

Chapter 11

Influence of Social Media on Dating Relationships of Emerging Adults in Nigerian Universities: Social Media and Dating in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Social media play important roles in creating a person's sense of reality, recreating face-to-face interactions on the web by allowing people to interact either publicly or privately. Social networking sites help in maintaining relationships with individuals who may not be closer to one; used to express romantic relationships through profile pictures or posts on social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter, Uber Social etc. This chapter focused on the influence of Facebook on communication between emerging adults in dating relationships. A total of seventy-seven participants comprising students from the University of Lagos, Nigeria aged between 19 and 29 years, took part in different focus group discussions. Data was analyzed using thematic analysis. The results revealed that majority of the dating couples spent long hours on Facebook daily and they did not feel comfortable with the hours spent on Facebook by their partner chatting with friends on a regular basis.

INTRODUCTION

Social media, such as Twitter, WhatsApp, Facebook, and the like, have grown rapidly over the years in terms of popularity. Furthermore, social media impact our lives and sometimes determine how we might react to issues and situations. Social media also shape our attitudes and values, and perceptions of others,

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situations, places, and events. Social media have a significant influence on people and their cultural lives (Wood, 2009). Social media provide surveillance for individuals who scan local and global environments for information that helps them make decisions to live better. In addition, social media serves a socialization function, contributing to togetherness by creating commonality and helping individuals to maintain social relationships by giving them something in common. Consequently, social media are important in creating community and global communication. However, people can fully immerse themselves in social media, thereby having stimulation, relaxation, or emotional release. These feelings can be seen as a diversion function of social media. Using the mass media as a stimulant, relaxant, or release is quick, healthy escapism but when individuals perceive themselves as characters in a story and live their lives as those characters, it becomes a serious psychological disorder (Vivian, 2001).

Emerging adulthood offers more independence and freedom, unlike adolescence, and unlike adulthood, it offers less responsibility. Arnett (2000) posited a new perspective on the period widely known as late adolescence or young adulthood. He describes this stage as the period of change, in which the emerging adult is able to explore issues that emerged during adolescence, such as relationships, love, work, and general world views.

This study sought to examine the influence of social media on communication between emerging adults in dating relationship. It also attempts to determine whether emerging adults in dating relationship feel safe or comfortable sharing relationship problems with others through social media chats/post. The social networking site, Facebook, is a rapidly expanding occurrence that is changing the nature of social relationships. Personal opinion, instead of facts, as well as information described in the popular media, suggests that Facebook may be responsible for creating jealousy and suspicion in romantic relationships (Liebert, 2012). The belief has always been that communication nurtures a healthy relationship. This is commonly referred to as traditional offline communication, whereby couples in relationships maintain intimacy mainly through face-to-face interaction. However, the spread of the Internet, mobile phones, and social media has reformed the way the world communicates within social networks. Social media, in particular, make it possible for people to extend beyond two-way communication by allowing networks of people to instantly connect across the globe by exchanging personal information online (Williams, 2012). Social networking allows users to connect and interact with likeminded people. While these tools were originally developed for individual use, the aspects of information sharing and instant responsiveness of social media lend themselves well to corporate communications (CCG, Investors Relations, 2012).

Scholars, such as Elphinston and Noller (2011), Manner, Bakley, Lawrence, O'Neill and Raines (2011), and Farrugia (2013), have criticized the negative impact of social media on society, relationships, and even marriages, saying that the quality of relationships is deteriorating and the strength of social connections is weakening. Previous studies conducted with emerging adults and adolescents had focused on parenting and delinquent behaviors. Ekpo (1996) and Uwe and Obot (2000) argued that when parents fail to teach their children the necessary social skills for successful interaction in the world, they tend to develop the skills through unfavorable means.

In 2015, an online statistic site on internet users, "Statmonkey", simply put it that 93.72% of Nigerians are active users of the internet; while Facebook recently revealed that it has 16 million active users in Nigeria, a 6.3% increase from June 30, 2015. The network giant, Facebook, further revealed that 7.2 million people in Nigeria visit Facebook each day and that 97% of those access the social networking site on their mobile devices (Financial Nigeria, 2016). A poll released from Social Media Week in Lagos,

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Nigeria in 2016 identified Facebook as the leading online dating platform in Nigeria with 72% of all internet users in Nigeria, followed by WhatsApp (15%), 2go (8%), and Badoo (5%). Facebook was the most used social platform used by Nigerians.

