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USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA AND ONLINE DATING SITES FOR DATING BY STUDENTS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF IBADAN, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study was designed to examine the use of social media and online dating platforms for dating by students of the University of Ibadan, Nigeria. A survey research design was adopted. A multistage sampling technique was adopted to select 385 undergraduate students and data were collected using a structured questionnaire. The students used both general social media platforms and specialised online dating sites, but the usage varied among platforms. The most reported benefits were ease of communication and dating convenience, while dishonesty on dating platforms and unrealistic expectations were the most significant challenges. Uses and Gratifications, Subjective Norms, Perceived Behavioural Control, Habit and Hedonic Motivation showed statistically significant relationships with the use of social media and online dating sites for dating. There is a need to implement structured digital relationship awareness programmes that promote responsible and cautious use of social media and online dating platforms.

Keywords: Hedonic motivation, Online dating sites, Social media, Subjective norms, University of Ibadan, Nigeria, Uses and gratification

INTRODUCTION

In the last twenty years, the active expansion of digital technologies has transformed numerous factors of human interaction, including the emergence of social media through which direct electronic exchange of information between people in various places is possible (Vika & Widia, 2023). A recent report by Datareportal (2025) has also shown that there are now about 5.24 billion users of social media globally. This equates to about 63.9% of the total world population. These statistics demonstrate that social media is becoming an important technology in our daily lives.

Social media can be described as a group of online communication channels that are intended for collaboration, information sharing and community building (Folorunsho, Oladosu, & Oyelami, 2022). Notable examples of these platforms include Twitter, Reddit, Pinterest, etc. (Dutta et al., 2023). Examples of social media and online dating sites are TikTok, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, WhatsApp, Bumble, Badoo, Tinder, Grindr, etc. Aichner, Grünfelder, Maurer, & Jegeni (2021) noted that the major applications of social media include socialising with friends and family, job seeking and professional networking, interacting with brands and companies, business operations, as well as romance and dating. Interestingly, other studies (Balcioglu & Cerasi, 2025; Rydahl et al., 2021) have also suggested that one area where social media is increasingly being utilised for social interaction by young people is for dating.

Dating refers to the process of actively pursuing a romantic relationship with another individual (MacKinnon, 2021). The practice of dating varies across cultures and has evolved considerably

over time (Ariyo et al., 2018). Nevertheless, modern dating has become significantly less formal, which has resulted in the development of various types of relations (Nag, Swaminathan, Sridhar & Esther, 2022). Aspects such as technological advances are radically changing the idea of dating (Tadros et al., 2024). In particular, teenagers and young people around the world are increasingly utilising social media for dating (Nag et al., 2022). As a result, online dating, mostly enabled by mobile applications, has become the norm for initiating and sustaining love relationships.

Online dating (with an intensive application of social media integration) provides entry into a large pool of possible partners, leverages technology-facilitated communication, and applies matching algorithms to outline preliminary high compatibility (Stoicescu, 2019). These platforms have a wide range of digital interfaces, from short, swipe-on, swipe-swipe formats to highly detailed profiles with user preferences (Williams et al., 2021). Similarly, online dating platforms have successfully transformed dating practice by normalising virtual communication and offering enhanced convenience and ease of decision-making (Duguay et al., 2022). Online dating is especially attractive in situations where face-to-face communication is restricted, which makes people more dependent on global communication technologies as a form of social interaction (Baba & Misra, 2023). Therefore, the changing nature of romantic interaction is particularly pertinent to understanding how undergraduate students at the University of Ibadan use social media in dating.

However, despite the increasing trend in the use of social media and online dating sites, there is a significant lack of empirical studies investigating the trends, preferences and factors influencing the use of these platforms for dating by Nigerian students. While global studies have explored online dating behaviours, few have focused on Nigerian undergraduates whose socio-cultural and economic contexts may influence their online relationship choices differently.

Moreover, most of the existing studies that have examined the issue of dating and social media have only focused on aspects such as application of offline relationship models to social media (Sharabi & Hopkins, 2021), the ways people fall in love, maintain their relationships or break up online (Brody, LeFebvre, & Blackburn, 2020) and the role of social media across the relational lifespan (Brody et al., 2016). These studies have neglected the other aspects, such as the challenges faced in the use of social media for dating.

