



Social Media and Internet Dating Hangouts: Threat and Inference to Sexual and Reproductive Health of Adult Persons in Nigeria

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Abstract

Observation show that Internet dating sites basically meant for meeting intimate friends and partners have witnessed more patronage than the traditional or conventional means in recent times. However, there have been benefits as well as risks associated with this unconventional ways of meeting casual or intimate friends and even partners. This study investigated the effect of internet dating sites and social media applications on sexual and reproductive health of young adults in Nigeria. An online questionnaire was adopted to assess the data in respect of the demographics, preferences and sexual effects of internet dating sites, sexual behaviors and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) diagnoses as perceived by the participants of the study. Simple percentages, mean and thematic analyses were used to investigate the opinions retrieved from respondents. Standard deviation analyses were run to investigate the mean age, motives and features of dating sites on sexual risk taking and sexual health. Findings from the data obtained show that internet dating sites features such as anonymity, accessibility, and contiguity are profound tools for derived pleasures by users. In addition, internet dating sites/social media apps facilitates major effects turning into risky sexual practices based on misinformation, dissimulation, impulsiveness, deceitfulness or promiscuity and emotional imbalance to persuade partners into sexual impulsiveness.

Keywords: Internet, dating sites, sexual risk behaviours, sexually transmitted diseases/infectious, Dating Apps

1. Introduction

As technology and artificial intelligence (AI) continue to advance in the twenty-first century, internet dating sites and social media platforms have become hubs and platforms where new people come together to form romantic or sexual relationships and alliances for several reasons. (Smith 2022). Internet dating sites (IDS), also known as online dating platforms (ODPs), have permanently changed the way that many people find romantic or sexual partners via the internet or online sites. IDS are computer networks that offer opportunities to connect with others in a romantic, sexual, and social context. Internet dating sites that are linked from specific search engines or websites, as well as other social media dating apps, are examples of available types of IDS (Hardey, 2020). Online dating services have been compared to a service facilitated so that individual's private, intimate relationship get to begin such that individuals regarded as users are connected to make themselves strategically positioned to be more attractive possible romantic partners and intimate relationships. This may be casual or long term

depending on the agreement upon initiation by the persons involve.

There gradual emergence of a deviation from the traditional conventional means of dating has shown the growing innovative means which makes dating online to involve using computer-mediated and or assisted communication tools that includes voice, photographs, and texts to establish contact where physical meeting is impossible or not preferred, unlike traditional dating where physical contact is given optimum priority in establishing the relationship. Throughout the day, dating services 'push notifications' which alert users about (new) matches and conversations to users; and often times to non-users through online sites pop up unsolicited adverts. Dating services platforms or sites that have geolocation capabilities enhances the possibility of finding local people through targeted searches, potentially leading to more intimate dates within the locality of the users or subscribers to the services. The alleviation of boredom, the pursuit of casual sex and dating, or the termination of a romantic relationship have been identified as the main reasons why people use dating services cutting across different levels. Timmermans & DeCaluwe, (2020) state that the lack of physicality combined with an internet user's capacity to consistently produce great material is a determining factor in their ability to interact and initiate

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romantic relationships via social media platforms. Teenagers and young adults utilize more than 1500 dating applications and websites at the moment. Other conventional methods of meeting a spouse, including through friends, family, work, or religion, have largely been supplanted by dating apps, dating sites; and the internet in general (Rosenfield, Thomas, and Hausen 2019). In a study conducted by Brown (2020) even with the abundance of romantic chances available on the internet, 75% of US individuals surveyed in 2019 reported that they had difficulty finding partners for dates in the previous year. Furthermore, nearly half of the respondents (47%) believed that dating was tougher now than it was ten years ago, with 42% of users of dating sites reporting unpleasant experiences ranging from abuses of all sorts to near death experiences resulting from their dates. According to Smith (2022), 42% of persons in the US surveyed in another study about dating services and apps reported having a bad experience from the relationships initiated with their partners without any particular recourse to gender or sex of the respondents. These results raises concerns regarding the detrimental effects that online dating services have on users' health and wellness. Humans use their eyes as powerful sense organs to detect and interpret stimuli that are being observed and examined. Also, research findings reveals that individuals' actions are impacted by the dedicated from close monitoring and scrutiny under the watchful eye such as it happens when actions are under dedicated use of technological based they are in the presence of eye-related visuals. At some point, the visuals being viewed dictate the impact of following actions so does the numerous posts and images on dating sites effects on users when viewed by them. Numerous debates about sexual health issues have arisen among daters as a result of the interaction style of sexually explicit photographs between partners on various dating services therefore making online dating emergence as a more convenient and socially acceptable way for users to find companions or lovers. Naija Planet, Afroromance, Afro Introductions, Tinder, Friendlite, Badoo, Hinge, and MeetNigerians.com are a few of the well-known online dating services with service presence and impact evidence more in Africa, used by Africans and explored by non-Africans seeking African partners and friendship (Davis, 2026). Tinder is one well-known example of an online dating service; and provides a social networking platform for its users. In September 2012, the App Store saw a soft launch. Tinder was created from the ground up to be a smartphone application, in contrast to other online dating services that were available at the time. It had a simple to use user interface (UI) with a unique swipe function that let users anonymously swipe left or right to express their likes and dislikes for other people's profiles. In May 2013, the innovative swiping feature was created, activated and made available for its subscribers and users. This innovative seamless interface and user experience with the site and app has made Tinder to have more users than other social media platforms. There are 50 million registered users; 3.6 million daily visits; and an average of 85 minutes of use

