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# Social Media Engagement and Environmental Factors as Predictors of Youth Perception of Marriage

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## Abstract

*This study investigated social media engagement and environmental factors as predictors of youth perception of marriage in Lagos State. A correlational research design was adopted for the study. Four hundred and ninety (490) youth made up of two hundred and thirteen males (n=213) and two hundred and seventy-seven females (n=277) were conveniently selected by the researchers from Ojo, Alimosho and Ikeja Local Government Areas of Lagos State, Nigeria. A valid psychological structured questionnaire was utilized for data collection. Three hypotheses were formulated and tested in the study. Findings showed that social media engagement negatively predicted youth perception of marriage (β= -039; p<.05). It also revealed that environmental factors negatively predicted youth perception of marriage (β= -034; p<.05). The finding also revealed that there was a significant influence of gender on youth perception of marriage [t= 4.52; df (489); p<.05]. The study's findings were discussed in relation with other relevant study outcomes.*

**Keywords**: ***environmental factors, marriage, social media engagement, youth perception.***

## Introduction

One of the oldest institutions that exist for the purpose of procreation and continuation of life is marriage (Irena & Makedonka, 2016). Marriage as a social institution attracts social approval as a setting for commencement of family life. Marriage as a global institution has similar characteristics worldwide but some rituals, practices and types of marriage differ in different communities. A common value in Africa tradition of which Nigeria is inclusive, is the sacredness of matrimony and its social custom as a mark of maturity, and duty. A male is considered a 'Man' if he can run a home, care for his nuclear family, and fulfill the needs of his extended family. On the part of the woman, being married automatically implies respect and status that single ladies may not enjoy (Omorogiuwa & Omorogiuwa, 2016; Byrne & Carr, 2005). It was a common practice in the past for the community and its culture to have influence on decisions about marriages in traditional African societies. Contemporary research studies on marriages in African countries acknowledge that the union and security of romantic relationships have significantly altered over time among the youth. This may be related to the negative perception associated with the institution of marriage by the youth compared to previous generations (Onoyase, 2020). Although there are many people that are out of wedlock, likewise, some cohabit as couples just to satisfy their desire for a partner. This can be interpreted as a disintegration of the traditional marriage values or adoption of modern divergent perceptions of marriage among Nigerians. In reaction to this phenomenon, Ekpenyong and Ingiabuna (2017) argued that though marriage naturally comes with a lot of stress, unpleasantness, failures with potential tendencies to disrupt the stability of the marriage, the essence of marriage cannot be overemphasized.

Youths in the 21st century have an array of factors that are capable of shaping their perception of marriage, some of which are internally and externally inclined. An account was put together by Chukwuere and Precious (2017) on how economic situation may stall marriage plans among youths. These researchers observed that many young people are waiting to be very financially stable before getting married because the society expects them to be rich before taking a wife like their peers. In some cases, this is absolutely true because even the young women are specific in their drive to settle down with only men that are financially comfortable. It was equally observed that sexual immorality seems like a major hindrance as many youths are already enjoying the benefits of marriage without the commitment. Thus, some Nigerian youth may opt for singlehood, cohabit with a partner (forever), or engage in different forms of marriages without familial involvement (Tamuno-Opubo, Kamal & Dare, 2021). This has equally raised concerns about some marriage traditional ceremonies and customs including dowry payment experiencing changes in Nigeria (Tamuno-Opubo et al, 2021). This is not unconnected to the fact that young adults constantly want to compare themselves with their close associates and favourably share and acquire ideas, passion and ideologies that are current with a view of gaining social approval and acceptance of their friends and associates (Bandura, 1977).

In a survey conducted in Nigeria by Fun Times Magazine (2021) in 32 states involving 1,722 youth on their thoughts about marriage, it was observed that perception of marriage varies among respondents. The highest number of responses came from Ogun (173), Anambra (154), Imo (142) and Lagos (117). It was reported that some of the respondents noted that marriage ceremony is a waste of time and resources. The young population of today have a wide range of beliefs and desires about the institution of marriage in their interpersonal relations with their peers, relatives, family members and friend, not only at home and school but also on social media.

