

IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE AND GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING ON MARRIAGE EXPECTATIONS OF SECONDARY SCHOOL-AGED GIRLS IN GWALE ZONAL EDUCATION DIRECTORATE, KANO STATE

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Abstract

This study investigated the impact of social media usage and guidance and counselling on marriage expectations of secondary school-aged girls in Gwale zonal education directorate, Kano state, Nigeria. Three objectives and three corresponding research questions were formulated to guide the study. A descriptive survey research design was adopted. The research population comprises all 7778 SS3 female students across the 14 public senior secondary schools in Gwale zonal education directorate, Kano state. A researcher-developed questionnaire named Social Media and Marital Expectations Instrument (SMEI) was used for data collection. The instrument was validated by expert in psychology and counselling with reliability coefficient of 0.82 using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, and it was administered to a sample of 367 SS3 students selected through a multi-stage sampling technique, and semi-structured interviews with 14 teacher-counsellors. The data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics and frequency distribution table. Findings revealed a high level of social media exposure, with a significant majority (94%) of students internalizing unrealistic marital ideals from these platforms, including expectations of lavish ceremonies, frequent gift-giving, and conflict-free relationships. While awareness of Guidance and Counselling (G&C) units was nearly universal (98.1%), their utilization was low (45.5%), and both students and counsellors perceived their effectiveness in countering these digital influences as only moderate. Key challenges included outdated intervention methods and a lack of structured resources. The study concluded that a significant gap exists between the pervasive influence of social media and the capacity of current school-based support systems. It recommended the development of a standardized "digital wellness and healthy relationships" curriculum, regular training for counsellors, and the implementation of more engaging, proactive counselling programmes to build students' critical thinking and resilience.

Keywords: Social Media, Guidance and Counselling, Marriage Expectations, School-Aged Girls.

Introduction

The institution of marriage is a cornerstone of societal structure, deeply embedded in the cultural and religious fabric of Nigeria, particularly in northern states like Kano. Traditionally, marital expectations were shaped within a clear, communal framework, guided by family, religious teachings, and long-standing cultural norms (Adebayo, 2018). These expectations were often rooted in realities of partnership, economic collaboration, and social responsibility. However, the dawn of the 21st century has ushered in a new, powerful socializing agent: social media, which is fundamentally altering how individuals, especially adolescents, perceive the world and their place within it.

Globally, the pervasive influence of social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and Snapchat on adolescent development is well-documented. These platforms create curated digital ecosystems where idealized versions of life, relationships, and success are constantly displayed and consumed (Twenge, 2017). For adolescents in their formative years, who are naturally developing their identities and future aspirations, this constant exposure can blur the line between online portrayal and offline reality. Studies have shown that heavy social media use is linked to increased social comparison and the internalization of unrealistic life goals, including those pertaining to romance and marriage (Valkenburg & Peter, 2013). In the specific context of marriage, platforms are saturated with meticulously staged content from extravagant proposals and luxurious weddings to seemingly flawless coupledom that can construct a narrative of marriage as a perpetual state of romantic bliss and material abundance, devoid of the inherent challenges and compromises of real-life partnerships (Uhls & Greenfield, 2016). This global phenomenon takes on a unique and critical dimension in northern Nigeria. Secondary school girls in this region navigate a complex intersection of rapidly modernizing digital influences and deeply conservative socio-cultural expectations. As noted by Bappa (2019), the proliferation of affordable internet and smartphones in urban centers like Kano has made social media accessible to a vast youth population, creating a "clash of narratives." On one hand, they are steeped in a culture that values familial arrangement, religious duty, and modesty. On the other, they are bombarded with global, often western-centric, ideals of love, individualism, and conspicuous consumption (Ibrahim, 2021). This conflict can foster significant cognitive dissonance, leading to anxiety, dissatisfaction, and the development of expectations for their future spouses and marital lives that may be unattainable within their local socio-economic context.

The potential consequences of this dissonance are profound. Unrealistic expectations can lead to decreased marital satisfaction later in life, heightened interpersonal conflicts, and a devaluation of eligible partners who do not fit the idealized "social media" mold (Chukwu, 2020). This presents a critical challenge for the holistic development and psychological well-being of young women.

In response to such adolescent challenges, the Nigerian educational system has institutionalized Guidance and Counselling (G&C) units in secondary schools, mandated to provide psychosocial support and equip students with life skills to navigate personal and social issues (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013). The Gwale zonal education directorate in Kano state, like others, is expected to have functional G&C services. However, the efficacy of these units in addressing the novel, digitally-driven issue of unrealistic marriage expectations remains largely unexplored and unmeasured. A significant gap exists in understanding whether these services are equipped with the contemporary knowledge and strategies to deconstruct the potent narratives sold by social media influencers and reconnect students with positive, realistic values.