Hence, these are gaps in studies that need to be filled. The existence of these research gaps necessitated the need to explore the increasing application of social media and dating apps in youth relationships, with particular applications in the context of developing nations such as Nigeria. It is necessary to know how Nigerian students use social media and dating apps for dating and how these digital platforms influence romantic behaviours, relationship expectations and social interactions during the crucial development period of young adulthood of Nigerian students. This research, thus, is intended to fill the gaps in the literature by investigating the use of social media and online dating sites for dating, particularly by undergraduate students at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria. The paper addresses the following research objectives:

- i. Identifies the types and frequency of social media platforms used for dating by UI students.
- ii. Find out the benefits associated with the use of social media and online dating sites for dating by UI students.
- iii. Identifies the challenges faced by UI students in the use of social media and online dating sites for dating
- iv. Investigates the factors influencing the use of social media and online dating sites for dating by UI students.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Several studies have been conducted similar to the current study, focusing on the use of social media and online dating sites for dating. These existing studies were reviewed to identify some similarities and differences to understand how the current research differs and fill the existing

research gaps. The study of Izang et al. (2016) investigated the role of social media in online dating and sustainable marriage among Babcock students. The study employed a quantitative research methodology using descriptive statistics. Data were collected through a well-structured questionnaire administered to 50 respondents. The sample was selected using the convenience sampling method. From the results of the findings, it was revealed that 72.61% of the respondents do not believe that online dating can create a sustainable marriage, while only 27.39% of the respondents think otherwise. Based on the findings, the researchers suggested sampling youths in a different university or geographical location to find out if the findings would be the same or different. Therefore, the current research study has taken advantage of a different population to explore similar aims to the above research.

Van Ouytsel et al. (2016) conducted a study on the role of social networking sites in developed countries with adolescents' romantic relationships and dating experience. The authors used a qualitative research design and conducted 11 focus group discussions with 57 adolescents in Belgium aged between 15 and 18 years old. The data obtained from the research participants were analysed using NVivo, and the results indicated that social media had the potential to induce jealousy and reported controlling behaviours such as password sharing or checking on a partner's online activity. However, this study was conducted in Belgium and not Nigeria, which is the focus of the current study.

Bryden (2017) also conducted a research on the Uses and Gratifications Theory of online dating applications. Data were gathered through an online survey that was administered to 190 respondents aged 18 and older from the general Eastern Washington University, United States region. The results showed three main reasons for using dating apps: attention seeking, boosting self-esteem, and time passing. However, while useful, this study fails to take into account the underlying factors that may affect the behaviour of Nigerian students. This present study adds to this through its understanding of the individual motivating factors of students in the University of Ibadan.

Ogunshola (2018) also conducted a study focusing on the attitude, perception, and use of social networking applications for dating, courtship, and marriage among postgraduate students at the University of Ibadan. The study used a mixed-method approach and a multistage sampling technique. Data were collected through 311 questionnaires and 30 interviews. The findings showed that most postgraduate students had not used social networking applications for dating or marriage, even though many had a positive attitude toward them. Only about 7% reported marrying someone they met through these platforms. However, unlike this study, which focused on postgraduate students and used mixed methods, the present study focuses only on undergraduate students, adopts a purely quantitative approach, and specifically examines the use of social media and online dating sites for dating.

In addition, Folorunsho et al. (2022) researched the effect of online dating among Kwara State University students. A survey questionnaire was used to gather data from 400 students at Kwara State University. The results indicated that Badoo ranked highest as the most used online dating site. It was also noted that the majority of these students had been surfing Internet dating sites regularly for over a year. Moreover, all participants stated that they had online dating partners and that they mainly used online dating for leisure. However, the study did not investigate the factors that affect the use of the identified dating sites. This current study aims to fill that gap by including the factors influencing students' use of social media for dating as an objective of the current study.

Furthermore, Dunu & Abaneme (2022) conducted a study examining cyber dating in Nigeria with a focus on exploring why single ladies use online dating platforms. Data was collected from 900 women in Nigeria using a closed-ended questionnaire. The collected data were analysed using SPSS. The findings revealed that the majority of young adult women in South-East Nigeria who

used online dating platforms mainly used them to find romantic partners with the goal of finding a long-term, marital relationship. Despite similarities in the research objectives investigated, Dunu & Abaneme's (2022) study differs from the current study because it focuses on women in the South-Eastern region of Nigeria only, while this study aims to utilise both male and female undergraduate students of the University of Ibadan as the population being investigated.

The study of Goldberg, Yeshua-Kats & Marciano (2022) examined online construction of romantic relationships on social media. The study involved 30 student participants (15 men and 15 women) aged between 21 and 30. Participants generally viewed Facebook as more suitable for relationship representation. This was largely because Facebook allows users to create friend lists, offering couples a clearer, more consistent audience to showcase their relationship, something Instagram does not facilitate. Overall, this current study differs from Goldberg et al. (2022)'s study because it adopted a quantitative research approach and focuses on students as the population.

