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Can my Wife be Virtual-Adulterous? An Experiential Study on Facebook, Emotional Infidelity and Self-Disclosure

By Okorie Nelson¹ & Abiodun Salawu²

Abstract

Emotional infidelity is a perennial concern and negatively affects marriages in many modern societies. The advent of social media networks has heightened the alarming rate of emotional infidelity across the globe. This study examines the influence of Facebook on emotional infidelity and self-disclosure among married women. The study uses the media dependency theory, which stipulates that social media platforms, such as Facebook, serve as a potent channel for self-disclosure and emotional infidelity among individuals. The survey method was adopted in the study and a questionnaire used as an instrument to collect data. Two null hypotheses were tested with Pearson product moment correlation and Somers' D directional measure to determine the relationship between variables. This study found that almost 60% of respondents had witnessed situations where individuals are separated, break-up or divorced due to emotional infidelity on Facebook. In addition, more than 30% of respondents indicated that they had experienced emotional infidelity in previous relationships. This study concludes that married people should use Facebook to strengthen communication with their partners, which will invariably destroy emotional distance in their marriages.

Keywords: Facebook, Emotions, Infidelity, Self-Disclosure, Social Media

Introduction

Scholars (Anim, 2013; Burke, 2013; Colás, 2013; Suleiman, 2013) posit that social media allows people to create a profile or identity through which one can show others who one is, create lists and links to things one supports and likes, easily share information with and among groups, pass comments and messages from one person that others can read, pass comments and messages to an individual from people in that person's social networks or (in some cases) even from people unknown to the person and establish connections to other people. Okorie, Ekeanyanwu and Obanua (2010, p.31) explained the impact of social media networks on social interactions and relationship as follows:

The emergence of social networking sites have significantly altered today's media landscape and presents individuals with new opportunities to meet different people from different backgrounds across the globe. Social networking sites support the human need for social interaction, using Internet- and web-based technologies to transform broadcast media monologues (one to many) into social

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media dialogues (many to many). Social network sites (SNSs) such as Facebook, Twitter, and MySpace allow individuals to present themselves, articulate their social networks, and establish or maintain connections with others. These sites can be oriented towards work-related contexts (e.g., LinkedIn.com), romantic relationship initiation (the original goal of Facebook), or connecting those with shared interests such as music or politics (e.g., MySpace.com).

Social media are supposed to help build friendships and reconnect old friends. However, they have become a disadvantage to many married couples and youths in relationships. Many of them disclose personal information to friends on social media, thus breaking the bond in their relationships. This is due in part, to spending more time on social media than with the relationship partner. Serious friendships are created on social media, which leave the individual desiring a relationship with his/her supposed friend. He or she enjoys and looks forward to the company of his or her friend online. Due to the constant use of social media by people (dating or married), infidelity or an affair on social media occurs (Reynolds, 2013). This is referred to as emotional infidelity or an affair. Emotional infidelity simply refers to the infidelity of the heart or “an affair of the heart” (Pittman, 1989; Vaughan, 1989; Shield & Binder, 2013).

Shield and Binder (2013) explain that emotional infidelity is what happens “when one partner goes outside the primary relationship to get his or her emotional needs met”. Emotional infidelity occurs when a person allows someone of the opposite sex to fulfill emotional needs that should be met ordinarily by the person’s partner, thereby creating an intimacy that leads to an emotional attachment that may culminate in a physical, intimate relationship (Knapp & Dixon, 2013). Many married couples and youths in serious relationships are victims of emotional infidelity. It is a serious problem that is slowly becoming rampant in Nigeria.

There are few indicators of emotional infidelity, for example, when an individual eagerly expects a friend to come online more than any of his other friends put together, and spends more time with this friend on the social media (Knapp & Dixon, 2013). The individual confides in the friend about his relationship troubles at home. The individual also runs to this friend first before his or her partner whenever something is bothering them. Ultimately, the individual fantasizes or imagines what it would be like to be together in a relationship, physically or sexually. This shows that social media could create the environment which helps an individual engage in emotional infidelity, thereby causing him or her to fantasize about his or her friend on the social media (Burke, 2013).

