

Exploring self-presentation on online dating sites among young female adults in Nigeria

Ifeoma V. Dunu

NnamdiAzikiwe University, Awka, Nigeria,

And

Ezinne C. Abaneme

Alex Ekwueme Federal University, Ndufu Alike, Nigeria

Abstract

Research suggests that a commonly accepted understanding of identity is the assumption of the multiple aspects of the self which are made salient in different contexts. This may account for the dominance in literature of adults' multiple self-presentations in online self-presentation: real, ideal and false selves on dating sites. It is based on this, and scarcity of such study in Nigeria that this work explores the dominant type of self-presentation among online dating participants. It investigates how young adult females in Nigeria manage their online presentation of self in order to accomplish the goal of finding a romantic partner. Using semi structured interview and netnography (scroll back method); we interviewed and observed 45 single females' online dating profiles, aged between 18-35 years. Findings show that majority of the participants presented multiple selves on their online dating site profiles. These participants used both pictures of their real self and enhanced pictures on their profiles. This aligns with findings from existing literature of the increasing presences of multiple online self-presentations by young adults. Furthermore, this substantiate findings that when individuals expect to meet a potential dating partner there is this intrinsic tendency to engage in self enhancement in these online dating sites. Again, it has been found that older people among the participants aged between 27-35 years presented themselves as independent, working-class and successful women, while younger participants focus more on presenting themselves as beautiful or attractive. These findings confirm the assertion from research that individual control over self-presentation behaviour afforded by digital technologies allows individuals the ability to manage their online interactions in such a way as to achieve self expectations.

Keywords: Online self-presentation, online dating sites, Nigeria, single females, self-expression

Introduction

With over 1000 online dating sites in Nigeria, it is evident that online dating has become an acceptable way to meet potential partners, not just in the western world, but also in Nigeria. Some of the most popular dating applications available to users include; *Naija Planet, Afroromance, Afro Introductions, Tinder, Friendlite, Badoo, Hinge, MeetNigerians.com, The league and eHarmony* (African Launch Pad, 2020). As the digital age advances and the stigma associated with using these new technologies in such traditional settings decreases along with the prevalence of dating apps, singles in Nigeria, as in other climates, are finding online dating a more viable option than traditional ways of meeting people. The number of online dating users in Nigeria is expected to reach 7.2 million users by 2026, while user penetration will be 2.3% in 2022 and is expected to reach 3.0% by 2026 (Statista.com, 2022). One aspect of online dating platform that perhaps enhances its growing popularity is the control and anonymity it affords individuals, especially in terms of the ability for one to enhance or determine how to strategically present oneself online.

Online dating platforms have been described as personal courtship to a person, where the online user is free to self-improve to appear more attractive in order to attract a potential romantic partner. As a virtual communication platform where there is an absence of physicality and strong reliance on the content of self presentation and disclosures, having a strong self-presentation is key. Available literature has however recognized the growing concern of the increasing tendency of deception in the use of online self presentation. Hancock (2007) as seen in Toma and Hancock (2012,p.78) asserts, “fear about online fraud are as old as the internet itself.” These concerns stem from the disembodied nature of online communication, which allows people to interact without the physical self and primarily through text means. This lack of physicality increases the opportunities for deception (e.g., lying about physical appearance) and decreases the number of cues people use to detect deception (e.g., lying about physical appearance, staring, fidgeting).’ For these reasons, it is believed that detecting deception in online environments is difficult.”Toma and Hancock (2012)went on to argue that often people present themselves as their ideal self or how they hope to be in the future, rather than being an actual representation of who they were at the time their profile was created. Literature is also indicative of the use of multiple self presentations in online dating sites in a bid to attract a romantic partner.

However, it is important to note that research findings present an opposing argument that is polarised on the issue of deception and multiple self-expression and authenticity on online dating platforms. It is within the context of these contradicting arguments that this paper intends to make a contribution, leaning

strongly on available theories and discourses. Most of the arguments within this area are domicile in developed countries with few in developing African countries; we intend to find areas of agreement and departures. Theoretical perspectives from literature allow us to lean on a combination of technological deterministic perspective and a socially deterministic approach that acknowledge that technology has transformed the process of mate-finding by having the power to shape and be shaped by social practices. They advance our understanding of how the process of partner-finding through online dating sites is socially shaped by individual behaviours and practices online, and, it is argued, allow individuals to circumvent a trait that affects the means of the technology itself for the individual. In line with existing literature we argue that the dating sites have further enhanced as well as created opportunities for the match making process to be controlled by individuals involved and it is within this power of individual control, and lack of physicality that the possibility of deception and the use of multiple self presentation becomes a universal possibility of dating platforms across the globe irrespective of culture, socioeconomic context and the nature of use whether mainstream or nascent. This paper therefore, explores the ways in which interactants on dating sites in Nigeria manage their online self-presentation and contributes to our knowledge of these processes using qualitative data gathered from the dating participants. In light of the above, we also investigated: (1) dominant mode of self-presentation on online dating sites, (2) the type of self presented on online dating sites, (3) the information content about these users shared on their online dating profiles

