

E-DATING AND MARITAL LIFE IN NIGERIA: THE NEXUS

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Abstract: *The use of social networking and on-line dating are new methods of meeting future partners. It is now a loud song that the internet, cell phones, and social media have become key actors in the life of many couples, the influences of the western life's and its technological developmental dependency has affected our most home especially in Nigeria. Thus, the values attached to marriage and family life are now in decline which always led to separation or divorce as well as reducing the family bond. The study empirically examine the threat of the new technology system of entering into relationship and its effect on the family institution and its increasing social vices and marital breakdown coupled with well-being of married couples in the society.*

Keywords: *E-dating, Technology, Marital Violence, Internet, Network*

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INTRODUCTION

In the modern age, the desire to find a romantic partner endures, as does the sense that doing so can be challenging. But the resources available for meeting these challenges have changed, and many of these changes can be traced to the invention, spread, and now ubiquity of the Internet such as face booking, watt app, instagram etc. According to recent data, some 30% of the 7 billion people on our

planet now have access to the Internet (InternetWorldStats.com, 2011). In North America, where Internet usage is highest, that figure reaches 78%, 40% in Africa and 43% in Nigeria (PlentyOfFish.com, 2011). The trend of online dating has been around since the emergence of the Internet. In the generation before the online era, people would meet face-to-face, in cafes, on streets or at bars or even on airplanes. People make initial contact based on a number of cues and preferences, getting to know one another in person. Online dating has altered how people make decisions about romantic partners. Before the time of online dating people could either speak on the phone or face-to-face, now there are numerous options including text messaging, chat rooms, social media interactions and video calling.

With respect to forming romantic relationships, the potential to reach out to nearly 2 billion other people offers several opportunities to the relationship-seeker that are unprecedented in human history. First, the Internet now affords access to a vastly wider network of potential partners who would have been unknown or inaccessible in former eras. Second, interaction between potential partners once depended on their proximity to each other, the Internet now facilitates nearly instantaneous communication via multiple channels (i.e., text, voice, image, and video) without partners having to be in the same location and even without partners' conscious awareness (e.g., by allowing others to view one's information online). Third, the choice of a mate once relied largely upon the individual's intuitions and personal opinions, the Internet promises to create matches between suitable partners using new tools that draw upon data provided by thousands, or millions, of users.

Many Social and political commentators in Western Societies and the developing countries including Nigeria have expressed concern about what they see as the decline in marriage and family life. Many see this as a threat to the family, which in turn they see as the bedrock of a stable and civilized society. Brenda Ahmed (2006), argues that

there has been a shift away from concern with the family as a biological institution based upon the rearing of children, towards the family as an institution which dwell on' two people's emotional need or desire for one another. Almond (2006).

Another writer who believes that the marriage is in declining is Patricia Morgan (2003). She argues that factors such as increased cohabitation, E-dating, declining fertility, the decline in the proportion of married people and the rise in the numbers of living alone are all indication of this decline. To buttress Almond's argument, she sees this as harmful for both the society, and an individual in particular.

It is popularly known that online dating has almost become a norm in the dating world along with other types of dating such as: blind dates, and speed dating. Due to the popularity of online dating, new and unique dating sites seem to spring up online on a daily basis. However, this was not always the case, as online dating went through a series of evolutionary step to become what it is today. In tackling this declination in marriage and family as an institutionalized institution for the maintenance of value and culture bring us to the concept of E-dating and its impact on the life of married couples in Nigeria.

An Overview of E- Dating

The concept of online dating first began in 1995 when "Match.com" was launched on the internet. Founder Gari Kremam initially came up with the idea to find love for himself instead of the world "His Genesis and idea was to find the right woman for himself. He had the idea that if he put all the women in the world in a database and sorted it on my criteria he will find the right woman to marry. "Match.com becomes the first internet dating service available at the time, which only included the simple service of Matched people based on profiles of likes and dislikes". Match.com turned out to be a huge success and