Several studies have been conducted on Facebook and its effects on individuals across the globe (Anim, 2013; Burke, 2013; Colás, 2013; Suleiman, 2013). However, there is a paucity of research on how social media platforms, such as Facebook, can promote virtual adultery. This study explores how social media, Facebook in particular, influences married women to engage in emotional infidelity and self-disclosure with the opposite sex.

Objectives of the Study

1. To assess the awareness level of the practice of emotional infidelity on Facebook.
2. To determine how often Facebook users engage in self-disclosure with the opposite sex.
3. To examine the attitude of married women towards issues of emotional infidelity on Facebook.

Hypothesis

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant correlation between intense use of Facebook and the awareness level of emotional infidelity.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant correlation between self-disclosure with the opposite sex and emotional infidelity.

Theoretical Framework

This study relies on the Media Systems Dependency theory. The theory assumes that the more a person depends on having his or her needs met by using the media, the more important the role that media plays in the person's life will be, and therefore, the more influence the media outlets will have on that person (Baran & Davis, 2009). If more and more people depend on the media, media institutions will be reshaped, the overall influence of media will rise, and the role of the media in society will become more central (Baran & Davis, 2009).

Secondly, "the degree of audience dependence on media information is the key variable in understanding when and why media messages alter audience beliefs, feelings, or behaviour." (Baran & Davis, 2009, p. 274). In other words, the uses people make of media determine the influence of the media.

Thirdly, "as our world becomes more complex and as it changes more rapidly, we not only need the media to a greater degree to help us make sense, to help us understand what our best responses might be, and to help us relax and cope, but also we ultimately come to know that world largely through those media" (Baran & Davis, 2009). By using the media to make sense of the social world, people allow the media to shape their expectations.

Finally, "the greater the need and consequently the stronger the dependency...the greater the likelihood" that the media and their message will have an effect. Those who have greater needs and thus greater dependency on media will be most influenced (Baran & Davis, 2009, p. 274).

According to Baran and Davis (2009, p.274), the argument raised by the media systems dependency theory is that human beings have developed a range of routine uses for various media, and can easily adapt these uses to serve their needs. Many individuals, young married couples, in particular, use the social media (Facebook) to connect with potential partners outside their marriages. Therefore, it is safe to conclude that young married women have resorted to the Facebook to meet their needs of loneliness, intimacy, self-disclosure and, ultimately, happiness outside their primary relationship.

Facebook and Self-Disclosure

In the discourse of computer-mediated communication, the concept of self-disclosure is always highlighted or discussed. Self-disclosure has been referred to as the act of verbally sharing intimate or private level information with another (Cozby, 1972, p. 73). The basic parameters of self-disclosure are: (a) Amount of information disclosed; (b) Depth or intimacy of information disclosed; and (c) Duration or time spent describing each item of information (Cozby, 1972, p. 74). From these interjections, self-disclosure expands computer-mediated communication by sharing a large amount of intimate information between or among individuals in the cyberspace.

Okorie and Ekeanyanwu (2014, p. 64) maintain, "online self-disclosure activities involve posting and tagging pictures, as well as having a personal diary, which friends can have access to

on the social networking sites”. Furthermore, Okorie and Ekeanyanwu (2014, p. 64), citing Walton and Rice (2013), note that self-disclosure is typically a gradual, reciprocal exchange process in which one person’s disclosure often prompts an equal or even greater disclosure from the other person. The benefits include social control, validation, increased liking and intimacy, and relational maintenance.

In the domain of Facebook, self-disclosure is not only the basic activity to build oneself, but an important occasion that triggers interaction with other people. The degree of other people’s recognition of someone depends on the degree of his/her self-disclosure because there is no physical body on Facebook. Okorie, Ekeanyanwu and Obanua (2010, p. 31) reasoned that:

Facebook has become a critical variable in social interactions and relationship building among young people all over the world. Its emergence is both revolutionary and critical of existing interactive platforms and relationship models, especially in a place like Nigeria with diverse cultural backgrounds and different traditional methods of establishing romantic relationships. How Facebook became famous among users of relatively youthful age as well as influenced them in their romantic relationships to the extent of self-disclosures remains a pertinent question for researchers in the social sciences.