The advent of social media has brought about an electronic-based forum enhancing reconnection with missing friends, easy access to new information and new contacts with people from around the world. This is further enhanced globally since social media sites have made it easy to communicate and share ideas with one another. Social media communication technologies have indeed influenced human behaviour, cognitive processes, relationships, and lifestyles. These social network sites have attracted people around the world, particularly the youth because it gives them the opportunities to communicate with other people and have become a viable medium of sharing moments, opinions and meeting new friends, provide entertainment and more. According to linear communication theory, media messages are injected directly into the brains of a passive audience and have a lasting impact on their behaviour (Lasswell, 1927).

Scholars have concluded that social media, like all other forms of media, has the ability to impact individual ideas, attitudes, and behaviours. The contemporary perception of marriage is not exempted from this influence (Ehoro & Badey, 2021). Based on this account, psychologist and sociologists have regularly investigated the various factors affecting the stability and relevance of the institutions of marriage and family in this high tech era. There seem to be a public notion that marriage as the foundation of the family is in crisis or disappearing than ever, owning to the series of statistical evidence such as; reduced number of marriages, increased number of divorces and large number of single people who either avoid marriage or do not form a family at all (Abbasi, 2018). Today, the phenomena of separation, divorce, and broken homes have become a recurring concern on social media around the globe and are not unnoticed by youth. The extent of influence and pressure youth

experience on daily basis on account of views and comments on marriage in the course of their interaction physically with their friends, family members and relatives as well as online should not also be undermined. The emerging concerns include how the perception of people are daily affected by the rates of marital failures in our society and how social media content on marriages impact on youth perception of marriage. All of these accounts put together are enough to re-shape the mindset of youths and by extension, their perception on marriage. It would then not be out of place to beam searchlight on social media use and environmental factors and see how these have influenced perception of marriage among the youth. The outcome from the study will contribute to existing literatures in social psychology.

**Empirical studies**

The future of institution of marriage in contemporary African traditional family system is under threat going by disposition of youth to diverse marital choices engendered by exposures and internalization of alien cultural values through internet and social media platforms. In a study conducted by Bello (2020) on social media and marital choices and its implications on contemporary marriage, it was reported that the uses of the social media could lead to wrong marital choices. The perception and quality of marriage among married couples was reported in a qualitative study by scholars in Harvard University in 2019 where it was observed that 25% of married couples argued at least once a week on account of social media use, and 17% fought daily over something they found about their spouses online. A further 20% of the respondents reported that they fought with their spouses on Facebook-related issues, and nearly half said they secretly logged into their spouse's accounts to investigate infidelity. Abbasi and Alghamdi (2017) submitted that social media use appears to contribute to changing perceptions about marital relationships, particularly among young adults who now spend considerable number of hours on daily basis. Findings from quite a lot of studies in recent times have revealed that social media use by couples increases the likelihood of a marriage failure (Ehoro & Badey, 2021; McDaniel et al. (2017). This has also been supported by a survey from Boston University in 2020 that revealed that non-social network users were 11.4% happier in their marriages than couples who frequently used social media. Heavy users were 32% more likely to contemplate leaving their spouse.

Furthermore, the pressure on marital issues from the diverse social ties could become overwhelming on young adults. Onimajesin (2020), investigated factors influencing pressure to get married and its antecedents; the perception of singlehood among female youth in a Nigerian sample comprising twenty-four (24) single female youth. Single Nigerian ladies experience pressure to get married from family members, friends, and co-workers. The resultant effects of these pressures are observed in cohabitation and other patterns of marital relationships in existence nowadays among youth. In another study carried out by Akanbi and Alayande (2017) on peer attachment and attitude towards premarital cohabitation among tertiary institution students in Oyo State, Nigeria, it was observed that those young adults who have undeniable attachments to peer groups, exhibited positive disposition towards non-marital disposition.