Social media or networking site users are connected in the way they develop relationships through the Internet, even though they may not have a face-to-face relationship with those connections offline (Rau, et al., 2008). Utz and Beukeboom (2011) argue that social networking sites have become part of many daily routines. Rau et al. (2008) further stated that users find value in social networking sites because these sites allow users to post about their personal life and opinions. These posts can provide validation to individuals when they receive feedback from their online friends. These authors further stated that social networking sites gratify social-emotional needs rather than informational needs, and that these sites are connected in a person-to-person manner which is more direct and interpersonal.

Farrugia (2013) stated that as relationships have branched into online environments, the components of love have new influences. Papp, Danielewicz, and Cayemberg (2012) concluded that the use of Facebook has altered the way people interact and develop relationships. They stated that people no longer disregard the potential connections between Facebook and intimate relationships, which serve as one of the most important contexts of individual growth and development. Seeing a profile picture online is comparable to seeing a person from across the room where the viewers can then decide if they are attracted to the person. Facebook allows users to add the individual as a friend, inbox message them, or 'poke' them with just a few clicks (Farrugia, 2013). Identifying factors, such as groups and interests, initiate a relationship. Depending on how much a person or their partner reveals, Marshall et al. (2012) argue that the insecurity of individuals can play a direct factor in relationship stability.

Farrugia (2013) further states that public displays of commitment mean displaying such things as liking pictures or status updates, posting pictures, or sharing inside jokes on a future partner's social media wall. This feature allows the users to like the public display of commitment that their friends have uploaded. Liking a picture on Facebook is an interactive way to virtually indicate approval. Liking uploaded content is as simple as clicking the thumbs up button at the bottom of the picture. Furthermore, uploading photos of a significant other is a demonstration of commitment to others online. Bowe (2010) as cited in Farrugia (2013) further suggests in his study that couples found it important to reciprocate actions of posting about their relationship online, though women were more likely to express their affections online than men (Mansson & Myers, 2011; Marshall et al., 2009).

Researchers have shown several results of Facebook on interpersonal relationships, among married couples and adolescents. Valenzuela, Park and Kee (2008) concluded in their research that there were positive relationships between intensity of Facebook use, Facebook Groups use, and students' life satisfaction, social trust, and civic and political participation. Facebook gives users the platform to rediscover old friends and relationship on Facebook could lead to physical contact (Edegoh, Asemah & Ekanem, 2013).

Muise, Christofides, and Desmarais (2009) concluded that Facebook users are more prone to jealousy. They further stated that exposure to information about a romantic partner's friends and social interactions may result in an environment that enhances jealousy. Facebook creates opportunities to expose users to information about their partners that they may not have had without Facebook, which then increases their surveillance of their partner on Facebook (Muise et al., 2009). In the same vein, Elphinston and Noller (2011) found that individuals who are more highly involved with Facebook may have relationship difficulties such as jealousy and dissatisfaction; furthermore, these individuals believed that the amount of time spent on Facebook would predict jealousy. Manner, Bakley, Lawrence, O'Neill, and Raines (2011) concluded that frequency of Facebook use is positively associated with negative relationship experiences.

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According to Valverde and Davis (2010), one of the major reasons why relationships fail is poor communication. This observation reinforces the central role which communication plays in any healthy relationship. Others are loss of feeling, financial problems, lack of time, sexual issues, marrying too young, loss of respect and admiration, poor boundaries with extended family, and substance and alcohol abuse. Some of these reasons account for the high mortality rate of Facebook relationships.

The ease and freedom associated with sharing information with a huge audience, with very little effort, has made social media a tool through which couples make private issues public, rekindle old flames, snoop, stalk, and retaliate against their spouses (Edmunds, 2014). Not much research is available to provide evidence regarding how social media influence normative socialization of emerging adults' relationships. Therefore, it is important to identify if the use of social media, particularly Facebook, has any influence on relationships among emerging adults in Nigeria. The use of social networking sites (Facebook, Myspace, Twitter etc) involves interacting with others and also meeting new friends at home and abroad. However, such sites also have a negative effect on courtships and intimate relationships. This research is important in identifying the use of Facebook among emerging adults in dating relationships in Nigeria, and it will allow couples to know whether the use of Facebook by emerging adults in such relationships will really foster the relationship they have with their respective partners.