Lastly, Maharani (2025) carried out a literature review of TikTok social media and dating behaviour involving the adolescent population. The researcher utilised research articles from 10 research journals (seven national research journals and three foreign research journals). The research findings indicate that TikTok had both positive and negative impacts on dating behaviour. It could provide improved communication, build up creativity and deliver educational content in relationships and dating. However, overuse can have negative effects like social comparison, anxiety, and insecurity in intimate relationships. Although this study is informative, it fails to achieve a level of understanding and contextualised analysis that the current empirical study will achieve, particularly in terms of exploring the nuanced behaviours or motives of social media use for dating among young adults in a bounded cultural and geographical context.

The review of past studies shows a research gap, no known study was found to have been conducted to investigate the types and frequency of social media platforms and dating sites used for dating, benefits associated with the use of social media and online dating sites, the challenges faced in the use of social media and online dating sites, and the factors influencing the use of social media and online dating sites for dating among the students of the University of Ibadan, Nigeria. This gap is what the study sought to fill.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study relied on three theoretical frameworks to examine the use of social media and online dating sites for dating by students of the University of Ibadan. These are the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology 2 (UTAUT2), the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) and the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB). These theories provided a different approach to technology adoption, the motives behind using social media and online dating platforms and the intention to do so.

Venkatesh, Thong & Xu (2012) introduced the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology 2 (UTAUT2), which is the continuation of the original UTAUT model that was proposed in 2003 (Venkatesh et al., 2003). The model has seven important variables, which are performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence, facilitating conditions, hedonic motivation, price value and habit (Venkatesh, Thong, & Xu, 2012). This model was suitable for this research study since it can be used to understand the behavioural intention of the UI students to use social media and online dating platforms for dating.

The Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) was introduced by Katz, Blumler & Gurevitch (1973) and explains how individuals actively seek out social media to satisfy specific needs. Unlike passive media consumption models, UGT views users as goal-directed, actively selecting media to gratify particular psychological or social needs (Ferris, Hollenbaugh, & Sommer, 2021). UGT

proposes five key user motivations for media use. These are the cognitive, affective, personal integrative, social integrative and tension-free needs.

Ajzen (1991) proposed the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), which offered a theoretical approach to cognitively mediated deliberate, planned behaviour. It has been developed out of the previous Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) (Chen & Slade, 2025). The TPB states that intention to perform a behaviour is the closest future predictor of that behaviour and intention as a whole is influenced by three fundamental variables namely, attitude toward the behaviour, perceived social pressure to do it (subjective norms) and perceived ease or difficulty of doing it (perceived behavioural control) (Ajzen et al., 2018).

Conceptual Framework and Development of Hypotheses

The study's conceptual framework, as shown in Figure 1, was based on the three aforementioned theories: the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology 2 (UTAUT2), the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) and the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB). These three theories provide five important variables that are adopted in the study. UGT is adopted as a variable, perceived behavioural control and subjective norm are adopted from TPB, while hedonic motivation and habit are adopted from UTAUT2.

