Digital Intimacy Interference among Couples and Ruined Marriages in Rivers State, Nigeria

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Abstract
The study was embarked upon to critically ascertain digital intimacy interference among couples and ruined marriages in Rivers State. The objectives were among others to determine the extent of intimate self-disclosure interference and interpersonal disinhibition interference among couples in Rivers State. The social penetration theory underpinned this study. The study adopted descriptive survey design: the choice was informed to document existing perceptions. The population of the study was 194,563 and the sample size was 384 using Krejcie and Morgan's sample table. The multi-stage sample technique was adopted and questionnaire was the instrument for data collection. The weighted mean score was used in the data presentation and analysis. The result revealed that the extent of intimate self-disclosure and interpersonal disinhibition interference among couples in Rivers State was high among couples in Rivers State. The study concluded that communication builds relationship and is paramount for a stable marriage. The nature of communication that is adopted goes a long way to make or marriages. There are pieces of information that should not be shared among couples by the third parties. However, with digital media, the core values of marriage in the society are threated.

Keywords: Digital, Intimacy, Interference, Couples, Ruined Marriages

Introduction
It is a commonly held belief that communication is the key to a successful relationship and good communication results in the success of relationships. It is also said that bad communication results in broken relationships. Communication scholars like Irwin Attman and Delmas Taylor in 1973, developed the social penetration theory to explicate how interpersonal relationship evolve. According to them, intimacy develops as partners' navigate from relatively shallow communication to deeper connections over time. The transition from shallow communication to deep communication builds intimacy (an emotional closeness) necessary to maintaining a healthy relationship. Shallow communication may consist of asking someone's name or where they are from, whereas deeper communication may include sharing intimate details about one's personal life.

Marriage is one of the most ancient, important, universal and indispensable social institution which has been in existence since the creation of man. As an institution, marriage in many countries is the state of being united with a person of the opposite sex as husband or wife. The institution is where men and women are joined in a particular kind of social and legal dependence for maintaining a family. From a societal level, the institution of marriage represents all the behaviours, norms, roles, expectations, and values that are associated with the legal union of a man and woman. The marriage institution is key structure in human societies as they form the basic social building blocks that connect otherwise different kinship groupings in society (Leighton *et al*., 2021). These institutions are regarded as cultural universals, implying that they can be found in any human culture regardless of the fact that their composition and form frequently differ significantly. Marriage, for instance, is principally the institution that admits people into family life and allows for an approved relationship involving economic cooperation as well as normative sexual activities and child bearing.

Marriage is considered to represent a lifelong commitment by two people to each other, and it signified by a contract sanctioned by the state. It thus involves legal rights, responsibilities, and duties that are enforced by both secular and sacred laws (Esere, 2018). Marriage involves emotional and legal commitment that is quite important in any adult life. This relationship usually needs some contract which defines the partners' rights and obligations to each other. The usual roles and responsibilities of the husband and wife include living together, having sexual relations with one another, sharing economic resources, and recognising as the parents of their children. Intimate relationships constitute an important source of happiness, support, health, and wellbeing in people's lives (Slatcher *et al*., 2014).

The notion that communication fosters a healthy relationship is most commonly referred to traditional offline communication, whereby couples maintained intimacy primarily through face-to-face interactions. However, the innovations in media technology, mobile phones and digital media have revolutionised the way the world communicates within social networks. It is possible for people to extend beyond two-way communication by allowing networks of people to instantly connect across geographical locations by exchanging personal information online. The digital media have become a powerful force in people's culture and an integrated component of human interaction. Thus a balance needs to be struck between positive and negative digital media use (Daniel, 2019).

People enjoy the benefits and outcomes of the digital media. These digital media is much faster in comparison to the old traditional media, which allow individuals to establish a public or semi-public profile in a bounded system. Also, it allows the users to share a list of others digital media users with whom they have a connection, view and transfer the connections list within the system. Users stay connected with friends and family members, and offers an easy way to keeping in touch and maintaining relationships with individuals for communication. Digital media users have grown to 4.66 billion people around the world in October, 2020 and average of nearly 2 million new users are joining every day (Kemp, 2020).