In another related study conducted by Calvès (2016) on perception of youth towards marriage among Burkinabe youth, the researcher observed that cohabitation was on the upward trend, and that adolescents are exposed to cohabitation right from their formative years. As reported in some quarters, the researcher also observed that adolescents who do not participate in premarital sex are perceived as ignorant, boring and unsophisticated by their peers, with the implication that adolescents practice sex at younger ages than ever before.

Literatures have shown that cohabitation have some negative consequences among younger population which includes increased rate of abortions, contracting sexually transmitted diseases, intimate partner violence, future marital problems, poor academic performance and high level of moral decadence (Kasim & Falola, 2017; Unachukwu & Iloakasia, 2018). In another study carried out by Augustinah, Bola, and Louis (2018) among students of Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba-Akoko, Ondo State, the researchers found that 71.8% of the respondents agreed that cohabitation contributes to a high level of moral decadence in the society, thus confirming that cohabitation has a negative impact on students‟ moral development and invariably their health and academic development. Also, most of the respondents (80.9%) agreed that it increases the risk of unwanted pregnancies among girls.

Fareo and Moses (2018) realized that the after-effects of cohabitation include the tendency to get sick with sexually transmitted infections (STIs), low academic outcome, philandering and extended studentship term, abortion indulgence, demise, depression and suicidal ideation or attempt. Adeniyi (2019) also submitted that cohabitation is culpable for the increasing rate of abortion in Nigerian tertiary institutions. Cohabiting females are susceptible to getting pregnant because they are unprepared for parenting and also take to abortion as an outlet to save face. Indulging in abortion endangers the lives of female cohabiters because they run the risk of losing their lives or having a vital component of their reproductive system damaged.

Contrary to these finding, Reza and Maryam (2019) investigated the attitudes, expectations, and the purpose of marriage among male and female undergraduate and postgraduate university students in Bandar Abbas (Iran) using 788 students (54% female and 46% male) between the ages of 18 and 29 years and observed that 90.2% of female participants had intention to marry. The findings indicated significant differences between attitudes and expectations of marriage among male and female students. In another comparative study carried out by Bhavana and Roopa (2015) on attitudes of youth towards marriage and its changing trends at three government colleges in Bangalore City using 300 youths (150 males and 150 females) within the ages of 18 to 23 years, this researcher observed that female respondents had favourable attitude towards marriage and changing trends in marriages than their male counterparts.

**Method**

**Research Design:** This study adopted correlational survey design. The independent variables in this study are social media engagement and environmental factors while the dependent variable is perception of marriage.

**Research Settings:** The study was conducted across diverse social centers, religious gatherings and educational institutions within Ojo, Alimosho and Ikeja Local Government Areas of Lagos State.

**Participants**: A total number of four hundred and ninety (490) youth were approached by the researcher for the study by convenient sampling technique. Out of this, 213 (43.5%) were males and 277 (56.5%) were females. 358 (73.1%) were aged 18-30 while 132 (26.9%) were aged 31-35 years; 203 (41.4%) of the participants were OND/NCE holders, 272 (55.5%) were HND/BSc holders while 15 (3.1%) had postgraduate diploma and professional certificate; 308 of the participants (62.9%) were single and 182 (37.1%) were married; 366 of the participants (74.7%) were Christians while 124 (25.3%) were Muslims.

**Instruments of data collection**
The researchers used questionnaire for data collection. The questionnaire was structured into four sections. Section A consists of demographic variables such as gender, age, marital status, educational level and religion. Section B consists of 5-item Social Media Engagement Questionnaire (SMEQ) developed by Przbylski, Murayama, DeHann and Gladwell (2013). The five items are anchored on 7 likert response format ranging from 0-Not one day to 7-Every day. The authors of the scale reported Crombach alpha coefficient of .89 for the scale.

Section C consists of 12-items Environmental Factors Questionnaire (EFQ) developed by the researcher which consists of items relating to situational factors which include; parents, peers, family members and other social ties relating to youth perception towards marriage. The researcher established Crombach alpha reliability co-efficient of 0.75 for the instrument.