In the personal relationship on anonymous cyberspace, self-disclosure is more important than location and attractiveness that matter for the face-to-face interaction (Merkle & Richardson, 2000).

Social media and emotional infidelity

The largest and most well-known social networking site is Facebook. According to statistics on Facebook, the social media has more than 700 million active users (Facebook, 2012). Social networking sites are mainly used for the maintenance of social relationships, especially for upholding contact with weaker social ties (Dorcan, 2007). They also offer a platform for idealised self-presentation. Suleiman (2013) maintains that Facebook is used for social engagement as follows:

The popularity of Facebook cuts across all age groups and has no relationship to individual characteristic with different class of people who use it ranging from clerics, actors, politicians to ordinary citizens. Facebook gives the impression that the entire world is meeting online and among youths, it is strange to come across a person without a Facebook account. It has become a good avenue for sourcing long lost friends and acquaintances because prior knowledge of password is not a condition for assessment of a person’s account or sending a message unless if the account holder uses his privacy settings to restrict those who can read his wall. Even if the privacy settings allow only friends to assess the wall, the Facebook search engine can still find the person using any of his registered names, hometown or present location and an inbox message can be sent to him (p. 105).

He also concludes, “social media have become an avenue for creating new online families” (p. 105). There are people who had not known each other before Facebook but afterwards, could not

spend a day without interacting. Facebook is also a tool for the creation of many romantic relationships. Suleiman (2013, p. 105) argues, “many male friends keep texting obscene messages online with the basic intent of establishing romantic relationships. Girls have also turned the social media into an avenue of online dating. They take beautiful pictures and upload them online. These days, many relationships start this way”.

The use of social media for romantic relationships can be done in several ways. Users can display their relationship status on social media, use a profile picture that displays them together with the partner, or upload several pictures showing the couple (Utz & Beukeboom, 2011). According to Utz and Beukeboom (2011), the first characteristic of social networking sites or social media is that they increase the amount of information that individuals receive about their partners. Even though people have always received information about their partners from friends and acquaintances, social networking sites centralise much of this information at one point. The second characteristic is that social media offers a socially accepted way of monitoring the partner. A third characteristic of social media sites is that information that is relevant to the romantic relation is publicly displayed (Utz and Beukeboom, 2011). Utz and Beukeboom (2011) do not assume that the use of social networking sites is good or bad per se; instead, they assume that the direction of the effects mainly depends on the quality of the relationship and the behaviour of the partner.

With the growing number of internet users (more than one billion users to date) (Internet world stats, 2006), infidelity on the internet is an issue of contention for many romantic partners. According to Dorcan (2007, p. 29), internet infidelity is defined as using the internet to take “sexual energy of any sort - thoughts, feelings and behaviours - outside of a committed sexual relationship in such a way that it damages the relationship, and then pretending that this drain will affect neither partner nor the relationship as long as it remains undiscovered”. However, “internet relationships are a relatively new occurrence, and internet infidelity has affected some couples in ways we do not yet understand” (Blow & Hartnett, 2005, pp. 190-191).

Some scholars (Stalk, 2012; Shield & Binder, 2013) believe that emotional infidelity is strongly interlinked with internet infidelity, a situation in which an individual forms a deep emotional attachment with another person outside the primary relationship. Stalk (2012) identifies several warning signs of emotional infidelity as follows: (1) Thinking and saying you are ‘just friends’ to the opposite-sex; (2) Treating them as a confidant, sharing intimate issues; (3) Discussing troubling aspects of your marriage and partner; (4) Comparing them verbally and mentally to your partner; (5) Fantasizing about a love or sexual relationship with the person; (6) Giving or receiving personal gifts from the person; and (7) Planning to spend time alone together or letting it happen.