People are becoming more digital social beings, expecting the gratification of their social and emotional needs through digital media (Gull *et al*., 2019). Digital media have resolved the communication gap between individuals in romantic relationships, especially married couples (Leighton *et al*., 2021). Digital media have allowed people to stay connected during work hours or when distance is a barrier. It allows people to share photos, text, and videos and afford each other the emotional support needed. However, with the increase of digital media popularity, online privacy, interpersonal disinhibition and self-disclosure issues

have come to the fore. A study on gender differences in self-disclosure reveals that women were more open to disclosing personal information about themselves than men, while men were engaged in intimate social interactions and relationship which has an important influence on wellbeing, marriage and relationship (Skelton, 2021).

The term digital intimacy interference (DII) was described by Williams (2010) as digital media influence on romantic relationships. He states that digital media create increase opportunities for digital intimacy interference given their broad range and accessibility. Digital media interference successfully encourages users to disclose personal information. Every minute, numerous digital media users are commenting on pictures, share status updates and photos, and express their preferences by liking the content of others (Pew Research 2016). In addition, digital intimacy interference relates to self-disclosures, caring and commitment, confidential knowledge, intense feelings of affection, emotional support, and mutuality, openness and trust. The study of digital intimacy interference is still in its early stages, there is general agreement that a form of digital intimacy can be experienced in this context. However, research into the relationship between digital media and broken marriages/relationship is critically limited.

The digital media also have strong implications for marital stability and make social relationships increasingly tenuous. Abbasi (2018), in a study notes that the invasion of technology has negatively impacted the age-long practice of spending quality time with a partner. In the past, couples enjoyed time together attending concerts, plays, shows, visited friends and other social gatherings. These interactions with one's partner and others have arguably bonded marriages and created room for healthy communication, intimacy, and fondness. However, with technology, people have started finding happiness in their gadgets, thereby, seriously jeopardising their relationships. For Hirschlag (2015), the Internet-enabled technology is affecting social relationships in different ways including exposing couples to unwarranted interference from admirers, former intimate partners, and explicit content that can encourage negative secrecy and infidelity.

The most causes of marital problems in Nigeria, especially among the digital community in Rivers State consist of factors such as economic hardship, sickness, sexual incompatibility, unsatisfactory sexual relationship, childlessness, and preference for male children. According to the Office of Assistant Chief Registrar (Litigation), Rivers State High Court (2022), the total divorce rate in 2020 was 423 (four hundred and twenty-three) cases, in 2021, the total divorce cases were 513 (five hundred and thirteen), while in 2022, the total divorce cases were 789 (seven hundred and eighty-nine). Also the Office of Deputy Chief Registrar (Litigation) from Human Rights Unit in Rivers State Customary Court of Appeal (2022), the total divorce cases in 2019 were 21 (twenty-one), in 2020, the total divorce cases were 26 (twenty-six), while in 2021, the total rate of divorce was 36 (thirty-six).

The digital media have encourage spouses of opposite sex to appreciate profiles of themselves, through texting, uploading and downloading of pictures which are gateways to distrust and infidelity in marriages. The inordinate access of digital media by couples has doubled the attendant problems of marital relationship and has to a large extent caused divorces among spouses all over the world. This lends credence to the account of Wright (2021) that this day and age, society is engaged in digital media which add to the stress and difficulties of relationship that surround us today. The digital media have contributed to a large amount of unrest among relationship. This unrest in relationship, due to the increase in trends of usage of digital media has created a huge uprising in divorce rates over the past decades. The digital

media have become part of people's lives and seriously affected socialisation, including marriage and marital intimacy. Hence, this study sets to examine

Statement of the Problem

In contemporary society, the increasing reliance on digital communication and technology has brought about new challenges for couples. The intrusion of digital devices and online interactions into intimate relationships can lead to disruptions and negative consequences, potentially resulting in marital issues and even the dissolution of marriages. Couples in Rivers State, Nigeria, may be facing challenges related to digital intimacy interference, where the use of smartphones, social media and other digital platforms affect the quality of their relationships. Recently, in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, a group of divorcees celebrated the initiation of new members under the banner "End of an Error" and "Live a free life in Port Harcourt" and the slogan of the association is "I do, I did and I'm done." Beyond how digital media impacts on marriages, the emerging concern includes how digital intimacy interference affects the rates of marital failure in the society today.