Literature Review

Scholars have argued that finding romantic partners on online dating sites can be accomplished through two main methods. “First of all, users can browse other people's profiles on the sites and contact those they are interested in. This is similar to the traditional approach of scanning "in person, print ads to find potential dates. Secondly, online dating site subscribers can enter their personal information and preferences into online dating site forms, allowing the algorithm processes to search for potential dates.” (deVarie, 2014; Slater, 2015; Sumter, Vandenbosch, & Litgenberg, 2016). Online self-expression strategies are especially important early in a relationship, as others will use this information to decide whether to continue in a relationship (Derlega, Winstead, Wong, & Greenspan, 1987).

Research suggests that when people anticipate meeting a potential dating partner for the first time, they change their self-presentation behaviours in accordance with the values desired by the potential date (Rowatt, Cunningham, & Druen, 1998). Even when dealing with strangers, individuals tend to improve (Schlenker & Pontari, 2000). The processes of online self-expression and self-disclosure are important aspects of relationship development in offline settings (Taylor & Altman, 1987) especially in the early

stages. Goffman's work on self-expression explains the manner in which an individual may engage in strategic activities "to convey to others an impression which he wishes to convey" (1959, p. 4). However, Ellison, Heino, and Gibbs (2006) suggest that "the pressure to emphasise one's positive qualities is felt alongside the need to present one's true (or authentic) self to others, particularly in meaningful relationships."

Online self-presentations are carefully constructed to enable personal agendas in the offline environment (Toma & Hancock, 2010). Therefore, self-portrayal on dating sites follows rational decisions about what to write in profiles and what pictures to display (Walther, Slovacek, & Tidwell, 2001). Online users present themselves in a certain way to influence how others see them and how they are accepted. To achieve this goal, according to Goffman (1959), individuals present themselves in according to their social role and their efforts to get others to rate their images positively. Goffman further suggests that seeking approval and avoiding disapproval motivates effective self-expression, which can be achieved through two modes of self-expression: employable and protective.

Intimacy in relationships is associated with a sense of being understood by a partner (Reis & Shaver, 1988) and develops "through a dynamic process by which an individual reveals personal information, thoughts, and feelings to his partner; receives a reply from the partner; and interprets that response as understanding, affirmation, and caring" (Laurenceau, Barrett, & Pietromonaco, 1998). Thus, when participants seek an intimate relationship, their desire to feel understood by their interaction partners will motivate self-disclosure that is open and honest rather than misleading. This tension between authenticity and impression management is inherent in many aspects of self-disclosure. When making decisions about what and when to come out, individuals often struggle to balance conflicting needs such as openness and autonomy (Greene, Derlega, & Mathews, 2006).

Misrepresentation on online dating environment

As with traditional face-to-face relationship building, relationships in online environments develop through multiple stages (Sprecher, 2009), with one of the most important stages being the initial interaction. Online dating sites require online daters to create a personal profile (Ellison et al., 2012) the profile includes demographic and self-descriptive information (with the option to add photos) that help explain the users' qualities and lifestyle, and indicate the type of romantic partner that dates are looking for (Fiore, Taylor, Zhong, Mendelsohn & Cheshire, 2010). Consistent with the above, Ellison et al. (2012) state that dates try to present a perfect picture of themselves when creating their online profiles. Ellison et

al. (2006) noted that "the information provided by online data often differs from what is known once an offline interaction occurs. Therefore, in their study, Morgan, Richards, and Van Ness (2010) suggested that the online profile content of individuals seeking sexual relationships differed from the profiles of other individuals seeking a romantic partner for a long-term relationship or a few marriage partners.

In their study, Gibbs, Ellison, and Lai(2011) found that most online mates misrepresent themselves on their profiles, particularly by posting inaccurate photos, due to a lack of physical contact and verbal communication that might otherwise reveal subterfuge Schmitz, Sachse-Thürer, Zillmann and Blossfeld (2013) argue that not only is misrepresentation used by online partners to selectively choose who they decide to engage in a relationship with, but Ellison et al. (2012) also suggest that data is misrepresented because they believe it increases the chances of being picked as a perfect match by other data first. In addition, online environments offer people greater opportunity to control their self-representation and thus greater opportunities to engage in misrepresentation (Cornwell & Lundgren, 2001). As Stone (1996) suggests, communicating via computers gives participants more freedom to explore fun and fantastic online characters that differ from their 'real' identities. Toma et al. (2008) similarly argued that male dates often tend to lie about their height, personal resources, relationship goals, personal interests, and personal characteristics, while female dates lie about their physical appearance, like weight.

