

# INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES ON MARITAL HARMONY IN SOUTH-SOUTH NIGERIA

BY

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## Abstract

*The paper examined the use of social networking sites and its influence on marital harmony among spouses in the South-South zone of Nigerian. The study was guided by four research objectives that were converted to research questions. The survey research design was used for the study with the questionnaire as the instrument for data collection. A total of 385 couples were sampled for the study using multi-stage sampling technique. In the analysis of data for the study, simple percentages were used while data were presented in tables. The study found that the Facebook was the most used SNS. The duration of use of SNS was found to be between 2-4 hours. The result also showed that the use of SNS negatively impact on marital status in the area of love, conflict, ambivalence and maintenance. Overall, the use of SNS was found to serve as a breeding ground for infidelity and divorce. The study therefore recommended, among others, that spouses should be most open in terms been able to express feelings of marital dissatisfactions and concern and should seek marital counselling or professional where need be.*

## Introduction

### Background of the Study

Social Networking Sites (SNS) are parts of new media of communication that came with the application of information and communication technology. As communication media, SNS are social media platforms people use to disseminate and receive information. Simply put, SNS describe media for people to communicate and interact online – as well as the relationships that exist between networks of people (Walther, 2006). SNS is equally made up of activities that involve socializing and networking through media channels. In doing so, users make use of message elements like texts, videos, illustrations, among others (Nwazor & Godwin-Maduiké, 2015, p. 127).

According to Nwazor and Godwin-Maduiké (2015, p. 127), “the availability of high speed Internet broadband connection with massive use of desktop computer, laptops, e-readers, facebook, youtube, and smartphones enables millions of people to actively engage in social media, text messaging, content sharing, online-learning and much more.”

Attesting to the different networking sites with their inherent interactive potentials, McQuail (2010, p. 520) posits that social media constitute ‘a number of Internet websites that have been set up to enable and encourage users to create networks of acquaintances and also to share messages and audio visual materials, often available to a wider public.’ In the same vein, Pempek, Yermalgyever and Calvert, (2009) and Boyd and Ellison (2007) and Eck (2017) describe SNS as web based services that allow individuals to create and sustain relationships with others, create personal, public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, up-load photographs and post personal messages to their friends and other users, including strangers at anytime. These SNS which include, but not limited to the following, are: Facebook, Instagram, Youtube, Twitter, Reddit, Linkedin Tumblr, Whataspp, Messenger, QQ

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chat, Meetup, Flickr, Ask Fm, Google +, Pinterest, Classmates, IMO, MySpace, Badoo, Match.com., BlackPlanet, Friendster, Cyworld, Ning, Youtube, (Eck 2017) etc, have however grown in popularity that many researchers and users affirmed the same. It is cognizance of this that Boyd and Ellison (2007) and Eck, (2017) acknowledged that SNS have created a phenomenon that has gained popularity over the last decade in the Internet with large number of people having greater access to the sites.

As the foregoing reveals, the creation of new communication avenues by SNS according to studies and researchers offer excess and diversified interactive access to the users. The extensive access to these online sites has resulted in spouses indulging in cyber relationship across the globe (Young, 2007) Young, (2007) also affirms that the excessive use of time on social media by spouses causes other marital problems among spouses. That is why Wright (2013), assert that SNS encourage spouses of opposite sex to appreciate profiles of themselves, through texting, uploading and downloading of pictures which are gateways to distrust and infidelity in marriages. Wright (2013) notes that the inordinate access of SNS by couples has doubled the attendant problems of marital relationship and has to a large extent caused divorces among spouses all over the world. In his words:

This day and age, society is engaged in SNS which add to the stress and difficulties of relationship which surrounds us today. SNS have contributed to a large amount of unrest among relationship. This unrest in relationship, due to the increase in trends of usage of SNS has created a huge uprising in divorce rates over the past decades (2013, p.1)

The increase use of social media among people of different age and marital status has posed a threat to marital harmony. Canel (2007) says that the harmony in marriage refers to the couple's orientation concerning changes that take place on a daily basis. This also includes how couples adjust their lives styles to meet up with such challenges. Canel (2007) conceptualize harmonious marriage wherein which couples are able to exchange views, address their areas of disenchantments.

Maintaining harmony in marriages is essential for a healthy family. One of the ways through which couples maintained marital harmony is through effective communication. Studies (George, & Ukpong, 2013; Jason & Kristi, 2017; Katherine & Markie, 2018) show that communication is critical to spousal relationship and marital harmony. However, the emergence of social networking site has raised concerns regarding harmony in marriages. Although social networking sites have expanded the scope of communication with a corresponding positive consequence, it has also come with some negative consequences. Such negative consequences have been largely investigated in education, crime, etc, marital harmony has not received significant attention of scholars, hence the need for this study.