This increasing reliance on digital platforms raises concerns about its potential interference with intimacy within relationship. Digital intimacy interference facilitates intimate self-disclosure and interpersonal disinhibition. These factors favour digital intimacy and promote increased satisfaction in online interpersonal interaction. However, this study will critically look at the intimate self-disclosure and interpersonal disinhibition, because the extent to which these components play complicated role in marriages is still poorly understood. Studies have been done on the social media and marital infidelity, however, to the best of the researcher's knowledge little or no studies have been done on digital intimacy interference among couples. Based on the foregoing, examining the digital intimacy interference among couples in Rivers State, Nigeria and its implications for marital stability thus, becomes peremptory.

Objectives of the Study

1. ascertain the extent of intimate self-disclosure interference among couples in Rivers State; and
2. determine the extent interpersonal disinhibition interference among couples in Rivers State;

Literature Review

Digital Intimacy Interference

It is a commonly held belief that communication is the key to a successful relationship. It has been said that good communication results in relationship success, while bad communication is said to result in relationship dissolution. Communication scholars Irwin Altman and Dalmas Taylor developed social penetration theory to explicate how interpersonal relationships evolve in 1973. According to their theory, intimacy develops as partners navigate from relatively shallow communication to deeper connections over time. The transition from shallow communication to deep communication builds intimacy, an emotional closeness necessary to maintain a healthy relationship. Shallow communication may consist of asking someone's name or where they are from, whereas deeper communication may include sharing intimate details about one's personal past. Deep connections increase intimacy through self-disclosure, an intentional exchange of relevant information at the presumed risk of both partners (Mader & Mader, 2013). As a result, relationship communication fosters intimacy and builds trust between relationship partners as they begin to feel understood and accepted (Pietromonaco, *et al*., 2014).

Intimate Self-Disclosure
This is the act of revealing personal information about ourselves that others are unlikely to discover in other ways. This information touches on topics that one would not even think about discussing with particular people and therefore, people keep their thoughts and feelings to themselves (Tang *et al*., 2013). However it is also argued that any verbal or nonverbal communication that reveals something about the self is self-disclosure. Therefore, self-disclosure does not always have to be deep to be useful or meaningful. Superficial self-disclosure, often in the form of "small talk," is a key in initiating relationships that then move onto more personal levels of self-disclosure. Self-disclosure gives room for controversial topics such as contraceptive use to be discussed and agreed upon (Masaviru *et al*., 2015). Self-disclosure has both advantages and disadvantages. With relation to its merit, it allows us to open up and disclose more with people who disclose too (Steinberg, 2017). Secondly, it is a reciprocal process where the more one discloses to others, the more they will be willing to do the same (Steinberg, 2017). Thirdly, disclosure leads to trust that develops the relationship. However, talking too much about ourselves early in a relationship may not facilitate the development of friendship because too much disclosure might be viewed as being insecure. As a result, self-disclosure can lead to rejection because of not being liked or accepted (Steinberg, 2017).

Interpersonal Disinhibition
Interpersonal disinhibition is a term used to describe the lowering of psychological restraints, which often serve to regulate behaviours in the online social environment (Joinson, 2017). It is reflected in reduced behavioural inhibitions, a lowered regard for behavioural boundaries while in cyberspace, and can be expressed in various online interpersonal behaviours which can be positive or negative. The Internet has changed the way people communicate and interact with other people. Previous research on psychology and the Internet have recognised that people often say or do things in the online space that they would not ordinarily say and do in the offline world (Joinson 2017; Suler 2014). For example, some individuals are more likely to disclose private or secret information of themselves online; something that they may less likely to in a traditional face-to-face interaction. Interpersonal disinhibition is a phenomenon where individuals in cyberspace do or say things that they would not say or do in "real-life" situations as they feel less restrained and able to express themselves more freely (Suler, 2014). The online world provides a context in which key social cues are absent concerning appropriate behaviour (Kurek *et al*., 2019). Interpersonal disinhibition is when individuals are motivated to share personal details, hidden emotions, fears, and wishes. For example, socially anxious individuals may feel they are better able to express themselves in an online environment (Stuart & Scott, 2021).

