

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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