### **Research Objectives**

The main objective of this research work is to examine how social media use impact on marital harmony. But the specific objectives are as follows:

1. To investigate the kinds of SNS, mostly used by spouses.
2. To examine the duration of SNS usage by spouses.
3. To determine the influence SNS use on marital harmony.
4. To identify the attributes of SNS that influences the heightening of infidelity and divorce among spouses.

### **Literature Review**

SNS play extensive beneficial and non-beneficial roles considering the potentials of the platforms that are offered to the users. The social media dialogue potential for instance has dramatically

transformed the social life of people around the world. This is by generating social interactions among individuals. In other words, the social networking platforms encourage interaction and socialization among individuals with a long profile of friends and acquaintance being developed through these networks (Okories & Oyedepo 2011). The connecting potentials of SNS according to Baran (2008) has caused peoples from distance parts of the world to be together as if they were in the same virtual space. Today, people all over the world can communicate and relate with different class, age and language of people irrespective of time and distance. Social media channels have invariably broken up communication barriers and boundaries that existed between and among people of distant regions.

However, the creation of new communication avenues by SNS like the creation of wide content formats which include texting, video, audio and photographs share among individual users on different levels of engagement, has caused spouses to develop other ways of satisfying their romantic and illicit love affairs (Kalyani 2010). It is to this that Wright (2013) affirms that by creating and making unusual comments or lurking on social media networks, individuals create and pursue new romantic and love interest. This is either to start a personal relationship or to satisfy sexual needs which are a problem of cheating or infidelity within marital relationships. More so, the reconnecting potentials of SNS, allow spouses explore the opportunities of reconnecting with old offline and online friends and/or lovers. This may rekindle old flames with starting up of another relationships, thus creating and/or promoting tension distrust and divorce in marriages.

But according to Elphinston and Noller (2015), social media platforms have another side to it; a negative or dark side which is affairs and one of the non-beneficial roles. Explaining how the negative usage of SNS, which is mostly cited is relationship. One of such relationship is marriage harmony. Porter, Wouden-Miller, Silva, and Porter. (2003) developed measures of marital harmony to include conflict, love, ambivalence and maintenance. Porter *et al* explain love as the show of affection which could be in areas like kissing, sexual intercourse, hugging, and praises. The explain conflict as disagreement on issues, quarrels, fighting among others. On the other hand, ambivalence describes mixed feelings about couples. This could manifest in lack of trust, accusations as well as inquiring about partners from third parties. Maintenance, the described as efforts by couples to maintain cordial relationship. This could come in form of gifts, and words of assurances. This study used the elements of marriage harmony as suggested by. Porter, et al. to determine how social media use impact on marital harmony among couples in South-South Nigeria.

Some scholars have conducted studies on this subject matter. Kimeto (2016) did a study to determine the effect of social media on marital success in Langata Constituency, Kenya. The study specifically sought to; determine the prevalence of use of social media among married individuals in Lang'ata Constituency, describe the marital problems arising from the use of social media by married individuals in Lang'ata Constituency, establish the relationship between social media usage and the success of marriages in Lang'ata Constituency and recommend strategies that married individuals can adopt to keep their marriages stable in the midst of social media use. Stratified sampling technique was used to sample 30 married men and 30 married women. A structured questionnaire was used to undertake the survey. Pearson's correlation technique was used to establish the relationship between the study variables.

The results showed that Facebook was both the most popular in terms of accounts and frequency of visit, with majority of the respondents visiting SNS four times or more in a day and spending on average 30 minutes or more per visit. Majority of the respondents visited SNS while at home. More female than male respondents spent more time on social media. There was a statistically significant correlation between social media and feelings of suspicion, jealousy, feelings of loneliness and emotional distance. However, majority of the respondents disagreed that social media use by their spouse was straining their marriage. With regards to the relationship between social media usage and

the success of marriages in Lang'ata Constituency, there was a strong positive correlation between marital stability and marital satisfaction but the relationship between social media use and either marital stability or marital satisfaction was not statistically significant. Generally, majority of the respondents rarely or never wished they had not married. Majority of the respondents were somewhat happy with their marriages. In terms the strategies that married individuals in Langa'ata Constituency deployed to keep their marriages stable in the midst of social media use, there was a statistically significant correlation between marital stability and sound relationship house strategies such as: knowledge of spouse's life dreams, respect from spouse, feelings of love and care, enjoying discussions together and attention to deepest feelings.