it became the pioneer of the online dating trend. Now, the site has up to millions of unique visitors per month, as the site offers a varied user base for those who are not picky or do not have specific requirements. As the online dating trend was on the rise, this led to an increase of niche online dating sites which cater for a specific audience. Popular examples of niche dating sites include VeggieDate.com, a dating site specifically for vegetarian singles and TheWaited.com, a dating site for virgins waiting until marriage. Over time, niche dating sites became more popular than broad ones, as people could narrow the pool of potential matches and have a mutual interest or preference to talk about with a romantic interest. It is however argued that marriage is becoming less popular decreasing numbers of people are getting married. More people are developing alternatives to conventional married life. These alternatives can take a number of forms. Among these forms is E-dating. The word "E-dating" can simply be defined as a process of contact, courtship and subsequent emotional, psychological, or spiritual bonding/ exchange at any level between person via a single matching, or online dating.

Smartphones have significantly changed the way human beings interact with each other including the way we converse, attract sexual partners and arrange meetings, for example by using software applications – online dating apps – such as Tinder, Happn or Grindr. These apps represent an evolution from desk-based technologies such as chatrooms or messaging clients such as Messenger, as they provide users the ability to share not only information such as text, image or video but also information about their current location with other users.

There is scant data produced within the academic sphere regarding the uses of dating apps. However, non-academic observers such as 'Leading dating site UK', an information site for online dating whose stated aim is to maximise users' success in online dating, provides market-oriented research data in the British online dating sphere. Leading dating site's latest report 'The Online Dating Market in the

UK 2014–2015' (2016), categorizes online dating apps into five groups. 'Online personals' are mainstream websites services such as Zoosk and Match.com for searching through personals where the user is responsible for the searching. 'Matchmaking' services such Elite Singles and Match Affinity match couples through a psychological process and profiling. 'Social dating' through mobile services applications such as Tinder and Badoo, provide flirt services and are particularly targeted at the younger population. 'Adult dating' websites such as F-buddy and Adult Friend Finder offer erotic contact for infidelity, fetish or swingers, and 'Niche dating' offer dating services for specific audiences such as seniors, ethnic or plus-sized. The report states that there are around 7.8 million people online every month 'looking for a partner' (p.p. 3, Leading Dating Sites, 2016) In addition, there are a 'further 3 million monthly users in the Adult dating category' as well as 'about 450000 users of gay dating services' (Leading Dating Sites, 2016). These figures indicate both an opportunity and a necessity for researchers to understand a sphere of human activity that is increasingly common, changing and reshaping the way we understand human relations and social life.

There are also non-academic projects available online which aim to unveil the way dating apps work. For example, [this experiment](#) tested 'Tinder' to see different uses between women and men (Whatever, 2015), highlighting that the app has more male users than women.

Problems & Prospects of E-Dating

In e-dating, there are some problems that are peculiar to it's usage and these include the below:

A. Pay dating exploitation

Online dating sites illustrate how the modern world centers around a money economy, as individuals are in essence able to buy love. Although some sites offer free trials and/or profiles, most memberships can cost upwards of \$60 per month, and many individuals buy into the promise that these websites advertise; that

they will find you love that cannot be attained out in the real world. Thus, the main premise of online dating sites is to find you “perfect match”—the person whom you will inevitably fall in love with and thus, spend the rest of your life with. In order to find this person, they use various questions, scales and polls to find someone who they deem to be compatible with you. For many individuals, this precise calculation of determining suitable matches offers an implied higher degree of success and eliminates the need to look for new relationships outside the home, consequently saving time and energy. Online dating sites have taken advantage of the modern individual’s desire to save time in their hectic life in order to successfully commercialize their product in our capital-based society.

B. Abundance of information

Through the abundance of information on online dating profiles, as well as elsewhere on the Internet, people may already possess a lot of superficial information about their potential partner’s interests before talking to them, which may lead to a false sense of security when meeting up with a new person. Meaning information on internet can be accessed by anybody. So it’s not save.

C. Lies

Impression management is a large component of online dating profiles. In a 2008 study, many participants stated that they often found themselves scrutinizing over what to write in their description and private messages, often first composing the piece on a word processing document to ensure proper spelling. Participants reported explicitly considering how they would be perceived by others, deeply analyzing themselves in order to appeal to others. This type of careful manipulation and scrutiny is made possible through modern technology—it is much easier to carefully plan out what you type rather than what you say.