per user every day (Benotsch 2020). Social networking apps and websites that can be downloaded for free on laptops and Android devices can be used to interact with strangers on dating platforms. Online dating sites give people a simple way to meet new people for romantic and sexual connections. Parallel to this, there is a strong likelihood that online dating services could have an impact on people's sexual health and ability to procreate (Scott S., and Chan P, 2020). There are obvious indications that dating has become a common technique to meet possible mates not only in the west but also in Nigeria, as evidenced by the numerous online dating sites in the country.

According to Smith (2022), there will be 7.2 million online daters in Nigeria by 2026. The country's user penetration rate is predicted to be 2.3% in 2022 and rise to 3.0% by 2026. The power and anonymity that online dating platforms provide users may contribute to their increasing popularity, particularly in terms of their capacity to improve or choose how to strategically present themselves online. Additionally, in 2015, two thirds of online daters reported going on a date with a person they met on social media, an increase from 43% in 2005 (Smith & Anderson, 2016). Research from the past has shown that people who look for partners online engage in higher risk sexual behavior. These people also report higher rates of unprotected sexual activity, STI diagnoses, and more sexual partners overall (Benotsch, 2020). The purpose of this research is to examine effects of internet dating sites on a range of sexual risk behaviours and reproduction, including having unprotected sex, related health issues to reproductive system. It was hypothesized that a sizeable minority of participants would report using dating apps and that these individuals would report higher rates of engagement in sexual risk behaviours.

2. Effect of Internet, Non-conventional dating on Sexual Health

An increasingly common method of meeting individuals for relationships and sex is online dating, which is available on laptops and smartphones. In order for dating apps to succeed as commercial goods, they must primarily cater to user demands and be easy to understand for individuals who use them. They have to be compatible and acceptable, in other words. As a result, dating app features such as static alternatives show the self can be considered to be a rich source of information that reflects many important facets of the sexual cultures in which they are most effective. Physical parameters in terms of location, connection, appearance and presence have always been critical mechanisms of establishing romantic or dating relationships in the past but innovations in technological advancements leading to the development of smartphones, laptops, websites, and the uploading of software, including dating apps, has, nevertheless, resulted in the advancement of sexual gratifications as digital devices and computers and other technological devices have become handy. Sexual behavior and activities of individuals have

equally been impacted by this moment of emerging trends and evolving dimensions to the present transformation. As a result, highly deceptive identity manipulation by daters—who assume many different personas and present a variety of false impressions to arouse the desire of a potential partner—has hurt the health of some young people who have since met using these sites, services and platforms for friendships and partners. This inadvertently presents itself with additional consequences trialed by myraids of health and issues and challenges. There are some related sexual health risks to reproductive system of young adults presumptuously to have met with diverse partners both physically and sexually. Sexual Transmitted Infectious and diseases have a profound impact on sexual and reproductive health worldwide. More than 30 different bacteria, viruses and parasites are known to be transmitted through sexual contacts including vaginal, anal and oral sex pleasure and experience pathways. Some STIs can also be transmitted from mother-to-child during pregnancy, childbirth and breastfeeding. Eight pathogens are linked to the greatest incidence of STIs. Of these, 4 are currently curable: syphilis, gonorrhea, chlamydia and trichomoniasis. The other 4 are incurable viral infections: hepatitis B, herpes simplex virus (HSV), HIV and human papillomavirus (HPV). Pelvic inflammatory disease (PID) has been significantly identified as one of the major sexually transmitted diseases due to sexual intercourse with multiple partners. It is an infection of the female reproductive organs which occur when sexually transmitted bacteria spread from the vagina to the uterus; and then to the fallopian tubes. When untreated PID can cause scar tissue and pockets of infected fluid (abscesses) to develop in the reproductive tract, which can cause permanent damage of the reproductive system.