Saleh and Mukhtar (2015) carried out a study to ascertain the impact of social media on marital relationship with particular attention concerning how social media can result separation in marriages. The researcher studied a sample of 140 and reported that more women are subscribing to the social media and irrespective of sex differences, social media users are spending more time using the social network sites. The result also showed that the Facebook is the most frequently used social media platform.

Clayton, Nagurney and Smith (2012) ascertain the association between Facebook use and negative interpersonal relationship outcomes. The researchers made use of a survey of 205 Facebook users aged 18–82. The result revealed high Facebook use and an association between Facebook use and impact on interpersonal relationship. Cravens and Whiting (2014) in a study found Facebook use has significantly impact on marriages. See also, Clayton (2014; Nitzburg and Farber 2013; Fox & Warber 2013).

### **Theoretical Framework**

The researcher applied the uses and gratification theory for this study. The theory was suggested by Katz, Blunder and Gurevitch in 1974. The fundamental assumption of the theory is the benefits that media users derive when they make use of the media. The theory assumes that people do not just make use of the media, they do so to meet certain needs which they consider beneficial. The uses and gratification theory is chosen to explain and interpret the phenomena of this study. Anaeto, Onabanjo and (2008, P 70) highlighted the provisions of the theory in as follows:

1. The audience is conceived as active. The idea focuses around the assumption that the viewers are goal oriented and attempt their goals through the media source
2. In the mass communication process, much initiative in linking need gratification and media choice lie with audience member. This is encompassing the idea that people use the media to their advantage more often than the media use them. The receiver determines what is going to be absorbed and does not allow the media to influence him otherwise.
3. Many of the goals of media use can be derived from data supplied by the individual audience member themselves. This idea claims that people are very aware of their motives and choices and are able to explain them verbally, if necessary.

The uses and gratification theory is relevant to the current study because it bordered on the media recipient (audience) as having the complete right to what and how he utilizes the media contents to quench his needs. This theory, thus served as a framework to explore how the gratification couples seek in SNS could also impact on their marital harmony.

### **Methodology**

**Research Design:** The study employed survey method of science inquiry. The choice was made based on the attributes of the research design that give room to varying views of people on issues.

**Population of the Study:** The South-South Geo-Political Zone of Nigeria constituted the population. The South-South Geo-Political Zone comprises the following States: Rivers, Edo, Delta, Akwa-Ibom, Bayelsa and Cross River. The table below shows the projected population of the study at 3.2 per year from the 2006 population figures. It has been projected up to 2017.

**Table i: Population of the Study**

S/N	Population
Edo	4,351, 186
Rivers	7,010,661
Delta	5, 540, 945
Akwa-Ibom	5, 300, 121
Cross River	3,905, 882
Bayelsa	2, 302, 940
<b>Total</b>	<b>28,411,735</b>

### Sample and Sampling Technique

The sample size for this study was 385. It was calculated with the use of the Australian Sample Size Calculator of the National Statistical Service (NSS). With the sample size determined, a multi-stage sampling technique was employed to select the sample. At the first stage, purposive sampling technique was used to choose the capitals of the six (6) states. The capitals were purposively chosen because the subjects are likely to use the social media than those from other areas.

A proportionate simple sampling technique was used to select the number of the persons that possessed the psychographic and demographic characteristics (of interest) of the study. This was done by dividing of the projected population in each state divided by the total population in the Zone and multiplied by the sample size of the population. Below is the calculation:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Edo (Benin)} &= \frac{4,351, 186.216 \times 385}{28,411,735} \\ &= 59 \text{ Respondents} \end{aligned}$$

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Rivers (Port – Harcourt)} &= \frac{7,010,660.8 \times 385}{28,411,735} \\ &= 95 \text{ Respondents} \end{aligned}$$

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Delta (Asaba)} &= \frac{5, 540, 944. 632 \times 385}{28,411,735} \\ &= 75 \text{ Respondents} \end{aligned}$$

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Akwa – Ibom - (Uyo)} &= \frac{5, 300, 121. 216 \times 385}{28,411,735} \\ &= 72 \text{ Respondents} \end{aligned}$$

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Cross –River (Calabar)} &= \frac{3,905, 882.032 \times 385}{28,411,735} \\ &= 53 \text{ Respondents} \end{aligned}$$

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Bayelsa (Yenogua)} &= \frac{2,302,940.016 \times 385}{28,411,735} \\ &= 31 \text{ Respondents} \end{aligned}$$

While at the third stage, a simple random sampling technique was used to select one street each, from the Central Business District (CBD) of the state capitals (Gbakeji, 2014). Systematic sampling technique with an interval of 5 was used at the fourth stage to select the houses/buildings where the copies of questionnaire were administered. While simple random sampling technique was used at the fifth stage to select the respondents who met the psychographic and demographic requirements of the study. By this, the researcher meant the respondents were all high ranked working class/business people (male and female), who are married and responsible, enlightened, well-to-do and above all, exposed to the mass media, and social media.