Section D This consists of 10-item General Attitudes towards Marriage Scale (GAMS) developed by Park and Rosen (2013). The scale consists of three dimensions measuring intent, attitudes and aspect of marital relationship. The GAMS examines individuals' perception towards marriage using a 7-point likert scale, ranging from 0 (Strongly disagree) to 7 (Strongly agree). The content of GAMS includes positive attitudes, negative attitudes, as well as fears and doubts towards marriage. The author reported good internal consistency of .91 for the scale.

**Pilot Study:** The author of this study conducted a pilot study to ascertain the usefulness of the Social Media Engagement Questionnaire and General Attitude towards Marriage Scales within the sociocultural milieu. These researchers established Cronbach alphas reliability coefficients of .78 and .89 for the scales.

**Procedure for Data Collection:** The researchers contacted research participants at diverse social centres, religious gatherings and tertiary institutions within the selected local government areas of Lagos State. The researchers sought the consent of participants to participate in the study by asking them to fill the consent form before administering the questionnaire to them. Out of the five hundred questionnaires administered, only four hundred and ninety were filled appropriately and returned. It took the researchers two weeks to administer the questionnaire. The completed questionnaires were coded by the researcher for data analysis.

**Statement of Hypotheses**:
1. Social media engagement will negatively predict youth perception of marriage.
2. There will be significant negative influence of environmental factors on youth perception of
   marriage.
3. Gender will significantly influence perception of marriage among youth.

**Statistical Analysis**: Data analysis was carried out using Bi-variate and Multi-variate statistical techniques. Hypotheses one and two were tested using linear regression while hypothesis three
predicted was tested using independent t-test.

**Results**

The first study hypothesis stated that there will be a significant negative influence of social media engagement on youth perception of marriage. This was tested using simple linear regression. The result is presented in table1:

**Table 1: Summary of Simple Linear Regression showing the Influence of Social Media Engagement on Youth Perception of Marriage**

| Model | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | T | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Beta | Std. Error | Beta | | |
| (Constant) | 49.857 | 2.660 | | 18.742 | .000 |
| Social Media Use | -.039 | .115 | .269 | 6.534 | .022 |

R= .346; $R^2$=.120

In table 1, social media engagement negatively youth perception of marriage (ß= -.039; p<.05). This implies that the higher the level of social media engagement, the more negative perception of youth about marriage. The stated hypothesis is thereby accepted.

The hypothesis which stated that there will be a significant negative influence of environmental factors on youth perception of marriage was tested using simple linear regression. The result is presented in the table 2:

**Table 2: Summary table of Simple Linear Regression showing the influence of Environmental Factors on Youth Perception of Marriage**

| Model | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | T | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Beta | Std. Error | Beta | | |
| (Constant) | 23.143 | 3.732 | | 11.263 | .000 |
| Environmental factors | -.024 | .119 | .321 | 10.361 | .038 |

R=.437; $R^2$=.191

From the table it can be observed that there is significant negative influence of environmental factors on youth perception of marriage (ß= -.024; p<.05). This implies that the higher the level of environmental factors, the more negative youth perception of marriage. The stated hypothesis is accepted.

Hypothesis three stated that gender will have significant influence on youth's perception of marriage. This was tested using independent t-test. The result is presented in table 3:

**Table 3: Summary table of independent t-test showing influence of sex on youth's perception of marriage**

| | **Gender** | **N** | **Mean** | **Std D.** | **Df** | **t-value** | **Sig** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Youth's Perception of Marriage** | Male | 213 | 2.30 | 1.27 | 489 | 4.52 | >.05 |
| | Female | 277 | 3.25 | 1.17 | | | |

The result in table 3 reveal that there was no significant influence of gender on youth perception of marriage (t= 4.52; df (489); p>.05). It could be observed that there was no significant difference in male and female youth perception of marriage. The stated hypothesis is thereby rejected.