A problematic component of online dating is the ease of lying it allows for, due to the anonymity of the internet. Many stories have involved someone meeting up with a new online partner, only to find they look nothing like their profile photo. Often, online daters

find it difficult to balance “accuracy and desirability in self-presentation”. One of the main processes behind social interactions include the packaging and portrayal of one’s self to make favourable impressions upon others; online dating is no exception to this impression management. Individuals are concerned about how to present their own identity to attract partners, since they know their profile will be deeply scrutinized by others; thus, they often try to display the best photos of themselves and describe themselves in favourable ways to portray themselves in the best possible light to attract the most number of people. In one study, it was found that nine out of ten participants had lied on at least one attribute; weight was the most lied about attribute, and age was the least lied about. Often the lies are slight, but these still illustrate the difference that new media has created in relationships.

D. Effects on dating

The increased use of online dating websites and services, thanks to a greater sense of acceptance by the mainstream, reinforces the “hyper-casual approach” to dating through the large amount of potential dates that arise. This can cause people to have a sense of “FOMO” (fear of missing out), thus choosing to enlist a speed-dating approach in order to cycle through potential mates quickly. Often, this leads to much more casual dates than would have occurred previously, mirroring “online job applications [allowing] you [to] target many people simultaneously—it’s like darts on a dart board, eventually one will stick”.

E. User problems

This problem has to do with the users of e-dating through many but useful and these are as follow:

This section possibly contains original research. Please improve it by verifying the claims made and adding inline citations. Statements consisting only of original research may be removed. (September 2007)

There can be a variety of problems when using online dating sites.

1. Some sites offer members to subscribe "blind", meaning that users have little or no ability to search or preview the available profiles before they pay the subscription fee.
2. For paying members, it is often unclear whether a potential contact has a full subscription and whether he or she will be able to reply. Some sites prevent a potential contact from even reading a paying member's messages unless the contact has also paid to subscribe. There are, however, a few established dating sites that allow non-paid-up users to reply to messages, especially internally focused sites where there is an expected disparity of income.
3. Some sites require that both the sender and recipient of messages be subscribers before any off-site communication or contact can be arranged, and will filter messages to remove email addresses, telephone numbers, web addresses and surnames. Subscribers who attempt to circumvent this restriction may lose their membership and be removed from the site.
4. Some profiles may not represent actual daters, but are "bait profiles" that have been placed there by the site owners to attract new paying members. Both Yahoo Personals and Match.com have received several complaints about this tactic. Some users spam sites with "fake" profiles that are in reality advertisements to other services, such as prostitution, multi-level marketing, or other personals websites. Most recently, BBC and Kiev Post have investigated Cupid PLC for this issue.
5. Even when members' profiles are "real", there is still an inherent lack of trust with other members. Married people seeking affairs will often pose as singles. In addition, many members misrepresent themselves by telling flattering 'white lies' about their height, weight and age, or by using old and misleading photos. Members can, of course, ask for an up-to-date photograph before arranging a meeting, but disappointments are common. Matrimonial Sites are a variant of online dating sites, and these are geared towards meeting people for the

purpose of getting married. Gross misrepresentation is less likely on these sites than on casual dating sites. Casual dating sites are often geared more towards short term (potentially sexual) relationships.

6. Online predators find online dating sites especially attractive, because such sites give them an unending supply of new targets of opportunity for Internet fraud. A recent study, led by Dr. Paige Padgett from the University of Texas Health Science Center, found that there was a false degree of safety assumed by women looking for love on the internet, exposing them to stalking, fraud, and sexual violence. Some online dating sites conduct background checks on their members in an attempt to avoid problems of this nature but some don't. For those who had actually used online dating, 43 percent thought that online dating involved risk, although just over 50 percent did not see it as a dangerous activity. Media coverage of crimes related to online dating may also contribute to people's perceptions of the risks of online dating.
7. Most members are enticed to join dating websites with free or low-priced "trial" memberships advertised on many other websites. On sites which require credit card information to join at all, these trial memberships may automatically become full memberships at the end of the trial period and charge the full monthly fee, without any additional action from the member, regardless of whether the member has actually used the services or not.
8. Some members have expressed complaints about the billing practices of certain dating sites. In some cases, trial memberships that were canceled within the trial period were automatically re-billed even after canceling. To avoid these potential problems, some users have advised using a virtual credit card number which is offered by several credit card companies.