Concept of Marriage
The marriage is an institution that is as old as the creation of man. Marriage dates back to the first human on earth. It is an indispensable phenomenon in human life regardless of society, tribe and religious affiliations. Some scholars such as Munroe (2013) see marriage as a religious duty and is consequently a social necessity as well as a moral safeguard. Marriage is the oldest social institution ordained by the God and in some clime sanction by the society as a social contract between two individuals to become husband and wife. Marriage, as ordained by God or accepted by the society, gives legitimacy to sexual relationship and reproduction for legitimate children (Sarker, 2017). Marriage is the state of being united with a person of the

opposite sex as husband or wife for the purpose of harmonious living, companionship, procreation and maintaining a family (Gove, 2016).

Conflict in Marriages

Marriage involves a union of two individuals, commonly husband and wife who are embarking on the occasionally arduous, novel endeavour of becoming one in interest. Thus, when a bridge of interest surfaced, conflict emerges. The differences in views, beliefs, actions or inactions may begin surfacing at an increased rate even during the early days of marriage. A new couple must individually and jointly construct a solution for significant differences as these conflicts possess the power to endanger the stability and marital satisfaction within the union (Tallman & Hsiao, 2014). Oduro-Frimpong (2017) observes that married couples exhibited some form of conflict within their union. In intimate relationships, conflict is a common phenomenon and does not have to drive partners apart. The reasons for conflict can be diverse. Tallman and Hsiao (2014) maintain that conflict develops partially due to individuals' expectations that their partners will fulfil their social, emotional, and material needs throughout their married life and if that seems not to be fulfilled, can result to grievances. Allender and Longman (2019) report that since male and female have similar and dissimilar interest and social wants, the differences inherent in gender may be a huge potential for conflict and contempt.

Theoretical Framework

Social Penetration Theory

Social penetration theory was first examined by Altman and Taylor in 1973. This theory proposes that interpersonal relationships evolve in some gradual and predictable fashion. Penetration theorists believe that self-disclosure is the primary way that superficial relationships progress to intimate relationships. Although, self-disclosure can lead to more intimate relationships, it can also leave one or more persons vulnerable. Often times, when a relationship begins to develop, it is customary for the individuals within the relationship to undergo a process of self-disclosure. Self-disclosure is sharing information with others that they would not normally know or discover. Self-disclosure involves risk and vulnerability on the part of the person sharing the information. The reason that self-disclosure is labelled as risky is because, often times, individuals undergo a sense of uncertainty and susceptibility in revealing personal information that has the possibility of being judged in a negative way by the receiver. Hence, the reason that face-to-face communication must evolve in stages when an initial relationship develops. An example of social penetration theory can be seen when one thinks of a hypothetical situation such as meeting someone for the first time. When two individual meet for the first time, it is the cultural expectation that only impersonal information will be exchanged. This could include information such as names, occupations, age of the conversation. However, if both members participating in the dialogic exchange decide that they would like to continue or further the relationship; with the continuation of message exchanges, the more personal the information exchanged will become (Asemah, 2020).

Relating this theory to this study, people get to know each other better, they are more likely to disclose more information about one another that may cause jealous feelings. When it comes to relationships, digital media gives couples the chance to find out information or history about one another. With technology and the ease of partner monitoring online one might begin to see a rise in jealousy between couples which usually leads to broken relationships or marriages. The constant flow and access to information, which was previously discussed as one of the factors that will contribute to partner surveillance, additionally, will increase the amount of relationship jealousy. Digital media platform as an entity allows couples to gain

more insight to each other's previous relationships, which can directly cause issues. When it comes to making a relationship official, even though it is an online environment, it is the most public place a couple will symbolise their commitment. Even things such as socio-economic factors or level of intimacy can directly affect the couple and online behaviour. The amount of time spent on digital media directly related to the jealousy felt between couples. Couples will be scared their partner is developing a relationship with another person online, making issue in relationships. With the continuation of digital media message exchange, the more personal the information exchange will become. However, this study hinges on digital intimacy interference and its influence on the broken marriages, when couples spend more time in social networks which results to interference, there may be friction in the marriages and conflict may occur. Hence this study will underpin the social network interference theory.