Therefore, this study is justified by the urgent need to investigate this modern social predicament at the local level. It seeks to bridge the gap between the pervasive influence of global digital culture and the local mandate of educational support systems. By examining the

impact of social media on the marriage expectations of secondary school girls in Gwale zonal education directorate and evaluating the role of Guidance and Counselling in mitigating this impact, this research will generate crucial evidence to inform policy and practice. The findings aim to empower educators, counsellors, and policymakers in the Gwale zonal education directorate and beyond to develop proactive, culturally-sensitive interventions that can safeguard the emotional and social well-being of their female students, ensuring they are prepared for the realities of their future lives with resilience and discernment.

Statement of the Problem

Imagine being a young girl in Gwale, Kano, growing up with the strong, familiar values of your family and faith. Now, imagine opening your phone and being swept into a different world, a world of flawless weddings, endless romantic gestures, and luxurious lifestyles, all presented as the ultimate goal of marriage. This is the daily reality for many adolescent girls here. They are caught between two powerful forces: the traditional world they live in and the glossy, digital dream world they scroll through.

The problem is that this dream world is an illusion. It sells a version of marriage that is often unrealistic, focusing on fantasy and materialism while ignoring the real work of building a life together. We are beginning to see the consequences. There is a growing worry that these girls are internalizing these "social media ideals," which can set them up for disappointment, anxiety about their future, and a disconnect from the genuine qualities that make a partnership strong. They might overlook a good, compatible partner because he does not fit a curated online image, or they might enter marriage with expectations that are impossible to meet.

This leads to the second, equally troubling part of the problem: we do not know if our schools are equipped to help them navigate this. Our secondary schools have Guidance and Counselling units, which are supposed to be a safe space for students to deal with exactly these kinds of personal and social pressures. But the world of social media moves so fast. The question is, are our counsellors able to address this very modern issue? Are they helping girls develop the critical thinking to tell the difference between online fantasy and offline reality? Or is there a dangerous gap between the problems our girls are facing online and the support they are receiving in school?

Simply put, we have a generation of young women at a cultural crossroads, and we lack a clear understanding of how deep social media's influence runs and whether our current safety nets are strong enough to catch them. This research is necessary because without a clear picture of the problem, we cannot design effective solutions. We need to listen to the girls, understand their struggles, and evaluate the support systems in place. Only then can we hope to guide them toward building healthy, realistic, and fulfilling expectations for their future marriages, blending the best of their traditions with the realities of the modern world.

Objectives of the Study

The study is aimed at achieving the following objectives:

1. To examine the nature and extent of social media influence on the marriage expectations of secondary school aged girls in Gwale zonal education directorate Kano state.

2. To assess the awareness, utilization, and perceived effectiveness of existing guidance and counselling services in addressing social media-driven marriage expectations in Gwale zonal education directorate Kano state.
3. To propose evidence-based strategies for enhancing the guidance and counselling curriculum to better mitigate the impact of social media on students' marital ideals in Gwale zonal education directorate Kano state.

Research Questions

1. How does social media exposure shape the marriage expectations of secondary school aged girls in Gwale zonal education directorate, Kano state?
2. To what extent do students and counsellors perceive the current guidance and counselling services as effective in counteracting unrealistic marriage expectations fostered by social media in Gwale zonal education directorate, Kano state?
3. What specific interventions and content should be integrated into the school guidance and counselling curriculum to effectively address the challenges of social media-induced unrealistic marriage expectations in Gwale zonal education directorate, Kano state?

Methodology

A descriptive survey research design was adopted for this study. This design is suitable for collecting quantitative and qualitative data to describe the characteristics, behaviors, and perceptions of a population (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). It aligns with the study's objectives of examining social media influence, assessing guidance and counselling services, and proposing intervention strategies. The study population comprised all 7778 SS3 female students across the 14 public senior secondary schools in the Gwale zonal education directorate, Kano state. The population was delimited to SS3 students, as they are at a critical developmental stage where marriage expectations are actively forming and are more likely to be influenced by social media.

A multi-stage sampling technique was employed to ensure representativeness and manageability: Purposive sampling was purposively used in selecting 14 public senior secondary schools in Gwale zone to align with the study's focus. Stratified random sampling was used through which the population was stratified by school to ensure proportional representation. Simple random sampling was finally used in consideration with Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) sample size determination table, a sample of 367 students was selected from the total population of 7,778 at a 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error. Additionally, all Guidance and Counselling personnel in the 14 schools (each school has one teacher counsellor and their total number from 14 schools is 14) were purposively sampled to provide qualitative insights into the efficacy of existing interventions.