Emotional infidelity is having an emotional involvement with another person, which leads one’s partner to channel emotional resources to someone else (Pittman, 1989; Vaughan, 1989; Shield & Binder, 2013). Also, Knapp and Dixon (2013, p. 1) maintain, “many couples are under the misconception that infidelity only occurs when a man and a woman have sex together. Yet, there are other forms of infidelity such as emotional infidelity. This type of infidelity is important to address because it can possibly be more damaging than the act of sexual infidelity”. In essence, emotional infidelity transfers deep and lasting emotions like love and care to the heart. Having an emotional affair can ultimately lead to sexual infidelity or affair, as well. Emotional infidelity has the same impact, if not, worse than sexual infidelity. The heart of the individual is stolen from her/his partner through emotional infidelity. Sexual infidelity puts the partner at risk of sexually transmitted diseases whereas emotional infidelity puts the individual’s partner at a risk of mental

abuse which has very serious and damaging consequences. During an emotional affair, the individual is not comfortable and ensures that the partner does not know about it.

Method

The researchers used the survey research method in order to ensure the effectiveness of the study. The survey research method is a reliable way of analyzing the views of a group, people or population of study about an event, activity or phenomenon. The survey technique is the most commonly used research method in the behavioral sciences and involves drawing up a set of questions on various subjects or on various aspects of a subject to which selected members of a population are requested to react (Sobowale, 2008).

The population consisted of married women, aged 23-50 and residing in Lagos State. The sample size for this study was 250 respondents. This helped the researchers to obtain a greater scope of enquiry and an effective analysis of responses as well as a manageable sample. The researchers effectively managed the sample size. Respondents were selected through a purposive sampling technique. A purposive sampling technique was used to select married women, who are Facebook users. Also, the respondents should have a minimum of 1000 friends on their Facebook account to be selected.

The two null hypotheses were tested with Pearson product moment correlation to establish relationships (positive, negative or zero association) and the direction of association between variables. In addition, the correlation test result was further subjected to the Somers' directional measure and symmetric in order to determine the strength and nature of the relationship.

Results

Out of the 250 copies of a questionnaire distributed out to participants, 233 were filled and returned. From the returned copies of a questionnaire, 67.8 % of respondents had been married for 1-5 years, 21.5% had been in the relationship for 5-10 years, 4.3% had been married for 10-15 years while 2.1% had been married for 15 years and above. Some respondents did not provide responses to this item of the questionnaire representing a total of 4.3%. The results revealed that the highest numbers of respondents who participated in the study were young married women who had been in the relationship for 1-5 years.

Table 1: Respondents' Awareness of Emotional Infidelity

Response	Percentage
Very large extent	55.8
Large extent	24.5
Rarely	12.2
Never	7.6
Total	100.0

Table 1 indicated that more than 90% of the sampled population had heard of the term emotional infidelity while 7.6% had not heard of emotional infidelity before. This shows that a

significant population had heard of the term ‘emotional infidelity’ and therefore understood its connotation or had an idea of what it meant.

Table 2: Emotional Infidelity in Practice

Responses	I have witnessed situations whereby individuals break up, separate or divorce because of emotional infidelity on Facebook	In the past, my relationship got broken because of emotional infidelity
Strongly agree	27.5	17.6
Agree	32.2	21.5
Undecided	14.2	6.4
Disagree	12.4	18.9
Strongly disagree	13.8	35.6
Total	100% n=233	100% n=233

Table 2 shows that almost 60% of respondents had witnessed situations where individuals break up, separate, or divorce because of emotional infidelity. Only 26.2% of respondents had not witnessed situations where individuals break up, separate or divorce because of emotional infidelity. Interestingly, almost 40% of respondents had experienced broken relationships because of emotional infidelity. From Tables 1 and 2, it could be concluded that respondents were highly aware of the practice of emotional infidelity on Facebook.