DeAndrea, Tom Tong, Liang, Levine, and Walther, (2012) argued that online dating environments allow daters more control over their self-expression, personal identities and backgrounds due to the anonymous nature of the platforms. While Toma and Hancock (2010) state that the majority of data on their self-portrayal lies in relation to one or more of their physical characteristics. In addition, Gibbs et al.(2011) found that "most daters do not know what to disclose, to whom they should send personal information, and are unsure whether other users will in return disclose the truth, all of which can lead to negative consequences, such as Distrust".

However, the online dating environment differs due to the lack of physical presence in the initial dating process coupled with the difficulty of verifying online dater claims. Behind this apparent challenge, however, is a sense of invisibility and anonymity that inevitably leads to a tendency toward manipulation and deception. Online Dating Participants Report Cheating as the "Top Perceived Disadvantage of Online Dating" (Brym & Lenton, 2001, p. 3) and View It as Common: A Survey of Online Dating Participants of an Online Dating site revealed that others misrepresented their physical appearance (Gibbs et al., 2006)

A 2001 research study found that more than a quarter of online dating participants reported misrepresenting some aspect of their identity, most commonly age (14%), marital status (10%) and appearance (10%) (Brym & Lenton, 2001). This may be because in the early stages of courtship, people are particularly concerned about the impression they make, such as how attractive they look (Kunkel, Wilson, Olufowote, & Robson, 2003). Impression management is important in any interpersonal context; Scholars have used two complementary theories to study the unique features of self-expression in computer-mediated communication environments (Hancock & Dunham, 2001): (i) the social identification and deindividuation (SIDE) model and (ii) social information processing (SIP) theory. The SIDE model (Lea & Spears, 1991, 1992) asserts that impressions formed in CMC are based on social categorization as group identities rather than individual identities, due to anonymity and minimal social and interpersonal cues. SIP theory (Walther, 1993) and the hyperpersonal model (Walther, 1996), which is an extension of SIP theory, assume that CMC users use more selective self-presentation through language selection or message construction and exploit the limitations of CMC.

Online dating is not relatively new in the Nigeria setting, as there has been anecdotal evidence that people have gotten engaged and married someone that they met online. Literature has shown that in Nigeria, there are currently over 100 dating sites available to users, and the number of online dating users in Nigeria is expected to reach 7.2 million users by 2026, while user penetration will be 2.3% in 2022 and is expected to reach 3.0% by 2026. These online dating platforms come in the forms of mobile phone applications, websites, or hook-up platforms such as 9jachristianmingles, IDFnaija, joroolumofin, etc. Scholars have argued that online dating site users misrepresent themselves on these platforms, majority of these studies are domiciled in the western world. Online self-representation is an emerging area among Nigeria scholars, this study will fill in the gap and findings will give an insight to online dating world with reference Nigerian users.

Theoretical Framework

This study was anchored on Social Information Processing theory, Self-Presentation theory and Social constructionism theory.

Computational theories of communication help explain how non-verbal online cues affect relationship formation and the advantages attributed to using CMC over traditional face-to-face communication in the initial stages of dating. Walther's (1992) Social Information Processing (SIP) theory explains online interpersonal communication without non-verbal cues and how people develop and manage relationships in a computer-mediated environment. Walther argued that online interpersonal relationships can exhibit the same or even greater dimensions and relational qualities (intimacy) than traditional face-to-face

relationships. Walther (2002), cited in Gray, Difronzo, Panek, and Bartel (2018), argues that computer-assisted communication has also led to higher rates of self-disclosure, as well as deeper questioning on dating platforms to eliminate deception. Hence, social information processing theory states that “people use whatever signals they have to obtain pieces of information about a person” (Rosen, 2007, p.6). Furthermore, “SIP explained that even due to the lack of face-to-face interaction and lack of non-verbal cues, relationships formed online through CMC can still develop the same level of intimacy as face-to-face relationships when given the appropriate time” (Gray, Difronzo, Panek & Bartel, 2018, p. 16). This theory when applied to the study will help us understand how online dating platforms gives users the opportunity to develop and manage their relationship using computer mediated cues like; picture, text, emoji etc.

Self-representation theory is an attempt to explain the processes by which individuals attempt to project the image of themselves onto others with whom they share a social space. The theory has its origins primarily in sociologist Erving Goffman's 1959 work, *Self-Presentation in Everyday Life*. Goffman's analysis focuses on the context of human behaviour based on the viewer's impression of the action or behaviour. He studied the roles individuals' play, how those roles are constantly evolving, and the types of masks people wear. Role definitions of participants and listeners are flexible because people have their own experiences that determine their perception of society (Manning, 1992).