**Instrument of Data Collection**

The instrument for data collection was a questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of two sections: Section A and B. Section A consisted of items to obtain personal data from the respondents. Such information include: age, marital status, occupation and educational qualifications. While section B consisted of four clusters of 24 items. The five clusters used three-point scale of “Agreed”, “Disagreed” and “Undecided”. The respondents were to tick the accurate options as applicable to them in the sampled population.

**Validation of the Instrument**

The instrument was validated by three experts from Mass Communication Department, Benson Idahosa University.

**Reliability of the Instrument:** The reliability of the instrument was determined using Cronbach’s Alpha. Therefore 20 copies of the instrument were administered to the respondents and the following Cronbach’s Alpha figures were obtained: Cluster A = 0.74, Cluster B = 0.71, Cluster C = 0.59, Cluster D = 0.67 and Cluster E = 0.55. The overall internal reliability coefficient = 0.82. This suggests that the instrument was reliable.

**Method of Data Collection**

The researcher administered the questionnaire personally and with the help of four (4) research assistance. The researcher personally conducted and supervised Benin City and Asaba on one on one basis but forwarded copies of the questionnaire to Port-Harcourt, Uyo, Calabar and Yenogua, where educated and mature research assistants were used to administer the questionnaire. They were informed on the purpose of the study and on what to do. The research assistants were used because of the sheer impracticability of the researcher to administer the instrument alone.

**Results**

A total of 385 copies of the questionnaire were administered to the respondents but only 364 copies, representing 95% were returned and found useful. The sample was 50% female and 50% male. The most (63%) of the respondents were within the age bracket of 36 and above. Most (61%) of them had tertiary education and most of them employed (58%).

**Table ii: Distribution of respondents according to SNS mostly use by spouses**

S/N	ITEMS	AGREED A	DISAGREED D	UNDECIDED U
1.	I have Facebook/facebook messenger account	311 (85%)	46 (13%)	7 (2%)
2.	I have Whatsapp account	295 (81%)	55 (15%)	14 (4%)
3.	I have IMO account	68 (19%)	249 (68%)	47 (13%)
4.	I have Twitter account	152 (42%)	194 (53%)	18 (5%)
5.	I have a 2GO account	73 (20%)	264 (73%)	27 (7%)
6.	I have Instagram, Face time, Snapchat, Flickr, Hangout,Badoo account	288 (79%)	13 (4%)	63 (17%)

The table above sought to determine the type of SNS most used among couples within the study area. The result suggest that the Facebook emerged as the most used SNS than all the other SNS examined. To examine the extent of SNS use, the below table was computed:

**Table iii: Distribution of respondents according to the duration of SNS usage by spouses**

S/N	ITEMS	AGREED	DISAGREED	UNDECIDED
7.	I spend between 8-10 hours daily on SNS	39 (11%)	271 (74%)	54 (15%)
8.	I spend between 5-7 hours on SNS	44 (12%)	252 (74%)	68 (19%)
9.	I spend between 3-4 hours daily on SNS	324 (89%)	26 (7%)	14 (4%)
10.	I spend between 1-2 hours daily on SNS	304 (84%)	19 (5%)	41 (11%)

The table above sought to determine the duration of SNS use among couples within the study area. The result indicated that most of the respondents reported that they spend between 2- 4 hours on SNS daily.

**Table iv: Influence of SNS use on marital harmony**

S/N	ITEMS	AGREED	DISAGREED	UNDECIDED
11.	Conflict	291 (80%)	48 (13%)	25 (7%)
12.	Love	311 (85%)	16 (5%)	37 (10%)
13.	Ambivalence	296 (81%)	28 (8%)	40 (11%)
14.	Maintenance	307 (84%)	39 (11%)	18 (5%)

The table above sought to examine the influence of social media on marital harmony. The result showed significant impact on marital harmony. This is because all the measures of marital harmony presented in the table above scored more than 50% in the agreed criteria.

Table 4: Distribution of respondents according to the frequency of infidelity and divorce caused by the usage of SNS by spouses.