Empirical Review

Gull *et al*. (2019) investigated the "Impact of social media usage on married couple behaviour a pilot study in Middle East, Saudi Arabia." The objective of the study was to find out how social media impact their marital life. The study adopted descriptive survey design and a total 287 individuals participated in the survey with their complete responses. Respondents were all married people and have been married between 1 – more than 25 years. Data collection was a survey questionnaire and data analysis was done using mean and standard deviation. The finding of the study showed that social media were the major cause of negative impact on the lives of couples and that social media create different kind of negative feelings such as arguments over social media use, ignorance from the partners, inappropriate posts, and lack of publicizing relationship status. The reviewed study and the current study are related as both studies focus on social media and marriages. The reviewed study is however, limited to the present study in its objectives, scope and methodology.

Ehoro and Badey (2021) did an analysis on "Digital media and marital instability: exploring the implications of social media on new marriages." The study objective examined the implications of social media on new marriages. The study adopted a cross-sectional survey design involving 200 conveniently selected respondents from Port Harcourt City. Data were collected using self-designed questionnaire. The data analysis was done with descriptive statistics. The study revealed that social media impact on marital relationships in many ways and indicated common marital challenges associated with the use of social media by couples in marriages which include loss of intimacy, infidelity, nagging, suspicion and loss of trust, and increased disputes. The reviewed study and the current study are related as both studies focus on social media and marriages. The difference is on the objectives, scope and methodologies.

Noor *et al*. (2016) conducted a study on "The role of social networking websites: do they connect people through marriage or are they responsible for divorce." The study examined the effects of specific social networking and dating sites on marriages and divorce in the visited United State. Also, to ascertain if social media are affecting positively or negatively the overall quality of life in terms of maintaining new and existing relationship. The study adopted Internet project tracking over landlines and cell phones conducted by Pew Research Centre. Hence, the study made use of the secondary data. The study found out that social media have a significant influence over marriages and divorces and dating sites such as Hinge, Bumbler and Plenty Fish and even a social networking site like Facebook has led to more divorce. Also, that social media have increased the opportunities to have an affair and some people were taking advantage of it. The gap is on the digital intimacy interference and methodological approaches because the

reviewed study focused on the role of social networking websites: do they connect people through marriage or are they responsible for divorce. Hence, the stage is set for the pioneer study which focuses on digital intimacy interference among couples and ruined marriages.

Methodology

The research design adopted for this study was descriptive survey design. A descriptive survey design is used to document existing perceptions. The choice of the descriptive survey research design was informed by the need to examine digital intimacy interference among couples and ruined marriages in Rivers State, Nigeria. The population is an aggregate or totality of all the object, subjects or members that conforms to a set of specification. The Federal Child Rights Act (CRN, 2003) prohibits marriage below age 18. Section 29 (4) (a) stipulates that citizens must be of full age to do so. The section adds that full age means the age of eighteen years (18) and above. In this study, the population comprises all individuals of 18 years and above of sexes, educational status and social economic status that are separated and divorced, who reside within Rivers State. According to 2006 population of Rivers State, the population of separated and divorced male and female by age 18 and above were separated – 183,594 and divorced – 5,375. The total population for the study stood at 188,969 (one hundred and eighty eight thousand, nine hundred and sixty-nine). This was projected at 2.96% as growth rate for 17 years (that is from 2006-2023), which gave a projection of 194,563 (one hundred and ninety four thousand, five hundred and sixty three). Hence, the population for this study comprised separated and divorced male and female residents of Rivers State from age bracket of 18 and above. Therefore, the population for this study is 194,563 (one hundred and ninety four thousand, five hundred and sixty three).

Also, there is a possibility of individuals of ages 18 and above having access to digital media, 18 and above were chosen in this study to enable effective determination of the study population, since the National Population Census of 2006 which is the available record used in this study was grouped at five year age intervals. In addition, this study assumes that individuals of ages less than 18 may not be independent enough and individuals of ages 66 and above may not be active enough to constantly maintain a presence on digital media platform that would make a serious impact on this study.