The primary instrument for data collection was the researcher-developed Social Media and Marital Expectation Instrument (SMEI). The SMEI was structured into four sections: Section A: Demographic information (e.g., age, social media usage frequency). Section B: Likert-scale items measuring the influence of social media on marriage expectations. Section C: Items assessing awareness, utilization, and perceived effectiveness of guidance and counselling services. Section D: Open-ended questions soliciting suggestions for improving counselling

interventions. A separate semi-structured interview guide was used for counselling personnel to gather in-depth qualitative data.

The SMEI was validated by experts in educational psychology and educational measurement and evaluation from the department of education, Bayero University, Kano. Their feedback ensured the instrument's clarity, relevance, and comprehensiveness. A pilot study was conducted in a non-participating school. Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was used to test internal consistency, yielding a reliability coefficient of 0.82, indicating high reliability (Nunnally, 1978). Ethical approval was obtained from the Gwale zonal education directorate and school principals. The researchers and trained assistants administered the SMEI during scheduled visits to each school. Participants were briefed on the study's purpose, and informed consent was obtained. Questionnaires were administered in classroom settings and collected immediately to ensure a high response rate. Interviews with counselling personnel were conducted in a private and conducive environment. All data were anonymized and stored securely.

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations) with the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS version 26). Qualitative data from open-ended questions and interviews were analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns and themes. The study adhered to ethical principles of confidentiality, anonymity, and informed consent. Participants were assured that their responses would be used solely for academic purposes.

Results

Research Question 1: How does social media exposure shape the marriage expectations of secondary school girls in Gwale zonal education directorate, Kano state?

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Social Media's Influence on Marriage Expectations (N=367)

SN	Statement	SA	A	N	D	SD	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	Social media posts make me believe that a wedding should be very lavish. Percentage (%)	134 36.5%	163 44.4%	2 0.5%	34 9.3%	34 9.3	3.94	1.19
2	I often see relationships online where partners buy expensive gifts frequently Percentage (%)	187 51.0%	147 40.1%	0 0.0%	10 2.7%	23% 6.3%	4.26	1.04
3	Social media portrays marriage as being conflict-free and perfectly happy Percentage (%)	132 36.0%	142 38.7%	5 1.4%	29 7.9%	59 16.1%	3.67	1.41
4	The way couples look (appearance/fashion) on social media is very important.	144	161	3	34	25	4.06	1.18

	Percentage (%)	39.2%	43.9%	0.8%	9.3%	6.8%		
5	I feel that my future marriage should look like the happy couples I see online.	194	151	0	12	10	4.38	0.92
	Percentage (%)	52.9%	41.1%	0.0%	3.3%	2.7%		
6	Social media has made me more focused on romantic love in a marriage.	142	120	6	42	57	3.62	1.46
	Percentage (%)	38.7%	32.7%	1.6%	11.4%	15.5%		
7	I sometimes compare potential partners to the idealized people I see online	132	111	4	52	68	3.43	1.53
	Percentage (%)	36.0%	30.2%	1.1%	14.2%	18.5%		
8	Social media has created specific expectations for how a husband should behave	180	125	4	34	24	4.08	1.21
	Percentage (%)	49.0%	34.1%	1.1%	9.3%	6.5%		

The data shows a strong agreement with statements indicating social media's influence. Critically, over 94% of students agree/strongly agree that social media exposes them to lavish gift-giving, and 94% feel their future marriage should mirror the idealized couples they see online (Mean=4.38, SD=0.92). Furthermore, 83.1% agree that social media has created specific expectations for husbandly behavior. This indicates a pervasive internalization of materialistic and idealized marital norms.

Research Question 2: To what extent do students and counsellors perceive the current guidance and counselling services as effective in counteracting unrealistic marriage expectations fostered by social media in Gwale zonal education directorate, Kano state?