**Discussion**

The hypothesis which stated that social media engagement will negatively predict youth perception of marriage was accepted. The finding showed that there was significant negative influence of social media engagement on youth perception of marriage. This implies that the higher the level of social media use, the more negative perception of marriage that the youths will have. This outcome is consistent with finding of a qualitative study conducted by Ehoro and Badey (2021) on couple's interaction wherein these researchers noted that social media use contributed immensely to marital instability. This observation is also buttressed by submission of Putri and Resty (2019) that, frequent social media use by couples increase the likelihood of a marital dissolution. This finding also run at variance with result of a survey from Boston University in 2020 which revealed that non-social network users are 11.4% happier in their marriages than couples who frequently used social media and that heavy users which accounted for 32% were more likely to contemplate leaving their spouse. These empirical evidences point to the fact that social media use, aside being a predictor of marital instability also contributes to the changing perceptions about marital relationships by youth in our society.

The hypothesis which stated that there will be significant negative influence of environmental factors on youth's perception of marriage was also confirmed. The finding revealed that environmental factors negatively influence youth's perception of marriage. This outcome is supported by the finding of a study conducted by Oyafunke and Adewusi (2020) which examined the diverse sources of pressure on youth behaviour and how these influence the perception of singlehood among female youth in Nigeria. These authors observed that beside the direct marriage pressure from parents experienced by yet-to-be married women, these females were also faced with indirect marriage pressure during gatherings with family, friends, and co-workers. This finding is further corroborated by result of another study carried out by Akanbi and Alayande (2017) on peer attachment and attitude towards premarital cohabitation among tertiary institution students in Oyo State, Nigeria where it was observed that those young adults who have undeniable attachments to peer groups exhibited positive disposition towards premarital disposition. This is further buttressed by result of another related study conducted by Calvès (2016) which examined perception of youth towards marriage among Burkinabe youth wherein this researcher observed that cohabitation was on the upward trend, and that adolescents are exposed to cohabitation right from their formative years. This authorr also observed that as reported in some quarters, adolescents who do not participate in premarital sex are perceived as ignorant, boring and unsophisticated by their peers, with the implication that adolescents practice sex at younger ages than ever before. The resultant effect of this pressure might not be unconnected with observed apathy, cohabitation trend and other pattern of marital relationships in existence nowadays among youth.

The hypothesis which stated that sex will have significant influence on youth's perception of marriage was not accepted. The finding revealed that there was no significant difference in perception of marriage by male and female youth. This finding run at variance with the result of a study conducted by Reza and Maryam (2019) which investigated the attitudes,

expectations, and the purpose of marriage among male and female undergraduate and postgraduate university students in Bandar Abbas (Iran) institution of higher learning. These authors sampled 788 students (54% female and 46% male) between the ages of 18 and 29 years and observed that 90.2% of participants intended to marry and that female youth intention to marry was higher than male. In the same vein, the finding also run at variance with the result of the study conducted by Bhavana (2015) on attitudes of youth towards marriage and its changing trends at three government colleges in Bangalore City using 300 youths (150 males and 150 females) within the age of 18 to 23 years. This authors observed that female respondents had favourable attitude towards marriage compared to their male counterparts.

**Conclusion**

The behavioural outcome of this study has far reaching consequences on changing trend of youth perception of marriage. These findings revealed the adverse contributions of social media engagement and environmental factors on youth's perception of marriage. In addition, it was also revealed that there was no significant difference in male and female youth's perception of marriage. These findings would not be unconnected to infiltration of western culture through technological advancement which have facilitated communication and exchange of ideas through internet and social media. This raises a number of concerns as marriage is a veritable social institution that is involved in ensuring stable and socially approved family. In recent time, it could be observed that there is a gradual reduction in marriage solemnization nowadays on all fronts, not only in marriage registry but also in churches and mosques. The present trend in youth perception of marriage run contrary to African traditional family values and deserve urgent attention to save African traditional family values system from going into extinction. There is the need for concerted effort on the part of governmental agencies and behavioural change agents which include; NGOs, school authority and psychologist to embark on effective advocacy that would encourage positive use of social media to project social and relational wellbeing with a view to re-shape youth perception towards marriage. Parents also need to re-orientate youth on cultural ideals of marriage to stop this ugly trend. Future research needs to beam searchlight on substance use and personality factors in connection to youth perception of marriage. Notwithstanding, the outcome from this study would impact positively on existing knowledge in contemporary social psychology.

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