**Table v: The SNS attributes that influence Infidelity and Divorce among spouses**

S/N	ITEMS	AGREE D	DISAGREE D	UNDECIDED
15	Hiding of users’ online affair mate by SNS can influence the heightening of I & D among spouses	243 (67%)	73 (20%)	48 (13%)
16	Easy access SNS grants users to other connections and probably to engaging in extra-marital online affairs and the opportunity to access SNS at anytime and at anyplace	211 (58%)	72 (20%)	81 (22%)
17	The opportunity SNS offer to the users to start and continue in an affairs without spending much money like in real life affairs can influence the heightening of I & D among spouses	241 (66%)	86 (24%)	37 (10%)
18	the opportunity SNS offer the users to derive extra-marital online sexual satisfaction as if they are in real world situation can influence the heightening of I & E among spouses	196 (54%)	66 (18%)	102 (28%)

The table above sought to determine the SNS attributes that influence the heightening of Infidelity & Divorce among spouses. The result showed that hiding of users’ online affair mate by SNS can influence the heightening of I & D among spouses was the most pronounced attribute.

**Discussion of Findings**

The result of this study showed that majority of the respondents reported using the Facebook. The result of this study is consistent with that of Kimeto, (2016) who examined the effect of social media on marital Success and found that the Facebook was the most used social medium. The use of the Facebook could be because it best offers the gratification that couples seek in their SNS engagement. This is more so that the uses and gratification theory applied in this study argues that people do not just use the media, they do so to meet certain needs. One of the characteristics of the Facebook which makes it unique is that, any mobile phone that can access the Internet can also be used to access the Facebook. The same thing cannot be said of other SNS like whatsapp. Previous scholars (Junco, 2011; Kane, Alavi, Lubianica, & Borgatti, 2013; Kaplan, & Haenlein, 2010; Karpinski, & Duberstein, 2009; Marisol, Sergio, & Pedro, 2012) reported a similar result regarding the preference people have for the Facebook.

The result of this study also revealed that most of the respondents who took part in the study reported that they use SNS between 2-4 hours. The duration of SNS use is essential because the longer couples spend time using the SNS, the more the possibility that such use will negatively impact on the communication among couples as well as marital harmony. The result of this study is consistent with *International Journal of Communication: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Communication Studies, No 24, June 2019.*

that of Nitzburg and Farber (2013) but run contrary to that of Clayton, (2014). Clayton had argues that the duration of engagement on SNS is a critical factor in understanding the impact it will have on users because time is essential. According to Clayton, when people spend so much time chatting with others, the bond may at a point, be comparable to that of face-to-face interaction. What this mean to the current study is that the more couples engage in SNS, the more it will impact on marital harmony.

The result of this study also revealed that SNS use has negative influence on marital harmony in the area of love, conflict, ambivalence and maintenance. The result of this study is consistent with that of Kimeto (2016) who reported that the use of SNS has a negative impact on marriages. Porter et al (2003) had reported that love, conflict, ambivalence and maintenance are very important in marriages and could also impact the entire family. Consequently, this study argues that SNS may not only affect marital harmony, but the entire family as a whole.

Finally, the result of this study showed the attributes of SNS that can influence the heightening of infidelity and divorce among spouses. Top among which were hiding of users' online affair mate and continuing in an affair without spending much money like in real life affairs. This result is similar to that of Saleh, and Mukhtar, (2015) and Katherine and Markie (2018) who reported that SNS provide a fertile ground for infidelity and eventual divorce.

### Conclusion

This study examined the how SNS impact on marital harmony. Based on the result of this study, the researcher concludes that the Faecbook is the most used SNS. The researcher also concludes that most of the couples from South-South Nigeria use SNS between 2-4 hours. The researcher also concludes that SNS negatively impact on marital harmony. The basic contribution of this study is that it has contributed to our understanding of how use of SNS impact on marital harmony. The result of this study has also contributed to our understanding of the uses and gratification theory by showing how the gratification couples seek in their SNS engagement impact on their marital harmony.

### Recommendations

Based on the result of this study, the researcher makes the following recommendations:

1. Spouses should be most open in terms of being able to express feelings of marital dissatisfactions and concern.
2. Spouses should seek marital counseling or professional help from recognized or approved organizations.
3. Emotional and sexual needs of spouses should be met to discourage the influence of SNS usage that increases the rate of infidelity and divorce.
4. Nigerian media should come up with campaigns to discourage couples from spending too much time on SNS considering its negative impact on marital harmony.

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