autonomy	Personal phone use could conflict with expectations about family time or attention to household tasks, as illustrated in P8 and P7.	Case summaries mention discussing limits on digital use. P7's husband described raising his concern directly in relation to household tasks.
Stability and change	Some spouses expressed a commitment to continuing the marriage while describing conduct they wanted to change, including the use of household money for gambling.	Participants described seeking advice, reflecting on their conduct, or reaffirming their commitment. P10's wife turned to her parents and a pastor after disagreements about household money.

Note. The same account may illustrate more than one tension. Negotiation responses are reported at the level supported by the interview excerpts or case summaries.

4.6. Relationship Maintenance and the Meaning of Marital Commitment

The wives in P7 and P4 described marriage vows as a reason to continue working through disagreements. The wife in P7 explained:

> *My husband and I have experienced various conflicts, including the use of social media, but in this relationship what keeps us going is our children, and the marriage commitment that we made during our wedding blessing in church. (P7, wife)*

The wife in P4 described marriage as "a bond that must be maintained" (P4, wife). She spoke about reflecting on her own conduct, yielding, and forgiving as ways of responding to conflict. These accounts help explain why some spouses understood their response to conflict as part of keeping a promise made at marriage. In P7, children and church vows gave the participant reasons to persist. In P4, the vows shaped what the participant believed she and her husband should do when conflict arose. P10 adds another dimension. Her account shows how a spouse's religious commitments could also shape whom she approached for help.

Stafford & Canary (1991) identify five relationship maintenance strategies: *positivity*, *openness*, *assurances*, *social networks*, and *sharing tasks*. These concepts provide a way to interpret the actions described in the study (Ogolsky & Stafford, 2023). The evidence is particularly direct for openness, assurances, and seeking support from social networks. For positivity and sharing tasks, the interviews presented here give more detail about the conduct spouses valued or expected than about changes sustained after a disagreement.

Table 4. Relationship Maintenance Strategies and Their Expression in Participants' Accounts

Strategy	Expression in the study material	Case evidence
Positivity	Trying to keep disagreements from escalating through self-reflection or forgiveness	P4's wife described reflection, yielding, and forgiveness when discussing how she and her husband responded to conflict.
Openness	Expressing concerns or discussing what spouses are expected to disclose	P1's wife expressed discomfort about her husband's Facebook interactions. Other case summaries describe efforts to discuss disclosure more openly.
Assurances	Reaffirming marital commitment during or after disagreements	P7's wife invoked the couple's church vows. P4's wife described marriage as a bond to be maintained.
Social networks	Drawing on relatives, religious leaders, or other trusted figures for support	P10's wife reported advice from her parents and advice and prayer from a pastor. The case summaries also mention customary mediation.
Sharing tasks	Discussing expectations about household work and financial responsibilities	P7's husband raised the issue of household tasks. P2's wife reported handling some tasks alone. These accounts show where responsibilities were contested.

Note. Strategy categories are drawn from Stafford & Canary (1991). The case evidence shows how each category relates to the material available.

Across these cases, the activity at issue shaped what spouses needed to talk about. Social media disputes brought attention, privacy, and trust into question. Gambling brought decisions about money and obligations to the household into the discussion. For some spouses, negotiating these issues involved people whose guidance they valued. Their accounts show how staying committed to a marriage could go together

with asking for changes in what a spouse did online, how much attention they gave at home, or how they used family money.

5. CONCLUSION, IMPLICATION, SUGGESTION, AND LIMITATIONS

The accounts of 10 married couples in Wamena show that social media use and online gambling raised different concerns within marriage. Disagreements over social media centered on privacy, disclosure, trust, and time spent together, while gambling-related disputes focused on spending and responsibility for meeting household needs. Spouses described raising concerns, seeking explanations, and discussing changes in digital behavior. Some also sought advice from relatives or advice and prayer from a pastor. Customary mediation appeared in the case summaries, with fewer details about how it unfolded. For some participants, Christian marriage vows and responsibilities toward their children gave meaning to their efforts to work through disagreements and sustain the marriage.

The findings illustrate how the tensions described by Relational Dialectics Theory can overlap in a single disagreement. Phone use during family time could raise concerns about both togetherness and openness, while a dispute over gambling expenditure could bring the desire to sustain the marriage into tension with the need for changes in spending. From a relationship maintenance perspective, advice from relatives and pastoral support show how spouses may draw on their social networks when managing these tensions. In practice, the findings suggest that conversations about digital behavior can focus on the specific issue at stake, such as privacy, family time, or responsibility for household expenses.

Couples can agree on what to disclose about online interactions, when to set aside uninterrupted family time, and which financial decisions require mutual agreement. When gambling affects the household budget, discussions can focus on protecting essential expenses and agreeing on how to address gambling-related spending. Relatives, pastors, and customary leaders who are asked to help should clarify what support each spouse wants and respect their privacy and willingness to participate. Future research could compare spouses' and support providers' accounts of the same dispute and use follow-up interviews to examine whether reported agreements were sustained over time.

The findings reflect the experiences of 10 Papuan Christian couples who were still married at the time of the study in Wamena. Their accounts were shaped by what participants recalled and were willing to share about sensitive issues, including suspected infidelity, gambling, and financial strain. Some cases provide greater detail about one spouse's perspective, and the interview material describes family advice and pastoral support more fully than customary mediation. The study therefore offers a situated account of how spouses experienced and negotiated conflict, while the long-term outcomes of those efforts remain unexamined.

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