Goffman argues that human beings, as social beings, consciously realize identities for selfish purposes. It suggests that a person's behaviour and actions can affect the course of a situation involving others. “For example, a person may be manipulative in hopes of presenting themselves in a better light than the authentic one. A person can also unintentionally steer a given situation in the desired direction. The viewer may judge this contribution as selfish, a desire for social approval, or an appreciation for those who are muscular and fit” (Goffman, 1959). However, cultural standards influence these actions, and the desired impression is the by-product, i.e., the ultimate goal for the individual to successfully project the image they wish to project (Goffman, 1959). In self-representation theory, Goffman argues that human beings, as social beings, consciously realize identities for selfish purposes. It suggests that a person's behaviour and actions can influence the course of a situation involving others. In this theory, Goffman argues that human beings, as social beings, consciously realise identities for selfish purposes. It suggests that a person's behaviour and actions can affect the course of a situation involving others. Therefore, applying this theory will provide insight into how single young adults present themselves on online dating sites. In addition, literature has shown that users present multiple selves online. So by applying this

theory, the work will help us understand the kind of selves these women present online and how they present themselves.

Online dating has advanced as a mechanism through which people are trying to find interactions with others, given their social objectives (Kambara, 2005). “Driven through current societal shifts, online courting happens in the interstices of organizational and character social processes, mediated through technology” (Kambara, 2005,p.2). Flug (2016, pp.18-19) states that, “social creation postulates that each one realities are created, or “constructed” through the social exchanges of human beings. This approach that each one “realities” are situation to alternate primarily based totally at the context of the interpersonal interactions happening at any given time.” “This additionally approach that no persons’ belief of truth will in no way be absolutely the same. When implemented to gender and race, social constructionism shows that the values we assign to every race and gender are features of the time and dominant cultural milieu round us, and that they do now no longer mirror an real truth” (Galbin, 2014 as cited in Flug, 2016). The creator in addition argued that “societal phenomenon, just like the net and on-line courting, form how classifications like gender and race are conceptualized” (p. 19). Social constructionism when applied to this study explains how those systems pair users who have same or comparable interest described on their profiles.

Method

Research Design

This study adopted a combination of two qualitative research techniques in digital ethnography (scroll back method) and semi-structured interviews. These methods are congruent with the study’s intention to explore how and why young female adults in Imo State, Nigeria self present themselves on online dating platforms. Due to the fact that media practices can be private, intimate and sometimes individual, as observed by Hine (2015), the researchers adopted digital ethnography (which can involve a number of qualitative techniques for data gathering) to enable the researchers overtly participate in the study participants’ online lives for a period of time. For Hine (2015), ethnography provides not just a distinctive but also a very useful way of examining the Internet for an in-depth understanding of nuances in social experience that occur as people engage with and in it. To explore the participants’ patterns of online self-presentation on online dating sites, the researchers adopted the scroll-back method. It involved scrolling through the participants’ online dating accounts, as an in-depth form of inquiry, to uncover rigorous and ‘rich life narratives’ about how they present themselves on these online dating sites.

A total of 45 profiles were studied. To fulfil ethical obligations, the research was guided by Zimmer’s (2010) recommendation on informed consent and intentionality. The researchers intimated her

participants about the objectives of the research. In addition, their anonymity, privacy, and confidentiality were guaranteed. The units of analysis for this study were text and pictures, because the form the major communication content on the online dating platforms.

Semi-Structured Interviews

To complement the scroll back method, the researchers asked the study participants some semi-structured questions about their online self-presentation on online dating sites. The researchers adopted the semi-structured interviews as an additional attempt to develop an understanding of what each practice observed meant to the participants.

Participants

The study participants were selected purposively and based on their interest to participate in the study. They were forty-five (45) single female adults residing in Imo State, Nigeria, aged between 18-35 years. Twenty seven (27) participants were between the ages of 18-26, while eighteen are of 27-35 age brackets. They were recruited using the snowball technique; the second researcher reached out to one of her female friend who is single, and an active member of one of the sampled dating platform, who later declared interest after being hinted of the study aim. She was among the sampled participants, and also volunteered to contact her other friends who fit into the study's preferred characteristics. The interested participants and the researchers agreed on specific day and venue which will be most convenient. Similarly, the researchers will not claim that this sample is representative of all online dating platforms users in Nigeria, but will however, point out that the sample did reflect some of the main demographic characteristics of the participants under focus.