Table 3: Respondents’ Level of Self-Disclosure with the Opposite Sex

Responses	I have disclosed personal information concerning my marriage to my close friends who are of the opposite sex on Facebook.	My emotions seem more powerful and intense when I chat with my close friends who are of the opposite sex on Facebook.	I have established a relationship with someone who is of the opposite sex on Facebook that my spouse does not know about.
Strongly agree	13.3%	12.5%	20.6
Agree	24.9%	9.9%	21
Strongly disagree	29.6%	41.6%	35.2
Disagree	24.0%	24.9%	19.3
Undecided	8.2%	11.2%	3.9
Total	100% n=233	100% n=233	100% n=233

Table 3 shows that more than 35% of respondents had disclosed personal information concerning their marriage to close friends who were of the opposite sex on Facebook, while 53.6% of respondents had not disclosed personal information concerning their marriage to close friends who were of the opposite sex on Facebook. Interestingly, 22.4% of respondents indicated that their emotions are more powerful and intense when they chat with close friends who are of the opposite sex on Facebook. In the same vein, more than 40% indicated that they established relationships with individuals who were of the opposite sex on Facebook that their spouse did not know about.

Table 4: Respondents' Attitude Towards Emotional Infidelity

Responses	I get jealous if I see my spouse consistently chatting with someone of the opposite sex on Facebook.	I will break a relationship if my partner engages in emotional infidelity.
Strongly agree	58.3%	21.4%
Agree	21.7%	18.0%
Strongly disagree	14.2%	15.9%
Disagree	4%	15.9%
Undecided	2.8%	28.8%
Total	100% n=233	100% n=233

Table 4 shows that the majority of respondents would be jealous if their spouses consistently chat with someone of the opposite sex on Facebook. This implies that the majority does not support the fact that their partner/s frequently engage in computer-mediated communication with the opposite sex. Furthermore, Table 4 also reveals that 38.4% would break their relationship or marriage if their partner/s engage/s in emotional infidelity, while 44.7% would not support a break-up if their partner engaged in emotional infidelity. From Table 4, it can be inferred that married Nigerians do not support or encourage emotional infidelity of their partners. However, it is not a critical factor to end their marriage. This shows in no small measure the fact that marriage is still highly valued in the Nigerian society and divorce or separation is not given much regard.

Testing the Hypotheses

H1- There is a no significant correlation between intense use of Facebook and the awareness level of emotional infidelity.

5a Correlation Test

		ARE YOU ON FACEBOOK?	HAVE YOU HEARD OF THE TERM EMOTIONAL INFIDELITY BEFORE?
ARE YOU ON FACEBOOK?	Pearson Correlation	1	.361**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	233	233
HAVE YOU HEARD OF THE TERM EMOTIONAL INFIDELITY BEFORE?	Pearson Correlation	.361**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	233	233

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The Pearson correlation coefficient calculates the linear association between two variables. The sign of the correlation coefficient indicates the direction of the relationship (positive or

negative). The correlation coefficients on the main diagonal are always 1.0 because each variable has a perfect positive linear relationship with itself. In this test, the correlation coefficient for intense use of Facebook and the awareness level of emotional infidelity is 0.361.

5b Directional Measures

		Value	Asymp. Std. Error ^a	Approx. T ^b	Approx. Sig.
Ordinal by Ordinal	Symmetric	.131	.038	2.504	.012
	ARE YOU ON FACEBOOK	.074	.029	2.504	.012
	Dependent	.608	.150	2.504	.012
	HAVE YOU HEARD OF THE TERM EMOTIONAL INFIDELITY				
	Dependent				

a. Not assuming the null hypothesis

b. Using the asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis

5c Symmetric Measures

		Value	Asymp. Std. Error ^a	Approx. T ^b	Approx. Sig.
Nominal by Nominal	Contingency Coefficient	.362			.000
Interval by Interval	Pearson's R	.361	.129	5.876	.000 ^c
Ordinal by Ordinal	Spearman Correlation	.225	.066	3.514	.001 ^c
N of Valid Cases		233			

a. Not assuming the null hypothesis

b. Using the asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis

c. Based on normal approximation

H2- There is a no significant correlation between self-disclosure with the opposite sex and practice of emotional infidelity.