METHODOLOGY

The sample for the study was comprised of emerging adults aged between 19 and 29 years, who were final year students of Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Lagos, Lagos State, Nigeria. There were 77 undergraduate students (41 males and 36 females) included in this study. Data analysis strategy used in this study included a thematic analysis using inductive techniques to identify themes across seven focus groups. Each focus group had 11 members drawn from different faculties from the University, and all in the final year of their different degree programs. The analysis concentrated on themes related to Facebook and communication between emerging adults in dating relationship.

RESULTS

Table 1 presents characteristics of respondents on the basis of questions asked about the use of Facebook and how it affects their relationship with their dating partner. For time spent daily on Facebook, a total of 6.49% ($n = 5$) of the respondents spend 0 to 2hrs on Facebook daily, 46.75% ($n = 36$) of the respondents spend 3 – 5hrs on Facebook daily, 44.16% ($n = 34$) spend about 6 – 9hrs, and 2.60% ($n = 2$) of the respondents spend 10hrs or more on Facebook daily. This shows that the majority of the respondents spend about 3 – 5hrs on Facebook daily. Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe (2007) conducted a study among U.S. college students where they found that students reported using Facebook on an average of 10 – 30 minutes daily. Also from the study, 31.17% ($n = 24$) of the respondents maintained that they made new friend regularly on Facebook, 40.26% ($n = 31$) stated they made new friends occasionally, 18.18% ($n = 14$) reported never to have made friends on Facebook, and 10.39% ($n = 8$) of the respondents were undecided This shows that the majority of the respondents made new friends occasionally on Facebook. Lenhart and Madden (2007) found that half of teenagers who use social networking sites make new friends. A total of 36.36% ($n = 28$) of the respondents reported that they listed their relationship status

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on Facebook for everyone to see, 53.25% ($n = 41$) of the respondents said they did not list their relationship status on Facebook, and 10.39% ($n = 8$) of the respondents were undecided. The study equally revealed that 27.27% ($n = 21$) of the respondents stated they felt safe with their partner chatting with friends on Facebook, 53.25% ($n = 41$) of the respondents disagreed with the statement, and 19.48% ($n = 15$) of the respondents were undecided. A total of 32.47% ($n = 25$) of the respondents reported not feeling comfortable when their partner posted or uploaded any information about them or their relationship on his/her wall, 53.25% ($n = 41$) of the respondents stated they felt comfortable, and 14.29% ($n = 11$) of the respondents were indifferent. About half of the participants, 50.65% ($n = 39$) reported that they regularly checked their partner's Facebook profile, 38.96% ($n = 30$) of the respondents reported that they did not check their partner's Facebook profile on a regular basis, and 10.39% ($n = 8$) of the respondents were undecided.

ANALYSIS, INTERPRETATION, AND DISCUSSION

The following analysis and interpretation is guided by two core themes: time spent by dating couples on social media and their tendency to discuss private issues with friends on Facebook.

Time Spent on Facebook

Participants in dating relationship indicated that their partners spent long hours using Facebook. They did not feel comfortable with the hours their partner spent on social media. Typical activities involved chatting with friends on a regular basis and meeting new friends. This even made respondents feel jealous of their partners. These concerns were voiced among the following participants:

Female 1: *I get scared at times, with the way he spends so much time on Facebook. Sometimes, I even try to see if he is chatting with some girls...*

Male 5: *When she is on Facebook, she goes on and on and on to the extent that we even have quarrels. She would not give me attention at all. It is like an addiction...and we don't even have the chance to communicate together...*

Male 14: *Whenever she is on Facebook, I feel lonely most times because she is always engrossed in it such that if she's cooking, the food at times get burnt...*

Female 52: *He hardly sleeps at night because of his addiction to Facebook... chatting with his friends without giving me any attention... so I often pray for his phone to run-out of battery...*

Female 43: *...because of his love for Facebook even when not chatting with friends, we have broken up twice, only just reunited few weeks ago because I couldn't bear the loneliness.*

These findings are supported by the Muise, Christofides, and Desmarais (2009) who found out that Facebook users were more prone than others to jealousy due to the exposure to information about a romantic partner's friends and social interactions. Elphinston and Noller (2011) concluded that individuals who were highly involved with Facebook may have relationship difficulties, such as jealousy and dissatisfaction, and these individuals also believed that the amount of time spent on Facebook contributed to jealousy.