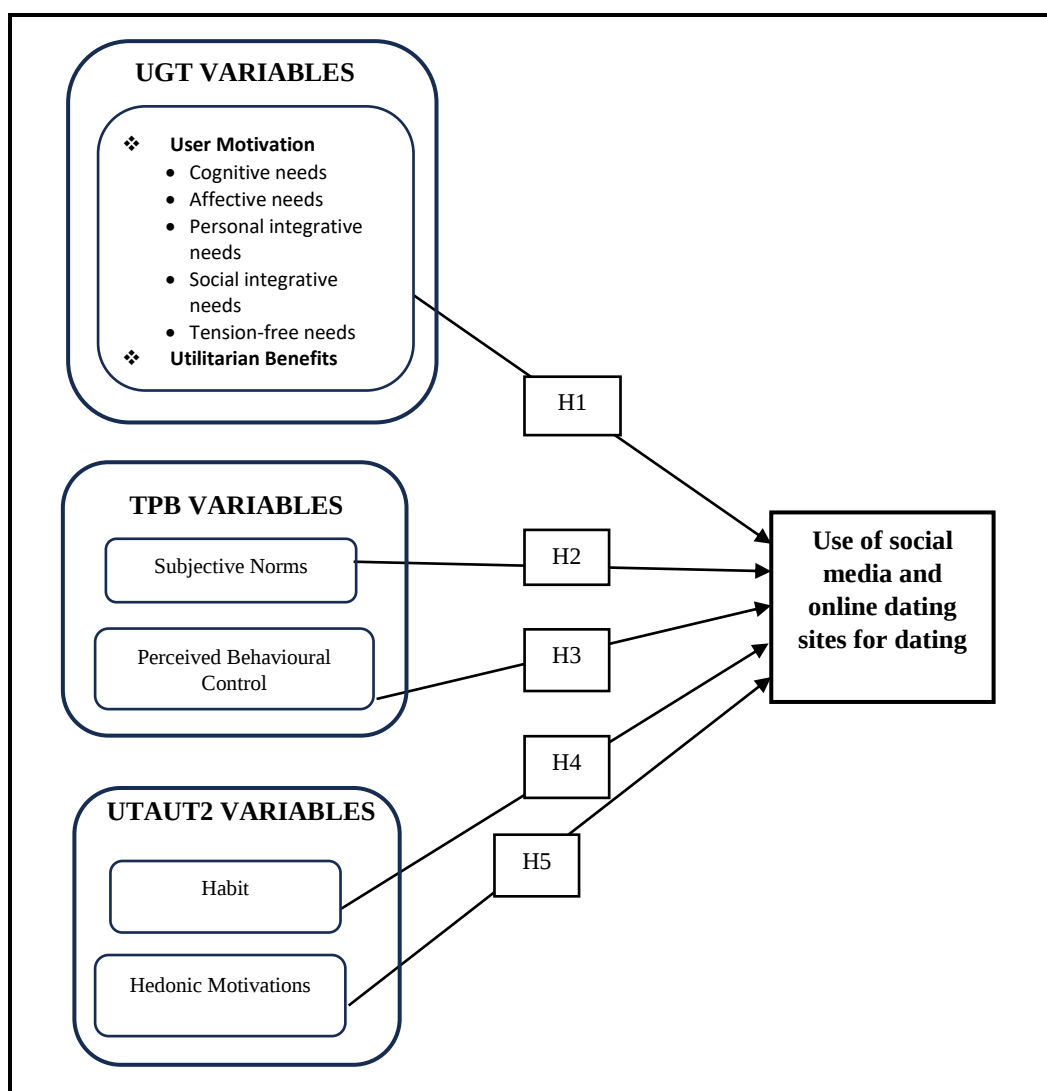


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Five hypotheses were developed based on the research framework:

The Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT): The Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT), as proposed by Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch (1973), explains media use based on the assumption that users actively select media to fulfil specific needs. These needs are explained by the user motivation construct, which includes cognitive, affective, personal integrative, social integrative, and tension-free gratifications (Sichach, 2023). In the context of this study, these reflect users' motives such as seeking information about potential partners, entertainment, self-validation, social connection, and emotional relief. Studies have demonstrated that individuals who perceive that a media platform satisfies these needs are more likely to engage with it (Kasirye, 2022). Therefore, it was proposed that the satisfaction of these gratifications significantly impacts students' engagement with dating on social media and online dating sites, as encapsulated in the first hypothesis below.

H1: There is a significant relationship between uses and gratifications derived from the use of social media and online dating sites and the use of social media and online dating sites for dating by students of the University of Ibadan, Nigeria.

Subjective Norms: Subjective norms refer to the social pressure individuals perceive from important people in their lives regarding whether or not they should engage in a particular behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). In this study, subjective norms relate to the influence of peers, friends, family, or social groups on students' decisions to use social media and online dating sites. Research has found that when individuals perceive that others support or expect a behaviour, they are more likely to perform that behaviour (Ajzen, 2020; Kiriakidis, 2016). Among students, trends in online dating practices and peer approval of such behaviour can heavily influence adoption. As such, the second hypothesis was proposed:

H2: There is a significant relationship between subjective norms and the use of social media and online dating sites for dating by students of the University of Ibadan, Nigeria.

Perceived Behavioural Control: Perceived behavioural control is described as the extent to which individuals believe they possess the capacity, resources and opportunity to carry out a specific behaviour (Ajzen, 2018). In this context of the present study, it indicates how much the students think that they can successfully use social media and the Internet dating tools to have a dating experience, depending on their confidence, access to or possession of devices, digital literacy, and access to the internet. Additionally, it has been found earlier that intention and actual behaviour are closely related to perceived behavioural control (Ajzen, 2020; Kiriakidis, 2016). In the case of university students, when they believe they can safely use the platform, say, Instagram, Facebook or WhatsApp for dating, they are likely to do so. Therefore, the third hypothesis:

H3: There is a significant relationship between perceived behavioural control and the use of social media and online dating sites for dating by students of the University of Ibadan, Nigeria.

Habit: The term habit can be described as the degree to which individuals carry out behaviours in an automatic manner as a result of learning or repetition (Venkatesh, Thong & Xu, 2012). Habit, in the context of this study, can be defined as the unconscious and frequent use of social networking sites by students to carry out their dating activities. It has been observed that habit has a strong impact on continued usage behaviour, particularly when the behaviour is already habitual or rewarding in feeling (Cheng, Sharma, Sharma, & Kulathunga, 2020). In this case, it means that students who have developed a habit of checking or communicating with possible romantic partners on social media would tend to use the sites. Therefore, the fourth hypothesis was proposed:

H4: There is a significant relationship between habit and the use of social media and online dating sites for dating by students of the University of Ibadan, Nigeria.