According to a sample size table from Krejcie and Morgan's sample table, a study population of 100,000, a sample of 384 is adequate. This number was arrived at assuming a margin of error of 5% and a confidence level of 95%. Therefore, the sample size for this study was 384. The sampling technique used by this study was multi-stage sampling technique. It was applied because the population is too vast and researching every individual is impossible, and multiple locations. To get to the 384 respondents, this study utilised the multi-stage sampling technique which involves the process of dividing the study population into a large groups and clusters. The first stage involves the clustering Rivers state into Rivers-East Senatorial District, Rivers-West Senatorial District and Rivers-South-East Senatorial District. The second stage involves simple random sampling method, the researcher prepares a list of all the 23 (twenty three) Local Government areas according to three (3) senatorial districts in Rivers State and marks each with a specific number (1 to 23).

The third stage is the use of systematic sampling method to obtain list of capital or headquarters of Local Government Areas in Rivers State. From each listed headquarter which were Rumuodumaya town, Port Harcourt City, Nchia town, Afam town, Ahoada town, Degema town, were the ultimate sampling units. In the fourth stage, the researchers chose households from each town or headquarters using simple random sampling method. The researchers ended

up with 384 houses which was included in the sample group for research. Individuals of 18 years to 65 years who were digital media friendly were judgmentally (ardent digital media users) selected from each of these sampled houses to make up the sample size of 384. The instrument for data gathering in this study was a set of questionnaire The questionnaire contained 20 items which were rated on a 4-points likert scale. The responses of the respondents were rated in scores of 4 – 1, where; "Very high extent" = 4 – points, "High extent" = 3 – points, "Low extent" = 2 – points, and "Very low extent" = 1- point. The researchers personally administered the questionnaire and retrieved the instrument by the same method. The research questions were analysed, using the weighted mean score and the criterion weighted mean score (CWMS) was established at 2.50, (i.e. 4 + 3 + 2 + 1 = 10) ÷ 4 = 2.5.

Results/Findings

Table 1: Extent Intimate Self-Disclosure Interference among Couples in Rivers State

S/N	Items	VHE	HE	LE	VLE	Total	Total Weighted (fx)	Remark
1.	Sharing of special far-reaching details in digital media triggers broken marriages	122 (488)	184 (552)	72 (144)	3 (3)	1187	3.12	High
2.	Communicating with more breadth and intimate details of personal information trust in digital media accelerate marriage crisis	88 (352)	134 (402)	128 (256)	31 (31)	1041	2.73	High
3.	Creating feelings of attraction by being vulnerable enough to engage and share personal details expedite marriage conflict	156 (624)	192 (576)	33 (66)	0 (0)	1266	3.32	High
4.	Partaking in mutual self-disclosure to improve trust for a safer place in digital media quicken unstable marriages	138 (552)	176 (528)	64 (128)	3 (3)	1211	3.18	High
5.	Relaying intimate details to feel special and have a strong connections in digital media kindle problem in marriages	148 (592)	165 (495)	68 (136)	0 (0)	1223	3.21	High
6.	Opening up and sharing personal struggles or insecurities for acceptance in digital media enhance happy marriages	2 (8)	14 (42)	161 (322)	204 (204)	576	1.52	Very Low
7.	Disclosing most personal details of one's life, including experiences, fears and beliefs for a degree of support boost marriages	0 (0)	22 (66)	248 (496)	111 (111)	673	1.77	Very Low
8.	Disseminating a vicious cycle, feeling optimistic and more confident with self-disclosure vivifies marriages	20 (80)	54 (162)	190 (380)	117 (117)	739	1.94	Very Low
9.	Relating details of hobbies and personal interests as if peeling back layers of an onion stimulate happy marriages	52 (208)	8 (24)	192 (384)	129 (129)	745	1.96	Very Low

						Total	Total	
10.	Divulging increasingly intimate information and engaging in deeper levels of self-disclosure tonic marriages better	50 (200)	107 (321)	116 (232)	108 (108)	861	2.26	Low
	Grand Mean					**952**	**2.50**	**High**

Data in Table 1 show that the extent of intimate self-disclosure interference among couples in Rivers State was high. It can therefore be deduced that sharing of special far-reaching details, communication with more breadth and intimate details of personal information trust among others in digital media stimulate marriage crisis.