Procedure

The entire research process was overseen by the two researchers, who constantly engaged in critical discourse through face-to-face interactions to solve emerging problems, make research decisions, and engage in data analysis. The initial stage involves the selection of dating platforms. Four online dating platforms were sampled in this study, they include; Badoo, Tinder, eHarmony, Afroromance, and 9jaChrisitainmingles. These sites were purposively selected because of the participants' use of them; they have the highest number of active users globally, and are among the top ten dating platforms in Nigeria. Stated differently, the researchers used the scroll back method during their casual chats with the study participants to explore their patterns of online self-presentation on online dating platforms. The sessions started with the researchers intimating them once again on what the research was all about. The

researchers and the participants then scrolled through the various online dating profiles of the participants to explore their patterns of self-presentation. The participants knew exactly where to find traces of some of their activities and this made the process easier and quicker. After the scroll back, the interviews commenced and lasted for about twenty minutes. Each session was recorded and was guided by an interview schedule. Thereafter, all qualitative data were analysed thematically.

Presentation of analysis

As stated earlier, two qualitative methods in media ethnography (scroll back method and semi-structured interviews) were adopted in the context of media usage to explore how young female adults in Imo State, Nigeria present themselves on online dating sites. The interviews were recorded and later transcribed for analysis. The transcribed data were thematically categorised and analysed. The thematic categorisation process was performed by identifying responses that fit within the thematic frameworks that emerged and repeated them (Bloor, Frankland, Thomas & Robson).

To ensure the participants' confidentiality, pseudonyms were used to denote each participant's response in the data analysis phase. The themes that emerged in the course of the research were as follows: uses of online dating platforms and online self-presentation on dating platforms.

Use of Online Dating Platforms

While observing their profiles and interviewing the participants to ascertain why they use online dating sites, the following dominant themes emerged; socialisation such as (making friends, chatting etc.) and dating (meeting romantic partners).

Dating

According to literature, the major reasons individuals' use online dating and other online platforms is because it avails them with anonymity to engage with other users (Poley, 2011), as well as to meet their romantic partners (Couch & Liamputtong, 2008). It is therefore not surprising that the major emerging theme as to why Nigerian female singles use online dating form is for dating. This is because it gives users a controlled environment to manage the type of potential date they are searching for, in hope that it will grow beyond dating and lead to marriage.

I'm a pretty 27y/o Yoruba woman with an average height and my genotype is AA. I'm a Christian, fun loving, never married with no kids. I live & work in Lagos 🇳🇮 .

I'd love to meet a God fearing Yoruba man btw ages 28-32. He should be hardworking, financially stable, caring, jovial with a good sense of humor.. A man ready for a serious relationship leading to marriage.. A Serious man only..
Thanks...

Fig. 1: Online dating profile of Participant 4

I'm a pretty 32y/o chocolate skinned curvy lady (size 14) from Akwa ibom state, my Genotype is AA and I equally live and work in Lagos. I've never been married with no kids.. I'm an hardworking, loving and an easy going lady who loves cooking..

I'll love to meet a God fearing Christian man btw ages 32 - 40, a man who is ready for a serious relationship thats leading to marriage. He must be hardworking, financially stable and family oriented.
Any tribe is welcome, serious men only..
Thanks.. #dia
#95m76a41JGno531b10oi640ni52

Fig. 2: Online dating profile of Participant 5

Figure 1 and 2 show the text description used on some of the interviewees profiles on 9jachristianmingles. The participants can be seen using direct words to give enough information about themselves, type of man they are searching for, as well as why they are on the platforms. These and more shows that most women on dating platforms are searching for serious relationships, which is consistent with findings from Madden and Lenhart's (2006) study. In their study, they found that respondents were single and looking for a romantic partner through online dating sites. Seventy-four percent of respondents to their study said they went online to seek a romantic relationship, while fifteen percent of respondents knew people who had been in long-term relationships or married someone they originally met online. Although at the time of this research there are no studies in Nigeria or Africa showing the percentage of users who have entered into a long-term relationship or marriage with someone, but according to Pew Research (2020), "in 2013, 11% of adults in the US said they had ever used a dating site or app, while only 3% said they were in a long-term relationship or marriage with someone they first met through online dating.

Socialisation

Socialisation is a lifelong process in which individuals learn and interact with social norms, rules, and values. Online media is an important socialising influence among other important agents of socialisation. Observing participants dating profiles, it was found that some of the participants use platform to socialise; like making new friends of same sex or opposite sex. Though most people assume that dating sites might be exclusively designed for dating, but result shows that even being single and on such platforms, one might be searching for something other than sex or romantic partner. Some of the profiles of the participants read:

Participant 32; 20 years... *Don't chat me if you are all about sex...Not a slay queen, I don't do hookups...Just here to meet good people and have conversations that would improve my life and maybe find love if I'm lucky...Smiles*

Participant 25; 29 years... *Pls am not here for hook-up and mind the way you talk if you come into my DM respect yourself for me to respect pls ... if you are not mature enough don't DM me to avoid embarrassment.....*

Participant 42, 18 years... *Am friendly, Am not here for hook-ups, Am not here for sex chats*

Participant 9; 30 years... *Please if you're here for games don't bother chatting me, and if you can't hold a conversation then why are you here?*

Also, interviewing the participants, some of them expressed their opinion as to why the use for socialisation only...