Hedonic Motivation: Hedonic motivation refers to fun or pleasure associated with the use of a technology (Venkatesh, Thong & Xu, 2012). Hedonic motivation in the context of using social media and internet dating platforms can be defined as the sense of pleasure or emotional fulfilment which students can obtain by chatting, looking at profiles or exploring romantic eventualities via digital platforms. Research has revealed that hedonic motivation is a strong predictor of the use of technology, more so outside the workplace (Nikolopoulou, Gialamas, & Lavdas, 2021; Oluwajana et al., 2019). Hence, we proposed that:

H5: There is a significant relationship between hedonic motivation and the use of social media and online dating sites for dating by students of the University of Ibadan, Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a positivist research philosophy. This research philosophy assumes that reality is objective and can be measured through observable phenomena (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Moreover, in line with the positivist philosophy, the study was grounded on a quantitative research paradigm, which aims at gathering and analysing numerical information to discover patterns, hypotheses, and correlations between variables (Bryman, 2016). The study adopted a descriptive survey design. It was carried out at the University of Ibadan in Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria, focusing

on all undergraduate students of the institution who were registered in the 2023/ 2024 session. The population of the students as of the session was 15,803, according to the data obtained from the Academic Planning Unit of the University. A multistage sampling method was used to select participants from the undergraduates of the University of Ibadan using simple random and disproportionate sampling techniques. The sample size specifically was 10% of the population of each faculty, except for 4% in the Faculty of Education, given that the student population was relatively greater. A total of 389 respondents from different faculties were selected, which is very close to the sample size of 384 calculated using Cochran's formula.

The primary instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire. The first part of the questionnaire was structured to collect demographic information from the respondents. The second section focused on identifying the specific social media and online dating sites that respondents use for dating, as well as the frequency of use. The third section focused on the benefits associated with the use of social media and online dating sites for dating. The fourth section discussed challenges faced by UI students in using social media and online dating platforms for dating. The last section measured the influencing factors that affect how students of the University of Ibadan engage with social media for dating purposes as identified from the theoretical framework.

The questionnaire was subjected to face and content validity through expert review to ensure that the items were suitable, relevant, and aligned with the research objectives and theoretical constructs derived from UTAUT2, UGT, and TPB. A pre-test was conducted with 15 students of the University of Benin, and reliability analysis using Cronbach's alpha indicated that all constructs exceeded the acceptable threshold of 0.70, demonstrating strong internal consistency. Specifically, Hedonic Motivation (0.95) and Uses and Gratification (0.91) reported great internal consistency. Additionally, Habit (0.88), Perceived Behavioural Control (0.86) and Subjective Norms (0.80) also had good internal consistency. Hair et al. (2003) proposed that a Cronbach alpha of 0.70 or above demonstrates acceptable internal consistency of a scale or questionnaire.

Data were collected using both online (Google Forms) and printed questionnaires distributed across faculties, with the online link shared through departmental WhatsApp platforms by course representatives. The data collection period lasted from September 2025 to January 2026. From the data collection process, the researchers were able to get 330 valid responses, resulting in an approximately 86% response rate. The research was conducted in strict conformity with ethical guidelines and principles. Participation in the study was voluntary, and respondents were informed of the purpose of the research before completing the questionnaire. An informed consent statement was provided at the beginning of the survey and only participants who consented proceeded. No personally identifiable information was collected, and responses were kept anonymous and reported in aggregate form. The data obtained in the questionnaires were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26. The analysis involved a summary of the demographic data and general trends, which was completed via descriptive statistics like frequencies, means and percentages. The hypotheses were tested using inferential statistics (linear and multiple regression), which show the strength of relationships between the variables.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of respondents. The findings show that most of the respondents were aged 21-30 years, constituting 63.0% of the overall sample. Males constituted the majority (51.2%), and females were 48.8%. For the level of study, all academic levels were represented. The highest proportion was among students in the 400 level, who were 31.5%. Faculty distribution showed that the largest representation was the Faculty of Education with 25.8%, followed by the Faculty of Social Sciences with 25.2%. The departmental distribution shows that the academic backgrounds of the respondents were diverse and varied. Lastly, the

analysis of demographic characteristics also revealed that an overwhelming majority of the respondents were single (96.1%).