Table 2: Extent Interpersonal Disinhibition Interference among Couple in Rivers State

S/N	Items	VHE	HE	LE	VLE	Total	Total Weighted (fx)	Remark
11.	Doing things in online space that would not ordinarily say or do in offline invigorates broken marriages	146 (584)	172 (516)	45 (90)	18 (18)	1208	3.17	High
12.	Sharing of personal details, hidden emotions and wishes brace marital conflict	152 (608)	189 (567)	35 (70)	5 (5)	1250	3.28	High
13.	Feeling less retrained by engaging in nude and pornographic sharing in online space fuel marriages negatively	149 (596)	165 (495)	57 (114)	10 (10)	1215	3.19	High
14.	Expressing oneself freely by nude chatting and indulging in online sex foster ruined marriages	151 (604)	192 (576)	38 (76)	0 (0)	1256	3.30	Very High
15.	Perceiving online environment as an imaginary world that has connection to reality spark shattered marriages	163 (652)	177 (531)	34 (68)	7 (7)	1258	3.30	Very High
16.	Appearing anonymous in online space to create overindulgence effect electrifies marriages positively	12 (48)	62 (186)	149 (298)	158 (158)	690	1.81	Very Low
17.	Increases time in sending and receiving of a message to have digital media gratification goad healthy marriages	0 (0)	182 (546)	69 (138)	130 (130)	814	2.14	Low
18.	Seeing oneself as innovative and independent mind explorer in online space help in marriage bonding	30 (120)	79 (237)	138 (276)	134 (134)	767	2.01	Low
19.	Online companion becomes a character within one's intra-psychic world discourages broken marriages	40 (160)	76 (228)	175 (350)	109 (109)	847	2.22	Low
20.	Feeling more like a peer relationship to share ideas on digital media stimulate happy marriages	50 (200)	83 (249)	165 (330)	102 (102)	881	2.31	Low
	Grand Mean					**1019**	**2.67**	**High**

Data in Table 2 reveal that the extent of interpersonal disinhibition among couples in Rivers State was high. The implication is that sharing of personal details, hidden emotions, wishes and feeling less restrained by engaging in nude and pornographic sharing in online space among couples influence ruined marriage.

Finding from the study reveals that the extent of intimate self-disclosure interference among couples in Rivers State was high. The imputation here is that sharing of special far-reaching details, communication with more breadth and intimate details of personal information trust, creating feelings of attraction by being vulnerable enough to engage and share personal details, relaying intimate details to feel special and have a strong connections, disseminating a vicious cycle, feeling optimistic and more confident with self-disclosure among others in digital media stimulate marriage crisis. The finding of this study is related to previous study done by Gull *et al.* (2019) who investigated the impact of social media usage on married couple behaviour a pilot study in Middle East, Saudi Arabia and found out that social media were the major cause of negative impact on the lives of couples and that social media create different kind of negative feelings such as arguments over social media use, ignorance from the partners, inappropriate posts, and lack of publicizing relationship status. Also, the finding of this study aligns with that of Ehoro and Badey (2021) who did an analysis on digital media and marital instability: exploring the implications of social media on new marriages. The study revealed that social media impact on marital relationships in many ways and indicated common marital challenges associated with the use of social media by couples in marriages which include loss of intimacy, infidelity, nagging, suspicion and loss of trust, and increased disputes.

Equally, the finding of this study is in tandem with the theoretical framework which is social penetration theory upon which this study was anchored on. This theory becomes relevant to this research because it proposes that interpersonal relationships evolve in some gradual and predictable fashion and that self-disclosure is the primary way that superficial relationships progress to intimate relationships. Although, self-disclosure can lead to more intimate relationships, it can also leave one or more persons vulnerable. Often times, when a relationship begins to develop, it is customary for the individuals within the relationship to undergo a process of self-disclosure. Self-disclosure is sharing information with others that they would not normally know or discover. Self-disclosure involves risk and vulnerability on the part of the person sharing the information. The reason that self-disclosure is labelled as risky is because, often times, individuals undergo a sense of uncertainty and susceptibility in revealing personal information that has the possibility of being judged in a negative way by the receiver.