Participant 1, 21 yrs ... *Well, I would want to say that my major use of online dating sites is just to meet people and interact with them first of all or do I say generally*

Participant 3, 20 yrs... *I use these online dating sites just like my Facebook. I use it to socialize. The difference between the online dating sites and Facebook is that the online dating sites allow me to be more specific with the kind of people I want to meet...*

In profile construction, participants are often asked to write what they are searching for. It is in this section that users' express why they are using the dating platform. This is when they decide who to swipe right or left for. Right swiping means that they like the other users because their profile aligns with what or who they are searching for. Thus, participants through their profiles controls the profiles the platform's algorithm sends them, and who sends the message. According to Alam, Islam, Mokhbul and Makmor (2018), online users engage in social activities such as exchange of messages, which could also be regarded as perceived playfulness and enjoyment, which was also found as the most important factors that influence intention to use online dating sites.

Online Self-Presentation on Dating Platforms

In online dating communication content such as physical appearance is represented via personal photographs of the user (i.e., photos selected and posted by users to represent their body type) and written descriptions (i.e., presenting information about self such as height, weight, and age). Using the scroll-back method, photos and text emerged as the main forms of self-expression on online dating sites. Self-portrayal strategies are especially important early in a relationship, as this information is used by others to make decisions about whether to enter into a relationship, which is why people try to convey a positive image in traditional face-to-face communication. Usually by their physical appearance (their clothes, makeup, perfume, etc.), what they say (how they describe themselves and what topics they engage in) and the non-verbal cues they give during the date. This is consistent with Goffman's work on self-presentation, which explains how a person can undertake strategic activities "to give others an impression of which they are interested" (1959, p. 4).

As shown below, participants aired their views on how they present themselves on the platforms as follows:

Participant 3, 24 Yrs... *I present myself mostly using photos and text. I am on AfroRomance and on the platform just like many other online dating platforms, you have to present a profile picture so that people will know what you look like. Then the text is for any other additional information about yourself you need to present...*

Participant 4, 24 Yrs... *I usually like to present myself using pictures. Pictures are the most reliable way of presenting oneself online. There some online dating sites like 9jaChristianmingles that allow only text. Those ones are very restrictive. I usually go for platforms that enable the use of both photos and text*

Participant 19, 35 years... *I think using pictures will trigger interest in the opposite sex. Also, text will help me describe myself in a way I want others to view me, as well as the type of man that I am searching for. I know why I am here, so I want the first impression to give out that...*

Online dating environments give users a motivated environment to control the impression they make (Toma, Hancock, and Ellison 2008). Kim and Dindia (2011) asserts that one of the key ways by which self-representation is being measured is via paying attention on different information captured in self-disclosure research. According to the authors, these measures include, breadth; this is measured by the amount of information a user presented, depth; measured by the degree of intimacy of information presented, positivity ; the value of information presented, authenticity; degree to which the presentation accurately reflects the presenter, and intentionality; degree to which people knowingly and intentionally disclosing information. While breadth, depth, positivity, and authenticity focus on the content of the presentation, intentionality draws the individual's attention to that activity (Yang & Brown,

2015). Findings show that the prevailing mode of self-disclosure was via text and pictures; this in turn provided the breadth, depth, positivity, authenticity and intentionality of their purpose of using the platforms. For the participants, these modes, photos especially, availed them the opportunity to present themselves in the most desired manner.

Additionally, the participants aired their views on the features or things about themselves they were desirous of presenting online. Some of participants went on to state how they preferred to present themselves on the online dating platforms.

Participant 12, 21 Yrs... *As you can see here, I like to present full photos of myself in a nice dresses. I like to present full pictures so that potential dates would know what I look like from hair to toe, my complexion, physique, everything*

Participant 11, 25 Yrs... *I like to present myself as a beautiful and independent lady. I dress well in the pictures. I like to look good and confident. These are the things that attract people. No one likes anyone looking shabby...*

Participant 10, 30 Yrs... *I like to present myself as a confident career woman. In my photos here I like to dress formally and responsibly. I present myself this way to attract responsible people*

Participant 45; 31 yrs... *I am not here to play games, I am only interested in serious minded people, people who are comfortable with my success and not intimidated by it. Yes, I am fun, and sociable, but I am also a hardworking independent woman.*