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

N = 330			
Variable	Response Category	Frequency (N = 330)	Percentage (%)
Age	Below 20 years	110	33.3
	21–30 years	208	63.0
	31–40 years	12	3.6
Gender	Male	169	51.2
	Female	161	48.8
Level of Study	100 level	74	22.4
	200 level	62	18.8
	300 level	64	19.4
	400 level	104	31.5
	500 level	23	7.0
	600 level	3	0.9
Faculty	Pharmacy	50	15.2
	Veterinary Medicine	22	6.7
	Economics & Management Sciences	44	13.3
	Education	85	25.8
	Law	46	13.9
	Social Sciences	83	25.2
Department	Pharmacy	50	15.2
	Accounting	8	2.4
	Banking and Finance	20	6.1
	Economics	15	4.5
	Educational Management	13	3.9
	Adult Education	7	2.1
	Curriculum and Instructional Technology	1	0.3
	Early Childhood Education	2	0.6
	Guidance and Counselling	6	1.8
	Health Education	3	0.9
	Human Kinetics	5	1.5
	Special Education	11	3.3
	Library, Archival and Information Studies	18	5.5
	Law	46	13.9
	Political Science	19	5.8
	Sociology	27	8.2
	Psychology	18	5.5
	Geography	4	1.2
	Philosophy	4	1.2
	Science and Technology Education	4	1.2
	Marketing and Consumer Studies	3	0.9
	Veterinary Medicine	14	4.2
Relationship Status	Single	317	96.1
	Married	12	3.6
	Divorced	1	0.3

The frequency distribution of social media and online dating platform usage for dating purposes was presented in Table 2. The data analysis revealed that general social media platforms, especially WhatsApp and Instagram, were more widely used for dating than specialised online dating applications.

Table 2: Frequency Distribution of the Types and Frequency of Using Social Media and Online Dating Platforms

(N = 330)										
Platforms	Cannot really say	Rarely	Daily	Weekly	Bi-weekly	Monthly	Yearly	Countless times	Mean	Std. Dev.
	Freq/%	Freq/%	Freq/%	Freq/%	Freq/%	Freq/%	Freq/%	Freq/%		
WhatsApp	31 (9.4)	47 (14.2)	184 (55.8)	16 (4.8)	15 (4.5)	12 (3.6)	7 (2.1)	18 (5.5)	5.57	2.182
Instagram	49 (14.8)	108 (32.7)	51 (15.5)	61 (18.5)	33 (10.0)	17 (5.2)	4 (1.2)	7 (2.1)	4.22	2.061
Facebook	51 (15.5)	113 (34.2)	68 (20.6)	35 (10.6)	18 (5.5)	28 (8.5)	6 (1.8)	11(3.3)	4.18	2.158
TikTok	75 (22.7)	87 (26.4)	82 (24.8)	35 (10.6)	17 (5.2)	16 (4.8)	7 (2.1)	11 (3.3)	4.15	2.373
Snapchat	69 (20.9)	91 (27.6)	71 (21.5)	31 (9.4)	24 (7.3)	20 (6.1)	11 (3.3)	13 (3.9)	4.09	2.305
X (Twitter)	67 (20.3)	117 (35.5)	46 (13.9)	45 (13.6)	22 (6.7)	23 (7.0)	1 (0.3)	9 (2.7)	3.90	2.121
Telegram	71 (21.5)	107 (32.4)	44 (13.3)	35 (10.6)	26 (7.9)	30 (9.1)	9 (2.7)	8 (2.4)	3.76	2.102
Bumble	119 (36.1)	133 (40.3)	11 (3.3)	17 (5.2)	13 (3.9)	12 (3.6)	6 (1.8)	19 (5.8)	2.95	2.025
Badoo	121 (36.7)	133 (40.3)	13 (3.9)	12 (3.6)	15 (4.5)	15 (4.5)	4 (1.2)	17 (5.2)	2.92	1.989
Tinder	122 (37.0)	133 (40.3)	13 (3.9)	14 (4.2)	15 (4.5)	16 (4.8)	6 (1.8)	11 (3.3)	2.83	1.886
Hinge	132 (40.0)	137 (41.5)	7 (2.1)	17 (5.2)	8 (2.4)	16 (4.8)	3 (0.9)	10 (3.0)	2.78	1.880
OkCupid	131 (39.7)	131 (39.7)	11 (3.3)	15 (4.5)	10 (3.0)	15 (4.5)	7 (2.1)	10 (3.0)	2.71	1.845
Grindr	131 (39.7)	141 (42.7)	8 (2.4)	11 (3.3)	13 (3.9)	12 (3.6)	4 (1.2)	10 (3.0)	2.68	1.795
Christian Mingle	131 (39.7)	132 (40.0)	12 (3.6)	17 (5.2)	8 (2.4)	15 (4.5)	4 (1.2)	11 (3.3)	2.68	1.790
Match.com	126 (38.2)	137 (41.5)	15 (4.5)	12 (3.6)	8 (2.4)	16 (4.8)	5 (1.5)	11 (3.3)	2.66	1.770

Table 3 presents the respondents' opinions on the benefits associated with the use of social media for dating. The major benefit identified by the students was communication, as most of the respondents reported positive responses.