F. Discrimination

Gay rights groups have complained that certain websites that restrict their dating services to heterosexual couples are discriminating against homosexuals. Homosexual customers of the popular E-Harmony dating website have made many attempts to litigate discriminatory practices. E-Harmony was sued in 2007 by a lesbian claiming that, "Such outright discrimination is hurtful and disappointing for a business open to the public in this day and age". In light of discrimination by sexual orientation by dating websites, some services such as Gaydar and Chemistry.com cater more to homosexual dating. In addition, many sites require members to specify what sex they are looking for without having the option "both", which complicates things for bisexuals. Many sites also require members to specify themselves as "male" or "female", complicating matters for transgendered as well as inter sexed individuals.

Less than half of our internet daters are open to dating people of all races. Consistent with social exchange and group position theories, Asians, Latinos and blacks are more open to dating whites than whites are to dating them. Of those who state a racial preference, 97 percent of white men exclude black women, 48 percent exclude Latinas, and 53 percent exclude Asian women. In contrast, white men are excluded by 76 percent of black women, 33 percent Latinas, and only 11 percent Asian women. Similarly, 92 percent of white women exclude black men, 77 percent exclude Latinos, and 93 percent exclude Asian men. 71 percent of black men, 31 percent of Latinos, and 36 percent of Asian men excluded white women.

The Approach of E-Dating to Nigerian Environment

P.Morgon (2003) sees all forms of relationship against the institutionalized (E-marriage) as a part of a worrying trend in which Marriage is going out of fashion and the family is in serious decline. Some of these E-marriages initially were part of Marriage prelude but now increasingly, it is part of a pattern which simply reflects an increase in sexual partners and partner change. This effect in cultural

practices globally therefore bring about the relevance of E-dating in Nigeria Context.

The relevance of e-dating to Nigeria context is of major importance because this will actually make us to know the operational benefits of the concept. There is no doubt about the fact that anything that has good side must also has the bad part.

Nevertheless, the major contributions shall be looked into and this will bring us to asking series of questions which include:

- Why do Nigerian goes into e-dating?
- Does it provide a reliable and lasting marriage relationship for the Nigerian?
- What are the positive and the Negative contributions of this marital means?

It is important to state that even though E-dating is in the increase in Nigeria, it is against our cultural heritage, norms and several values of our people since our forefathers does not belief in it. Further, our various religious affections does not permit the use of E-dating and its social vices. Thus, there is no legal framework for E-dating in Nigeria.

A lot of reasons can be attributed to the reason behind Nigerian going into e-dating and these include but the following:

1. **Internet Service** – This has to do with having access to global issues and information. As a result of this, make it very easy for the internet user to actually see what is globally accepted now as an alternative to marriage. Though it is a modern practice which Nigerian still battling with its operation because what can be called the misconception of the system against the global purpose.
2. **Economic situation in the country**–Some people see this as an avenue for them to actually enriching their pocket. This they do by implore series of dubious way or cheating and duping strategies. Nigerian sees this as an opportunity to have access to

the developed nation and as such bringing in series of strategies all in the name of dating to perpetuate their selfish evil.

3. **Academically Benefits**–There are series of online programmes of various schools both in Nigeria and the whole world at large. These programme actually create an atmosphere for interaction across the globe among the students who are running the same programme from all over the world. For instance, National Open University of Nigeria connects students of various continents together and such relationship can start through this means.
4. Additionally, some go into this type of relationship for no reason. That is just to follow the trend of world. The reason for involvement is not known to them, neither the purpose can be defined by them as well but just to make people to know that they are also part of the scene. These are set of people who deriving joy in chatting to keep them busy.