As also confirmed using the scroll back method, the participants presented themselves online in multiple and varied ways. There were some participants who were interested in presenting themselves as beautiful and attractive. For this category of participants, they presented photos of themselves in revealing clothing to showcase their attractive features: skin colour, legs and cleavages especially. Some of the photos also showed some of the participants posing in ways that accentuated their buttocks or made it appear big. For the participants who were interested in presenting themselves as independent career women, they presented photos of themselves in formal dresses and in work settings, offices especially. The aim of engaging in online self-presentation was to attract the kind of potential dates or people of choice. These online setting that daters are in, according to (Fiore, Taylor, Mendelsohn, & Hearst, 2008), allows them to present themselves, as they would like to be perceived by others. Toma (2015) argues that daters are not only concerned about forming a relationship online, but also hope to extend it in an offline setting. Thus, Leary and Kowalsk (1990) believe that the motivation to Self-expression stems from people's concern about how they are perceived by others and a desire to make a positive impression. Sinha (2009) further emphasised that in impression management, the perceived person manages the perceiver's perception in hopes of having a positive impact. So, if users want to be seen as beautiful and independent, they should showcase this picture in their dating profiles.

Multiple self-presentations

Self-representation theory holds that human beings, as social beings, consciously actualise identities for selfish ends, so that a person's behaviour and actions can affect the course of a situation involving others. In a non-verbal environment, the image is an important part of the user's feelings. Therefore, online dates engage in impression management with the aim of improving their image in the eyes of others (Sinha, 2009). Online self-presentation scholars have argued that users/daters present several identities on these platforms. According to Higgins (1987), online users present three self on online environment; "***the true self*** (attributes that an individual possesses), ***the ideal self*** (attributes that an individual would ideally possess), and ***dought self*** (attributes that an individual ought to possess). He further argued that though there are three distinctive self that users present online, the discrepancies between the true self and one's ideal are associated with feelings of depression (Higgins, 1987). Also, Klohnen and Mendelsohn (1998) found that individual's descriptions of their "ideal self" is usually biased because it is written based on what they assume their prospective romantic partner perceive as an ideal self-concept.

Thus, majority of the participants agreed to have presented multiple self on online dating platforms; actual and ideal self. This was borne out of the various motivating factors that triggered users to use the platforms (dating, socialisation etc). For instance, participants who were more interested in presenting themselves as beautiful or attractive made use of photo-editing software to enhance their photos. The views of the participants who used photo enhancers were summed by **Participant 11 (25 Yrs.)** who stated thus:

I have to use editing software on my phone to make my photo look very good. The software cleans up my photo. It makes it look neater. It is not as if I am not presenting my real self. As you can see, I am already fair in complexion. I just edit to make my photo look better...

The participants' views pointing to their use of photo-editing software to enhance their photos online explain their choice of photos as their most preferred modes of self-presentation. They relied on photographs as they are highly malleable and subjective, allowing them to enhance their appearance in numerous ways (Toma& Hancock, 2010) to achieve their aims.

The participants were asked for their views on the type of self they thought they presented online. Their views in this regard were also varied.

Participant 11, 25 Yrs... *Let me say I present my enhanced real self online. What I present is exactly who I am. It is just that I try to enhance the way I look in other to attract the kind of men I want...*

Participant 10, 30 Yrs... *I present myself freely and in a way I would want people to see me as a professional. I would say I present myself in different ways depending on the situation.*

Participant 15, 27 Yrs... *I focus on presenting the things that are desirable of lovable about me. This is why I prefer pictures because they allow you present yourself in a very lovable way. Pictures help to present the beautiful parts of you, like your face, your physique and all that. I present only desirable things. There are some things you cannot present online, if not, people will not be interested in you*

Participant 29, 24 Yrs... *For me, the whole thing depends on the kind of person I meet. I present myself according to what I feel the person would like. When I start communicating with someone, I try to under the kind of person he is and I present myself accordingly...*

Self-presentation is one of the main concerns of online daters and as such the strategies used are particularly important in the early stages of the relationship as the information provided is crucial in deciding whether or not to proceed with the relationship (Derlega et.al 1987). Therefore, the results show that participants presented multiple identities (real and ideal) on their online dating profile(s). The platform allows participants to present themselves in desired and controlled ways. This agrees with the excerpt from Fiore et al. (2008) who states that “when an online mate's intent is to find a potential mate, it can be challenging to find someone who is personally attractive to them in person rather than online. Therefore, the information that online dates present in their profiles can give others an idea of what that person would be like in real life (Walther & Parks, 2002).

Furthermore, this is consistent with Goffman's theory of self-representation, which suggests that "an individual may be manipulative in hopes of presenting themselves in a better light than authentic, this is why daters are concerned about what type of information they present, and this is because it could have an impact on authenticity and/or attractiveness. In addition, a dater can unintentionally steer a given situation in the desired direction. Bargh, McKenna, and Fitzsimon (2002) summarizes this by arguing that "compared to face-to-face interactions, the internet allows people to better express aspects of their true selves that they wanted to express but were unable to”.