Table 3: Frequency Distribution of Benefits Associated with the Use of Social Media and Online Dating Platforms

N = 330							
S/N	Benefits	SD (Freq/ %)	D (Freq/ %)	A (Freq/ %)	SA (Freq/ %)	Mean	Std. Dev.
1	I can easily communicate with potential partners via social media and online dating apps	52 (15.8)	59 (17.9)	167 (50.6)	52 (15.8)	2.66	0.925
2	Social media and online dating apps make dating more convenient	65 (19.7)	79 (23.9)	150 (45.5)	36 (10.9)	2.48	0.930
3	I feel more confident expressing myself through social media and online dating apps	69 (20.9)	93 (28.2)	125 (37.9)	43 (13.0)	2.43	0.963
4	Social media and online dating apps help me maintain romantic connections	74 (22.4)	100 (30.3)	116 (35.2)	40 (12.1)	2.37	0.963
5	Social media and online dating apps offer emotional support in my relationships	70 (21.2)	121 (36.7)	109 (33.0)	30 (9.1)	2.30	0.905

Table 4 revealed the perceptions of the respondents regarding the challenges of using social media and online dating platforms for dating purposes. The most salient problems reported were those connected with dishonesty, unrealistic expectations, fear of scam and inability to build trust.

Table 4: Frequency Distribution of Challenges Faced in the Use of Social Media and Online Dating Platforms

N=330						
Challenges	SD (Freq/ %)	D (Freq/ %)	A (Freq/ %)	SA (Freq/ %)	Mean	Std. Dev.
People often lie about themselves on dating platforms.	35 (10.6)	19 (5.8)	132 (40.0)	144 (43.6)	3.17	0.945
Social media and online dating apps create unrealistic expectations in relationships.	37 (11.2)	31 (9.4)	150 (45.5)	112 (33.9)	3.02	0.940
I worry about being scammed on dating platforms.	53 (16.1)	40 (12.1)	139 (42.1)	98 (29.7)	2.85	1.021
Online dating makes it hard to build trust.	42 (12.7)	58 (17.6)	139 (42.1)	91 (27.6)	2.85	0.969
I feel emotionally affected when ignored online.	67 (20.3)	65 (19.7)	123 (37.3)	75 (22.7)	2.62	1.048

Test of Hypotheses

Linear regression analysis was used to examine the predictive relationships between each independent variable and the use of social media for dating. Multiple regression was also conducted to assess the combined effects of the predictors. The level of significance was set at 5% ($p < 0.05$). All hypotheses were tested in the null form.

Table 5: Summary of Test of Hypotheses

Null Hypotheses	Predictor Variables	β (Standardised)	R^2	p-value	Decision
H01	Uses and Gratifications	0.703	0.494	0.000	Rejected
H02	Subjective Norms	0.653	0.427	0.000	Rejected
H03	Perceived Behavioural Control	0.702	0.492	0.000	Rejected
H04	Habit	0.698	0.488	0.000	Rejected
H05	Hedonic Motivation	0.764	0.584	0.000	Rejected

All independent variables showed significant positive relationships with the use of social media for dating ($p < 0.05$). Hedonic motivation had the strongest effect ($\beta = 0.764$, $R^2 = 0.584$), followed by uses and gratifications ($\beta = 0.703$, $R^2 = 0.494$), perceived behavioural control ($\beta = 0.702$, $R^2 = 0.492$), habit ($\beta = 0.698$, $R^2 = 0.488$) and subjective norms ($\beta = 0.653$, $R^2 = 0.427$). These results indicate that increases in these factors are associated with increased use of social media and online dating platforms among students. Therefore, all null hypotheses (H_01-H_05) were rejected.

The results in Table 6 show that all the variables except perceived behavioural control were predictors of the use of social media and online dating sites when other variables were controlled. Hedonic motivation was the strongest predictor.

Table 6: Multiple Regression Results

Model Summary: $R^2 = 0.647$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.642$, $F(5, 324) = 118.955$, $p < .001$. N = 330						
Coefficients ^a						
Model		Unstandardised Coefficients		Standardised Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.111	.095		1.176	.240
	Hedonic_Motivation	.339	.068	.360	4.990	.000
	UGT	.151	.067	.136	2.248	.025
	Subjective_Norm	.187	.060	.158	3.115	.002
	PBC	.079	.066	.079	1.198	.232
	Habit	.188	.063	.169	2.982	.003
a. Dependent Variable: Use of Social Media for Dating						

DISCUSSION

The findings revealed that students of the University of Ibadan utilised various types of social media platforms and online dating sites for dating purposes. However, there was a higher use of general social media sites compared to specialised online dating applications. This finding implied that the students are more likely to begin or sustain romantic relationships through platforms that they utilise daily in communication and interacting with others. This finding is consistent with previous studies (Agbasi & Bebenimibo, 2023; Lykens et al., 2019; Van Ouytsel et al., 2016) who posit that young individuals were more likely to find romantic partners on general social media than on specialised online dating sites.