Though e-dating is like a two sides of a coin which has both the positive benefit that include the following:

- i. It allows us to be actively involve in the global culture. The concept of global culture is at the opposite extreme to the idea of sub-culture implies that we are all becoming parts of one all embracing culture that affects all parts of the world. By this practice, it make the Africa and Nigeria in particular to be acculturated to the western world.
- ii. Nigerians see this as a way of escaping from poverty status as a result of economic situation of the country. They strongly believed that dating someone outside the country and most especially from either American or Europe will definitely give them an opportunity of leaving this country for other western nations one day. That is, it serves as an opportunity for better chances.
- iii. it removes the barrier of racism. That means you can date anyone either from your continent or outside your continent. As such, take away the problem of colour

differentiation and racial discrimination. This is very important because it is one of the social problems that faces the entire world (racism).

- iv. It allows for more patronage from the immigration department of the country. Because of this new practice, many people will have opportunity of travelling out of this country for relationship and it will also allow more people to be coming into the country as well.
- v. It removes boundary barrier between two or more countries. It gives room to both intra and inter marriages.

The above have shown us the positive role of e-dating but there is also need for us to look into the negative roles play by this new practice and these include:

1. It promotes Cybercrime. (Scam).-> an illegal means/plan to make money.
2. It gives room for transferring of some international diseases e.g. H.I.V/Ebola.
3. It increases the rate of divorce
4. It gives room/encourages lies.
5. It makes marriage to be unpopular.
6. It can be used as a means of kidnapping and ritual killing.
7. It increases sexual emotions of the young ones and especially the teenagers.

Marxism and E-Dating

A conflict perspective to understanding E-dating will consider the issue of "interest". Unlike functionalism's emphasis on value consensus, conflict perspective to social reality concentrates on issue of power, inequality and competitive struggle. The sociological questions to ask here, using the mindset of a conflict sociologists are:

- (a) Whose interest is E-dating Ultimately representing?
- (b) Is E-dating a dominant ideology: that is an attempt by the powerful cultures of the world to impose their cultural

- values on Africans or Nigerians – thereby estranging Africans from their primordial culture?
- (c) Can we say E-dating is an attempt by the western powers to erode African cultural values in mate selection, dating and marriage?
- (d) Does it mean that capitalists have found another avenue to exploit the “ignorant bourgeoisie” by creating a new “dating value” and imposing it on them to make money?
- (e) What are the contradictions or the seeds of contradictions embedded in E-dating?
- (f) Who is at the receiving end as far as E-dating is concerned: the Third World nationals or the I.C.T firms in charge of E-dating or the second and first world nationals?
- (g) Whose culture is E-dating representing or promoting, Africans or Western culture?
- (h) What country makes the bulk of the foreign revenue from E-dating and at whose expense?
- (i) Should Nigerian ICT experts or E-businesses, seek to dominate the E-dating industry or should they come up with alternatives to E-dating that will, at least protect the individual and national interest of Nigerians?

CONCLUSION

Developed country is an open society and with this development in marriage system that has been alternated by this new relationship pattern, no reason can be accounted for why developed nations actually tuned into this new system. In African and particularly Nigeria, we only join the practice without definition our own course of motive behind it but rather device another means to be equated to both our goals and how to achieve the goals, with the original goal of the system. As a result it will in due time affect our cultural practice in the area of Marriage. It will make marriage to be of low importance and value. Our cultural value is still working majorly because we are yet to get the original goals and objectives behind the establishment of e-dating. But gradually, it will still affect our cultural practices in

the area of marriage. Culture as it implies means identical of practice by certain set of people for identical purpose. Meaning embracing other people's culture at the expense of your cultural practice will rather cause more harm than good. African society is known for her cultural belief and Nigeria is not excluded. What differentiate the white from the black is their culture. So attempt to erase this will however cause a big problem. It is a Western World Life that Nigerian are trying to copy. Because they didn't get rightful choice For now, the idea of e-dating is still a game of probability because of the motive behind it by the Nigerian. It is a messiah's practice and to some it is an avenue for duping, cheating, jilting and all forms of cybercrime. Nevertheless it is still a practice that its operational definition is yet to be understood and follow by an average Nigerian.

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