6a Correlation Test

		I HAVE DISCLOSED PERSONAL INFORMATION ON FACEBOOK	I HAVE WITNESSED SITUATIONS WHERE INDIVIDUALS BREAK UP BECAUSE OF EMOTIONAL INFIDELITY
I HAVE DISCLOSED PERSONAL INFORMATION ON FACEBOOK	Pearson Correlation	1	.587**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	233	233
I HAVE WITNESSED SITUATIONS WHERE INDIVIDUALS BREAK UP BECAUSE OF EMOTIONAL INFIDELITY	Pearson Correlation	.587**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	233	233

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Table 6a shows Pearson correlation coefficients, significance values and the number of cases with non-missing values. The correlation coefficient's absolute value specifies the strength,

with absolute values indicating stronger relationships. The correlation coefficients on the main diagonal are always 1.0 because each variable has a perfect positive linear relationship with itself. For this test, the correlation coefficient correlation between self-disclosure with the opposite sex and practice of emotional infidelity is 0.587.

6b Directional Measures

		Value	Asymp. Std. Error ^a	Approx. T ^b	Approx. Sig.
Ordinal by Ordinal	Symmetric	.210	.056	3.692	.000
	DISCLOSED PERSONAL INFORMATION ON FACEBOOK	.210	.057	3.692	.000
	Dependent WITNESSED SITUATIONS WHERE INDIVIDUALS BREAK UP BECAUSE OF EMOTIONAL INFIDELITY	.210	.056	3.692	.000
Somers' D					

a. Not assuming the null hypothesis

b. Using the asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis

6c Symmetric Measures

		Value	Asymp. Std. Error ^a	Approx. T ^b	Approx. Sig.
Nominal by Nominal	Contingency Coefficient	.676			.000
Interval by Interval	Pearson's R	.587	.071	11.028	.000 ^c
Ordinal by Ordinal	Spearman Correlation	.256	.067	4.027	.000 ^c
N of Valid Cases		233			

a. Not assuming the null hypothesis

b. Using the asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis

c. Based on normal approximation

Discussion

In any debate and discussion on the significance of Facebook in computer-mediated communication, the concept of self-disclosure is always mentioned or discussed. In communication studies, self-disclosure is an evolving concept, which focuses on the prevalent activities of young people on social media platforms to promote communication of personal information, thoughts and feelings to other people.

The results of this study raise several issues and implications that affect current realities in any modern society. Some of these issues support as well as mark a departure from existing literature and studies on social networking sites and self-disclosure. This study was undertaken to examine Facebook influences on young married couples to engage in emotional infidelity.

Two null hypotheses were tested with Pearson product moment correlation to establish relationships (positive, negative or zero association) and the direction of association between variables. In addition, the correlation test result was further subjected to the Somers "D directional measure and symmetric in order to determine the strength and nature of the relationship.

The first hypothesis, which tested that there is a no significant correlation between intense use of Facebook and the awareness level of emotional infidelity, was rejected. The correlation analysis in Table 5a shows a linear connection between two variables. The correlation coefficient

for intense use of Facebook and the awareness level of emotional infidelity is 0.361. Tables 5b and c established the strength and direction between the variables, that is, if the approximate significance value has 0.00 in its column, one can infer there was a relationship variable. From Tables 5b and c, the relationship between the variables is a strong and positive one. These results indicate that married people had heard of the term 'emotional infidelity' and therefore understood what its connotation or had an idea of what it meant. Furthermore, Facebook is a social platform that promotes or reinforces emotional infidelity when people interact with the opposite sex. This result supports Docan's (2007) findings, that at social interaction is often initiated with unknown people in chat rooms such as Yahoo's 'married and flirting', Microsoft's 'Married but flirting', Facebook, Twitter, among others.