Furthermore, this study also identified several benefits associated with the use of social media and online dating apps for dating. Specifically, the benefits reported by the respondents included ease of communication with romantic partners, convenience without being restricted by physical or geographical boundaries, emotional support, and the ability to express oneself confidently. This is in line with previous studies (Arikewuyo, 2019; Dunu & Abaneme, 2022; Punyanunt-Carter, De La Cruz, & Wrench, 2017), which found that social media platforms provide opportunities for users to gain emotional support, initiate relationships and sustain romantic relationships.

Additionally, the findings also revealed that despite the benefits reported by respondents, there are challenges faced by UI students in the use of social media and online dating platforms for dating. The significant issues identified were fear of scams and deception, privacy and security concerns, emotional distress caused by rejection or misunderstanding, distrust of online profiles, and the likelihood of misrepresented identities. The results align with Arikewuyo (2019), who reported fraud and misrepresentation; Annet (2024), who identified jealousy, mistrust and perceived infidelity and Cooley (2021), who noted emotional distress, anxiety and insecurity in users who use social media for dating.

The test of hypotheses revealed a positive and statistically significant relationship between use of social media for dating and uses and gratifications, subjective norm, perceived behavioural control, habit and hedonic motivation. This result is consistent with the UGT, which posits that one may deliberately choose media platforms to fulfil personal and social needs (Katz, Gurevitch, & Haas, 1973). It also aligns with the research of Bryden (2017) and Dunu & Abaneme (2022), who discovered that young adults may use social media to seek attention, improve their self-esteem and pass the time.

Furthermore, the positive relationship between subjective norm and the use of social media for dating means that the use of social media and online dating platforms by students may be influenced by the opinion, expectation and behaviour of significant individuals in their social circles, such as their friends and peers. This result aligned with the Theory of Planned Behaviour, which argues that subjective norms play an important role in behavioural intention (Ajzen, 1991). It is also consistent with the research conducted by Agbasi & Bebenimibo (2023), who reported that peer pressure has a significant influence on the use of social media for relationship building by Nigerian undergraduates.

For perceived behavioural control, the results suggested that students who viewed themselves as possessing the necessary skills, confidence and resources to utilise social media platforms are more likely to use the platform. This finding aligns with the Theory of Planned Behaviour, which posits that perceived behavioural control can determine intention and actual behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). It further aligns with Leong et al. (2022), who discovered that individuals who had greater confidence in their capacity to use digital platforms tend to participate in online dating.

Furthermore, for habit, the findings imply that students who constantly utilise social media sites have a higher chance of utilising them as dating sites. The results confirmed the UTAUT2 model, which refers to habit as a powerful predictor of technology use (Venkatesh, Thong, & Xu, 2012). It is also consistent with Cheng et al. (2020), who found that habitual use also had a strong impact on sustained use of digital platforms.

Lastly, for hedonic motivation, the findings show that students may be inclined to use social media and online dating platforms if they derive innate benefits from them, such as enjoyment or satisfaction. The finding is in line with the UTAUT2 model, which highlights hedonic motivation as a crucial factor that facilitates technology adoption in non-work environments (Venkatesh, Thong, & Xu, 2012). It is also consistent with Oluwajana et al. (2019), who also found that hedonic factors significantly predicted sustained social media use by youths.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study concluded that the undergraduate students of the University of Ibadan used social media platforms and online dating sites; however, social media platforms were used more than the dating sites. Specifically, WhatsApp and Instagram were more used than Badoo, Bumble and other online dating sites. UI students derived several benefits from using social media and online dating sites, with ease of communication and convenience ranking highest. However, challenges such as trust issues and unrealistic expectations were noted. Overall, uses and gratification, subjective norms, perceived behavioural control, habit and hedonic motivations significantly influenced the use of social media and online dating sites for dating by UI students.

It is recommended that university counselling and health services should introduce sexual relationships and online dating discussions into the regular student counselling sessions and orientation programmes. The focus should be on responsible online interaction, managing expectations in online relationships and recognising deceptive behaviours. Students should be encouraged to utilise critical judgment when considering online dating. Social media literacy efforts should also be encouraged among students. Lastly, developers of social media and online dating platforms in Nigeria should enhance user safety mechanisms like identity verifications, reporting features and privacy settings to address issues like impersonation and lack of trust among student users.

This study is limited because of the small geographical scope of only UI students and the use of only quantitative methods. Future research could address these by focusing on other universities and other tertiary institutions in Nigeria and adopting a mixed-method approach.

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