More so, result from the study reveals that extent of interpersonal disinhibition among couples in Rivers State was high. The implication is that sharing of personal details, hidden emotions, wishes and feeling less restrained by engaging in nude and pornographic sharing in online space among couples influence ruined marriage. The finding of this study corroborates with the study of Noor *et al.* (2016) who conducted a study on the role of social networking websites: do they connect people through marriage or are they responsible for divorce. The study found out that social media have a significant influence over marriages and divorces and dating sites such as Hinge, Bumbler and Plenty Fish and even a social networking site like Facebook has led to more divorce. Also, that social media have increased the opportunities to have an affair and some people were taking advantage of it. This study is in consonance with the assumption of the social penetration theory, which posits that the constant flow and access to information, which was previously discussed as one of the factors that will contribute to

partner surveillance, additionally, will increase the amount of relationship jealousy. Digital media platform as an entity allows couples to gain more insight to each other's previous relationships, which can directly cause issues. When it comes to making a relationship official, even though it is an online environment, it is the most public place a couple will symbolise their commitment. Even things such as socio-economic factors or level of intimacy can directly affect the couple and online behaviour.

Conclusion

This study concludes that communication builds relationship and is paramount for a stable marriage. The nature of communication that is adopted goes a long way to make or marriages. Communication in marriage is usually private between couples. There are pieces of information that should not be shared among couples by the third parties. However, with digital media, the core values of marriage in the society are threated. Saying or doing something on a whim, without thinking in advance of what could be the unwanted or even dangerous result and lacking of restraint such as sharing nude pictures can lead to a ruined marriage.

Also, the study establishes that in the past, it is condemnable for any couple to bring marital issues to public domain. But intimate self-disclosure and interpersonal disinhibition have made have negatively impacted the age long practice. Thus, sharing high levels of intimate personal information with another person as a central feature of friendships and presenting oneself the way he/she chooses. The overdependence on digital media affects romantic relationships by arousing jealousy, straining relationships and causing mistrust between romantic partners. Hence, to sustain a good relationship, couples need to develop standards to guide their usage of the digital media to curtail the negative consequence of it.

Implications/Relevance

This study highlights the dyadic exchange that involves sharing what is personal and private, partners spending most of their time on digital media platforms and exposing personal information at the expense of family members. Through the study, couples will start to understand the impact of digital media use on relationships and work to limit time spent on digital media and be more open in their digital media activities. Couples will create social prenuptial agreement for acceptable behaviour, such as not friending exes and not sharing private information or photos without permission. Communication and digital scholars will through the outcome of this study gain knowledge on how digital media have changed the way people meet and interact with each other. They need to research more to know the increase usage of digital media and its negative effect on marriages and relationships. It will be beneficial to them because they will know the higher levels of digital media usage and the relationship with marital problems, infidelity, conflicts, jealousy, and eventually divorce.

The Government and Policy makers will immensely benefit from the finding of this study by outlining new powers for the media regulator to police social media. This will go a long way to protect users from content involving things like violence, nude, terrorism, cyber bullying, extreme personal disclosures and abuse. Government will ensure that harmful content is removed quickly and take steps to prevent it appearing in the first place. The policy maker will through the study finding implement policy development by monitoring and removing illegal contents such as pornography, extremist material or personal disclosure at risk of prosecution. Also, to ensure or introduce the general data protection regulation is its copyright directive to put the responsibility on platform for copyright infringing contents. This can be

implemented into domestic law, words that are seen as being sensitive could be added to a long list of censored words and can be temporarily banned, or filtered out from digital media.
Recommendations
Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were proffered:
1. Couples in Rivers State should promote open communication about digital device usage and set boundaries to ensure quality time together.
2. There is need to implement awareness on digital wellbeing by marriage counsellor before and after marriage which can empower couples to navigate the challenges posed by technology and foster healthier relationships.

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