Influence of Social Media on Dating Relationships of Emerging Adults in Nigerian Universities*Table 1. Characteristics of respondents on use of Facebook*

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	41	53.25
Female	36	46.75
Total	77	100
Time Spent		
0-2hrs	5	6.49
3-5hrs	36	46.75
6-9hrs	34	44.16
10hrs and above	2	2.60
Total	77	100.0
Made New Friends		
Regularly	24	31.17
Occasionally	31	40.26
Never	14	18.18
Undecided	8	10.39
Total	77	100.0
Made Relationship Status Public		
Yes	28	36.36
No	41	53.25
Undecided	8	10.39
Total	77	100.0
Felt Safe		
Yes	21	27.27
No	41	53.25
Undecided	15	19.48
Total	77	100.0
Felt Comfortable		
Yes	25	32.47
No	41	53.25
Undecided	11	14.29
Total	77	100.0
Regularly Checked Partner's Profile		
Yes	39	50.65
No	30	38.96
Undecided	8	10.39
Total	77	100.0

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Discussion of Private Issues on Facebook

Individuals in dating relationship also indicated that their partners engaged in discussions of private issues with friends on Facebook. The majority of the participants reported that their partners discussed private matters with friends on Facebook because they do not feel safe and this may lead to the breakdown of the dating relationship. For instance, most of the participants did not feel comfortable when their partner posted or uploaded anything about their relationship information on social media, such as Facebook wall. Another participant indicated that her partner knows the ramifications of discussing personal matters on Facebook:

Female 23: *I can't allow him to put our personal issues on Facebook! In fact, he knows he dares not. Or else I will just break up with him! Personal issues are just that: personal!*

Other participants indicated that their partner did not post personal information online because their partner valued their relationship or due to societal norms to keep relationships difficulties private:

Female 51: *He doesn't post our personal or private issues on Facebook. He, like me, cherishes our relationship. Besides, he is someone that likes keeping his personal life personal.*

Male 20: *Our private issues are addressed between ourselves because we don't know what others are also further passing on about our relationship, and so she always keeps them safe.*

Female 38: *While growing up, my parents always say to my elderly ones that are married – never allow any third-party interferes in your relationship, so, I've always adapted that ideology with my partner.*

These findings are supported by the works of Manner et al. (2011) who concluded that the frequency of Facebook use is grossly associated with undesirable relationship experiences on Facebook. The study also found that spending a considerable amount of time on social media contributed to the jealousy, suspicion, and surveillance between dating couples due to the long hours they spend chatting with friends on such media. This has limited the medium of communication between dating couples because they feel neglected because of the hours spent on the site. The intimacy in the relationship with each other starts deteriorating because of new friends they meet daily and the long hours of conversation they have with these friends.

IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE OUTLOOK

This study has several limitations. First, only one social medium was examined, which was Facebook. It is quite possible that emerging adults in Nigeria prefer using other forms of social media. Second, the study concentrated on a specific group of undergraduate university students from only one department. It is possible that not all the students in the university primarily use Facebook. The accessibility to fast and easy internet services among emerging adults who participated in this study may differ from that of students from other universities. Additional studies should be conducted to address the limitations of this study. For instance, Facebook is only one social networking site. Researchers should consider other forms

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of social media, such as Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp, and so on. Little research exists on the factors that guide the stability and maintenance of relationships among Nigerian emerging adults. Follow-up research should be conducted to better understand relationship development among these individuals.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to examine the influence of Facebook on communication among emerging adults in dating relationships. Overall, the findings revealed that emerging adults engaged in jealousy, suspicion, and surveillance when their partners spent long hours chatting with friends on Facebook. These emerging adults felt neglected by their partners' behaviors. Their intimacy deteriorated because of new friends their partners' met daily and the long hours of conversation partner had with friends. These emerging adults do not feel secure or comfortable when their significant other uploaded or posted any of their relationship issues on Facebook.

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