The second hypothesis, which tested that there is a no significant correlation between self-disclosure with the opposite sex and the practice of emotional infidelity - was rejected. Table 6a shows a linear correlation between the two variables. The correlation coefficient between self-disclosure with the opposite sex and practice of emotional infidelity is 0.587. From Tables 6b and c, the relationship between the two variables is a strong and positive one. The results reveal that there is a high level of self-disclosure with the opposite sex and this positively correlates with the practice of emotional infidelity on Facebook.

Interestingly, the results also reveal that almost 40% of respondents had disclosed personal information concerning their marriage to close friends of the opposite sex on Facebook. In the same vein, more than 40% indicated that they established relationships with individuals who were of the opposite sex on Facebook that their spouses did not know about. In essence, there is a high rate of self-disclosure among married people on Facebook. It is thus concluded that self-disclosure is an evolving activity carried out by young and married people. This finding is in agreement with the study conducted by Hand, Thomas, Buboltz, Deemer and Buyanjargal (2013). In their study, they found that young adults who were in a relationship spent most of their time on Facebook on activities relating to social, sexual, intellectual and recreational intimacy. It is this kind of thinking that motivated Walton and Rice (2013) to assert that self-disclosure is typically a gradual and reciprocal exchange process in which one person's disclosure often prompts an equal or even greater disclosure from the other person. The benefits include social control, validation, increased liking and intimacy as well as relational maintenance.

Four major socio-cultural implications that affect relationships and marriages are highlighted in this study. First, the proliferation of social media platforms will drastically increase incidences of emotional infidelity between couples across the globe. It was discovered that a significant number of married people spent a considerable amount of time on Facebook and share various kinds of information. Very few people can do without Facebook since their friends of the opposite sex constantly satisfy their emotional needs. This emotional bonding and attachment can lead to physical bonding and attachment. A number of married people engage in high levels of self-disclosure by disclosing personal issues and everything that happened to them on their wall, thereby making an opening to friends of the opposite sex to show care and understanding to them when critically needed.

Second, high levels of self-disclosure on social media platforms negatively contribute to emotional distance between couples in marriages. Also, trust in marriage can be negatively affected when married people engage in self-disclosure with the opposite sex. A great number of respondents indicated that they become jealous if they found out their partner was consistently chatting with a friend of the opposite sex on Facebook. This is an indication that a lot of married

women will not trust their partners if they cheat on them. When there is a problem of trust in a marriage, it strains emotional bonds among couples.

Third, emotional infidelity significantly promotes sexual infidelity. Intimacy is substantially built on emotional bonding and attachment; when intimacy is prevalent between a man and a woman, sexual negotiation will be established between these persons. Invariably, emotional infidelity on social media networks will snowball to sexual infidelity in reality.

Fourth, the major theoretical backup for media and communication scholars who maintain that the more people depend on the media, media institutions will be reshaped, the overall influence of media will rise, and the role of the media in society will become more central and relevant is rooted in the media dependency theory. This study has brought to the fore the inherent features of the media dependency theory because of the many individuals, married couples, in particular, who depend on the social media (Facebook) to connect with potential partners outside their marriage or relationship. The dependence for social media will greatly increase with self-disclosure. Thus, the content of this theory should be taken seriously and considered in line with education, advocacy and moral intervention against emotional infidelity.

Conclusion

Facebook should be used as a communication tool to strengthen and reinforce relationships in marriages. Communication is a crucial factor in marriage as it can make or mar any marriage. The high rate of self-disclosure with the opposite sex among married couples will establish the foundation for emotional infidelity. Married people should be encouraged to create and spend more time with their spouses as well as show care and understanding. This would help bridge the emotional gap in relationships.

Emotional infidelity is not encouraged in any modern society; great care must thus be taken to prevent its spread and the destruction it may cause in marriages and other emotional relationships. Married women should learn to control the level at which they disclose what happens in their personal and private lives and marriages on Facebook. This will prevent sympathy, care, love and understanding from any third party. Importantly, when a woman engages in emotional infidelity, she can be regarded as being a virtual-adulterous since her feelings, emotions and cares have been transferred to another man, who is not her husband. This is a perennial issue which many married people need to be careful of.

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