3. Theoretical Framework

Filtering and Identity

Davis (2016) "filtering" framework was employed in this study report. According to him self-construction, trust, and security engagements on the internet are essential to, filtering in the usage of the internet (Davis et al., 2016). It is a method for "quiet sorting" of probable sexual partners. Filtering can be thought of as the deliberate assembling of a sexual profile to suit online dating preferences (Davis et al 2016). Online dating negotiates identity, according to Rosenfield. (2019). Accordingly, the process of "interpretation and self-construction" is what is involved in the filtering of identity (Davis et al., 2006; Hardey, 2004). With depiction text and image used to portray sexual identity, which are central to the filtering process, filtering enables systematic arrangement of sexual encounters and reveals the production of sexual culture in users' actions (Davis et al., 2006). It also provides some assumptions about their prospective partners and the sexual action that might take place). Internet dating can be viewed from a protective tool perspective to partners on dating sites, as its secure risks to self-identity of the partner involve (Hardey, 2020). Internet daters' use of strategies and tactics created to get around the

limitations of the online dating environment while maximizing its potential. Online daters attempt to maximize their self-presentation by taking advantage of the increased control that the internet and online dating could provide through its features at creation. This is a result of the digital tools that dating app developers have made available to site users. Self-presentation aspects like updating a user's profile picture, voice tone, residence, etc., as well as how they build their credibility online, are crucial elements

4. Methods

4.1 Design

Online structured, and systematic questionnaire review approach was designed to review two top major dating sites in Nigeria. The top viewed or searched internet dating sites were systematically reviewed in terms of features available to the user. In-depth interview and KII was further used via direct phone calls, WhatsApp and Telegram to appropriate the study analysis.

4.2 Population

One-thousand (1000) participants were enrolled through the major internet dating chat room in Nigeria using Tinder and Bumble.

4.3 Instrumentation

Online questionnaire was used which contained the following measures: Demographics: age, educational level, cultural background, steady partner status, sexual preference, HIV testing, STI testing (Urine MCS), dating and sexual behaviour: frequency of chatting, number of dates and sex with internet-daters in preceding 3 months; Sexual behaviour, general and with e-dating: number of casual sexual partners in the preceding 3 months, anal intercourse, condom use; Sexual behaviour with last e-date: anal intercourse, condom use, disclosure of HIV status before having sex.

4.4 Procedure

E-questionnaire was distributed to the chatroom of Tinder website and bumble to collect data on demographics, and sexual related issues and the subsequent effect. The link created was sent to the target audience of the study to collect information on the selected dating sites. Furthermore, the Online questionnaire was tagged 'E-Dating INFO'.

4.5 Entrance

From 28 July to 24 August 2023, the survey website's home page received about 1000 new intakes to sites. It is consequently an overestimation of the number of unique invitees because this figure includes numerous visits. By selecting the "Enter" button on the introduction page, users could decide whether to take part or not. When they clicked the "Enter" button on the questionnaire, 723 (or 75% of the visitors that arrived at the survey site) continued. Due to many visits, this is once more an overestimate. A button to jump to the first question was included on the first page of the questionnaire. This first question was answered by 850 users, or over 90%. The questionnaire was filled up and submitted by 750 of them, or almost two

Table 1: Socio-demographic and Characteristics of Respondents on Internet Dating and Sexual Risk

Variable	Respondents	
	N = (750)	
Sexual attraction		
Bisexual	76%	615
Gay/Lesbian	24%	135
Age quartile ≤ 25	22%	104
26-33	30%	350
34-41	26%	221
>33	22%	75
Educational level		
Lower	34%	256
Higher	66%	494
Cultural background		
Yoruba	42%	318
Hausa	28%	214
Igbo	30%	218
Steady partner		
No	49.7%	373
Yes	50.2%	377
HIV status		
Positive	1.3%	10
Negative	45.6%	342
Not tested	53%	398
Unprotected Sex (no condom)		
Always	42%	318
Sometimes	28%	214
Never	30%	218
Internet dating sites		
Tinder (most preferred)	69.5%	523
Bumble (preferred)	30.7%	227
Tested of PID		
No	26%	195
Yes	84%	630

Table 2: Percentage of Sexual Related Diseases (mean SD) and Internet Daters {mean (SD)}

High (n = 101)	Medium (n = 52)	low (n = 101)	None (n = 28)	F-test (F)	P value
Meeting to Mating	1.73 (0.47)	1.72 (0.41)	1.84 (0.49)	5.28	.001
PID	56.85 (6.79)	57.89 (5.85)	59.73 (6.64)	1.59	.190
HIV	56.85 (6.79)	57.89 (5.85)	59.73 (6.64)	1.59	.190

thirds. Thus, 35% of those who remained to the survey's website and 45% of all website visitors responded to the poll.

4.6 Statistical analyses

Because of the small sample size, simple percentage and mean was used. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the interview session.