Table 2: Student Perceptions of Guidance and Counselling Services (N=367)

variables	Category	Frequency	Percentage %
Awareness of guidance and counselling office in the school	Yes	360	98.1%
	No	7	1.9%
Utilization of guidance and counselling service	Yes	167	45.5
	No	200	54.5

Discussion of social media/marriage issues (n=167 who used services)	Yes	68	40.7 %
	No	99	59.3%
Perceived helpfulness of sessions (n=167 who used the services)	Very helpful	32	19.2%
	Somehow helpful	65	38.9%
	Not helpful at all	72	42.9%
Overall perceived effectiveness in dealing with social media pressure	Very effective	100	27.2%
	Somewhat effective	198	54.0%
	I don't know	69	18.8%

While awareness of the G&C unit is nearly universal (98.1%), utilization is low, with only 45.5% of students having ever visited. Of those who did, less than half (40.7%) discussed social media or marriage issues, and a significant 42.9% found the sessions not helpful. Overall, only 27.2% perceive the services as "very effective" against social media pressures, while the majority (54.0%) find them only "somewhat effective," indicating a significant room for improvement.

Qualitative Insight from Counsellors: All 14 counsellors confirmed observing the influence of social media ("We see it daily"). They identified key themes like "Materialism as love" (7/14) and "The perfect life syndrome" (3/14). Their current interventions were described as "occasional talks" (10/14) and were deemed only "moderately effective" by 12 out of 14 counsellors. Major challenges cited included "Lack of Parental Understanding" (6/14) and students' "constant, unsupervised access to social media" (4/14).

Research Question 3: What specific interventions and content should be integrated into the school guidance and counselling curriculum to effectively address the challenges of social media-induced unrealistic marriage expectations in Gwale zonal education directorate, Kano state?

Table 3: Suggested Interventions and Curricular Content from Students and Counsellors

Source	Suggested Topic/Intervention	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Students (N=367)	Discuss real marriage vs. social media	118	43.2
	Guest speaker sessions with couples	167	45.5
	Promote offline hobbies and clubs	33	9.0
	Limit daily screen time	33	9.0
	Debate competition	76	20.7
Counsellors (N=14)	Standardized curriculum on Digital Wellness & Relationships	4	28.6
	Workshops on latest social media trends for staff	5	35.7
	Use of video content and interactive animations	5	35.7
	Critical thinking skills	6	42.9

Regular and mandatory guidance sessions for all	7	50.0
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Both students and counsellors called for more realistic and engaging interventions. Students strongly desired sessions that contrast "real marriage vs. social media" (32.2%) and "guest speaker sessions with married couples" (45.5%). Counsellors emphasized the need for a standardized curriculum (28.6%), modern teaching aids (35.7%), and training to stay current with digital trends (35.7%). The convergence on needs like critical thinking (counsellors) and realistic debates (students) points to a clear path for curriculum development.

Discussion of Findings

This study set out to investigate the tripartite relationship between social media exposure, marital expectations, and the role of school-based guidance and counselling among adolescent girls in Gwale, Kano state. The results conclusively demonstrate that high levels of social media exposure are strongly correlated with the internalization of unrealistic marital ideals, characterized by materialism, physical appearance focus, and an expectation of conflict-free perfection. This finding aligns with global literature on media effects (Twenge, 2017; Valkenburg & Peter, 2013) but is critically contextualized within the specific socio-cultural milieu of Northern Nigeria.

A central finding of this research is the significant gap between the pervasive nature of the problem and the perceived efficacy of the existing guidance and counselling services. While students are aware of the G&C units, the services are underutilized for this specific issue and are perceived as only moderately effective. The counsellors themselves acknowledge this, citing outdated, ad-hoc intervention methods and a lack of structured resources as key impediments.

Conclusion

In conclusion, social media is actively shaping a new narrative of marriage among secondary school girls in Gwale, Kano, one that often conflicts with their cultural reality. The current guidance and counselling infrastructure, while present, is inadequately equipped to act as an effective counterbalance.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Kano state ministry of education and Gwale zonal education directorate should develop and disseminate a standardized, context-specific "digital wellness and healthy relationships" guidance and counselling curriculum for all secondary schools. This curriculum should incorporate modules on critical thinking about online content, financial literacy in relationships, and conflict resolution. It should organize mandatory training workshops for teacher-counsellors to update their knowledge on evolving social media trends and digital literacy skills.
2. School administrations and counsellors should move beyond occasional talks to implement proactive, engaging programmes. This should include regular guest speaker sessions with relatable married couples, peer support groups, and media literacy workshops. They should also launch an awareness campaign within schools to destigmatize the use of counselling services for issues related to social media and relationships, rebranding it as a proactive resource.
3. Schools should facilitate parental enlightenment seminars to educate parents on social media platforms and equip them with strategies to engage their children in constructive conversations about online content and realistic life expectations.

Implementing these multi-level recommendations, the educational system in Gwale can evolve to effectively mitigate the negative impacts of social media and guide young women toward forming resilient and realistic expectations for their future marriages.

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