Discussion and Conclusion

According to Statista.com (2021), online dating platforms have about 182.5 million 57 million visitors per month. This data is substantiated by findings from this study which showed that single female young adults are active user's online dating platforms. Also, the participants' dominant uses of the platforms were socialization and search for dates. This substantiates Lawson and Leck's (2006); Sumter, Vandenbosch & Litgenberg's (2016) findings which showed that people used online dating sites to find companionship and fulfil romantic fantasies.

Furthermore, this study focused on exploring the patterns of self-presentation of single female adults in Imo State, Nigeria on online dating platforms. The study found these single females mostly used a combination of text and pictures to present themselves on the dating platforms. This is to say that text and pictures formed the core communication content by which they present themselves online. This result is consistent with Hancock and Toma's (2009) argument that physical appearance in online dating profiles is mainly determined by personal photos (i.e., photos selected and posted by users to represent their bodies) and verbal descriptions (i.e. direct indication of your own size) is displayed). , weight and age).In general, online dating platforms allowed participants to introduce themselves in preferred ways. This supports the contention of Barghet al. (2002) that compared to face-to-face interactions, the internet enables people to better express aspects of their true selves that they wanted to express but were unable to.

Online daters, according to Toma and Hancok (2010) try to manage the impression people may have about them through how they present themselves. This study found that in order to manage impressions, single female adults uploaded their most preferred photos and words online. This supports Toma and Hancock's (2010) contention that online self-expression must be carefully constructed to enable personal agendas in the offline environment. Therefore, self-expression on dating sites follows rational decisions about what to write in profiles and what pictures to present (Walther, Slovacek, & Tidwell, 2001). As noted by Hancock and Toma (2009), "pictures are highly impressionable and skewed. This gives daters the opportunity to edit how they appear in real life, by; (a) selecting the most flattering photos from potentially hundreds of personal photos, (b) select older photos that make them look younger and perhaps more attractive, and (c) manipulate the photo before, during, or after the photo is taken." This statement is consistent with the results of this study, which showed that participants used filters or edited their pictures before uploading them to their profiles.

Also, findings from this study show age-related disparities in self-presentation on online dating sites. From the findings of the study, it can be said that the older participants (aged between 27-30 years) were more interested in presenting themselves as independent, working-class and successful women, compared to the younger respondents who seemed to focus more on presenting themselves as beautiful or attractive. The older participants were also found to be involved in what can be described as 'need specific self-presentation', switching from one mode of self-presentation depending on how they want to be perceived. This result contributes to literature that shows demographic disparities in the construction of self-presentation on online dating profiles (Guadagno, Okdie& Kruse, 2013; Casimiro, 2014).

Michikyan, Dennis, and Subrahmanyam (2014) argued that adults present multiple identities in online self-presentation: real, ideal, and false identities on dating sites. In their study, respondents reported that they presented their true selves more than their ideal and false selves on Facebook. In addition, a path analysis suggested that emerging adults who reported having more consistent identity states also reported presenting their true selves to a greater extent on Facebook. In this study, it was observed that, participants presented their true or ideal selves on online dating sites and not their fake selves.

The findings of this study point to an important implication for research on self-presentation on online dating sites in Nigeria. Given that Nigerian young female adults desire to attract positive perception from people, self-presentation aims at constructing a range of positive public images. Here, online self-presentation can be said to be functional, depending on specific goals to be achieved, especially regarding the kind of person of interest and the impression the users want to make. Future research needs to investigate how online self-presentation strategies are used for a wider range of different purposes on online dating platforms.

In addition, based on findings from the study, it can be concluded that there are similarities with findings from studies from developed countries. This study has revealed that young females in Imo State, just like their counterparts in other parts of the world, aim to socialise and meet romantic partners online. Based on the findings from the study, it can be argued that online self-presentation is effectively driven by online dating sites.

Unarguably, online dating has its unique characteristics compared to face-to-face meetings or communication. In online dating communication, potential daters solely rely on information that user's post on their status to decide whether to communicate with the person or not, hence the importance of using the choicest words and pictures in managing this intended impression. We therefore conclude that young single female adults in Imo State present multiple (real and ideal) selves on dating sites with a combination of photos and text. It is hoped that this information will attract the right person. The manner in which young adults present themselves online supports self-presentation theory, which suggests that the purpose of acquisition-oriented self-presentation is to seek approval. Getting individuals to show attractive aspects of them or construct desirable images.

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Authors Biography:

Prof. Ifeoma Vivian Dunu is a professor of Communication and Media Studies, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Nigeria. She is a globally recognised researcher who has published several articles in Thompson Reuters rated journals. Email- ifeomadunu@yahoo.com

Corresponding Author: Ezinne Chioma Abaneme, is a PhD student of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Nigeria. She is also a lecturer of mass communication, Alex Ekwueme Federal University, Ndufu-Alike, Nigeria. Her research interests include; social media, health communication, media studies etc. Email – ezinneabaneme@yahoo.com, <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0748-838X>