5. Results

The demographic characteristics of the study sample are described in Table 1. Overall, 750 respondents both male and female participated in the study and were included in these analyses. Maximumly 30% (n=350) were between ages 26-45 years. The Southwest (Yoruba) participants also represented the majority of the sample (n=318, 42%), followed by South-south/East (Igbo) (n=218, 30%), and Northerners (Hausas) (n=214, 28%). Additionally, slightly more bisexual men than gay men completed the survey (n=615, 76%; n=135, 24, respectively). The majority of the participants also

identified as previous or current users of dating apps (n=407, 74.1%). Participants that use dating apps were mostly gay men (n=231, 56.8%) that are dating (n=229, 56.3%). More than 66% of dating app users were also employed full-time (n=270). Additionally, Tinder internet dating site dating had significantly higher in preference than other dating site reviewed. The mean age was 25 years (median 25.1, SD 1.05, range 11–44). The majority (66%) had a higher educational level, 34% a lower educational level. Most respondents (42%) reported having a Yoruba cultural background, 30% had Igbo background, and 28% had Hausa background. Most respondents (42%) reported having Yoruba background and found dating online and subsequently leading to casual sex, whereas 58 respondents reported were from Igbo and Hausa respectively. Half of all respondents (49.7%) were not in a steady relationship. Of those, 50.2% of male had a relationship with female and 31% had a relationship with a male. The large majority (92%) reported sex

with men in the 3 months preceding the assessment.

Percentage on the Sexual related diseases Questionnaires indicated that 28 participants (10%) showed having no sexual related disease and having several sexual intercourses, 101 participants (36.2%) showed low level of sexual related disease that is amendable, 52 participants (18.6%) showed medium level of sexual disease acquired through mating with online daters, and 98 participants (35.1%) showed a high level of contact of sexual diseases related online dating and mating.

Transitional Phase- From Dating to Mating Sexual Outcomes from Dating and Sexual Risk

The sexual outcomes of online dating resulted differently based on daters chances and opportunity to engage for mating or not. Some participants had sexual encounters with all of the people they met from online dating, whereas others had slept with a quarter of the people they had met in person without examining their health status before or after mating. Of the participants interviewed, the number of meetings from online dating varied. A female participant had only two meetings from online dating in 3 months before the study, compared with another female participant who estimated she had met at least 10 people from online dating in six months. The woman who had two dates had sexual interaction from one of these two dates; for the woman who had four dates, all except two of these dates resulted in sex. The difference in the number of meetings between these two participants highlights that peoples' outcomes from online dating vary greatly, basically on the interaction mode and usage of images can dictate how quick will the chatters will meet. At the time of the interview, one male participant had been using the Internet for online dating for two years. He had met 15 women and slept with all of them and after some months was diagnosed having infectious disease. "Don't try having oral sex without protection or going for STI test" He noted that having more sex through online dating without having knowledge of health status of partner with evidence is a risk to dare. Another female participant had sex with approximately 4 of the 30 people he met through online dating; his thought over online dating is below in a "phase":

"Internet dating and mating has done more harm than good to people" . . . sexual attraction and interaction on internet are largely on lies and many individuals who are desperate for relationship fall into it – I have experience and that is why I'm saying this to you. (Although I'm not sure if that is accurate representation as I went through a bit of a sexual experimentation phase which has greatly increased that figure).

6. Limitations

This study used an electronic questionnaire approach instrument that has high anonymity but has control over reliability of the questionnaires due to high indicators of confidentiality put in by the researchers. It is plausible

that due to social pressure and fear, the participants were not completely honest or open about their answers.

7. Conclusion

The study investigated internet dating sites using Tinder and Bumble as major preferred dating sites. The study presented causal-effects between internet dating sites and sexual health of partners involved among large sample of Nigerian population. The study examined risk factor of sexual behaviors among internet dating users from dating to meeting physically for mating. Then, to better understand the relationship between internet dating site and sexual health and behaviours, the role of demographics, of different features of dating sites. Some sociodemographic variables also emerged to influence the engaging in sexual risk behaviors: more specifically, being male accounted for higher numbers of partners of full protected sex and of friendship. Tinder as the most preferred internet dating site in Nigeria as selected by respondents in the research and from online presence and participation or site engagement. Young adults and adolescents responded that it plays a facilitating role as a risk factor for unsafe sexual practices and health status of individuals. Internet dating sites features, just like anonymity, accessibility, and immediacy are critical motivations for subscribers. In addition, among the characteristics of internet dating sites/social media apps that facilitate major effects to risky sexual practices such as misinformation, dissimulation, impulsiveness, deceitfulness or promiscuity and emotional imbalance to stimulate partners into sexual impulsiveness.

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