Moderating Factors of Digital Intimacy Interference and Marital Stability of Couple in Rivers State

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Abstract

This study ascertained moderating factors on digital intimacy interference and marital stability of couple in Rivers State. The objectives of the study were among others: to identify the cultural/societal norms in Rivers State that moderate the relationship between digital intimacy interference and marital stability of couple. Theoretical framework of the study was drawn from the social penetration and social network interference theories. The research design adopted for this study was descriptive survey design. According to National Population Census, 2006 population census of Rivers State, the population of married male and female by age 18 and above was 1,404,855 (one million, four hundred and four thousand, eight hundred and fifty-five). 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. The sampling technique used by this study was multi-stage sampling technique. The research questions were analysed, using the weighted mean score and the criterion weighted mean score (CWMS) was established at 2.50. Findings revealed that, societal expectations of sharing personal information on digital platforms, cultural norms on perception of privacy, societal pressure to maintain traditional family values and relationship boundaries were the cultural and societal norms in Rivers State that moderated the relationship between digital intimacy interference and marital stability of couple. The study concluded that, individuals' online behaviour and personal information sharing are greatly influenced by societal expectations, cultural norms and societal pressure to maintain traditional values. The study recommended that, couple should encourage a more open discourse about online behaviour and

privacy, as well as promoting awareness and understanding of diverse cultural norms, in order to create a more inclusive and respectful digital environment for all individuals

Keywords: Moderating Factors, Digital Intimacy Interference, Marital Stability, Couple

Introduction

Digital intimacy interference is the negative impact that excessive use of digital devices and online communication platforms can have on intimate relationships (Lee & Tang, 2019). While this phenomenon affects a significant number of individuals, it is important to acknowledge that, there are several moderating factors that can influence the extent to which digital intimacy interference occurs. One moderating factor that has been identified is the level of attachment anxiety experienced by individuals. Attachment anxiety refers to the degree of fear and worry about rejection, abandonment or the loss of intimacy within relationships (Schimmenti et al., 2020). Individuals with high levels of attachment anxiety may be more susceptible to experiencing digital intimacy interference as they tend to excessively monitor their partner's online activities and seek constant reassurance, leading to increased conflict and negative emotions within the relationship.

The quality of offline communication in a relationship can also moderate the impact of digital intimacy interference. Couples who have effective and satisfying communication offline are more likely to successfully navigate the challenges posed by excessive digital device use. This may be due to their ability to express their needs, concerns and boundaries more effectively, leading to a better balance between offline and online interactions (Drouin & Landgraff, 2012). The level of self-control exhibited by individuals can also play a moderating role in digital intimacy interference. Individuals with high levels of self-control are likely to set limits and boundaries on their digital device usage, allowing them to allocate sufficient time and attention to their intimate relationships. On the other hand, individuals with low self-control may be more prone to prioritise their online interactions over offline intimacy, leading to decreased relationship satisfaction and increased conflicts (Griffiths et al., 2014).

Research shows that, marital stability can be influenced by various factors, including communication patterns, relationship satisfaction and attachment styles. Couples with more positive communication patterns are more likely to have long-term marital stability (Levenson, 19990. Similarly, Amato and Previti (2003) posit that, higher levels of relationship satisfaction are associated with greater marital stability. Marital stability can be influenced by various factors such as communication, conflict resolution and compatibility. Johnson et al. (2013) suggest that, couples who engage in effective communication and are able to resolve conflicts constructively tend to have greater marital stability over time. Compatibility in values, goals and lifestyle preferences has been linked to higher levels of marital satisfaction and longevity (Amato & Rogers, 1997).

In Rivers State, Nigeria, the intersection of digital intimacy interference and marital stability among couples is influenced by various moderating factors. Cultural norms and societal expectations shape how couples navigate digital interactions within their relationships. Orji et al. (2017) highlight the importance of considering socioeconomic factors when examining the impact of technology on marital relationships in Nigeria. Limited access to digital devices or the Internet may hinder communication between partners, while economic pressures may exacerbate conflicts related to digital intimacy interference. Individual differences in personality traits and communication styles also moderate the relationship between digital intimacy interference and marital stability among couples in Rivers State.

Idemudia et al. (2018) elicit that, individual characteristics such as attachment styles and communication preferences influence how couples engage with technology in their relationships. Partners with insecure attachment styles may be more prone to jealousy or mistrust in response to digital interactions, potentially leading to marital discord. The role of support networks and access to resources cannot be overlooked in mitigating the impact of digital intimacy interference on marital stability. Couples who have access to supportive social networks and professional guidance may be better equipped to navigate challenges related to technology use within their relationships. This study examines the moderating factors that influence the relationship between digital intimacy interference and marital stability among coupes in Rivers State.

Statement of the Problem

The pervasive integration of digital technology into daily life has significantly impacted interpersonal relationships. The factors influencing digital intimacy interference can significantly affect marital stability in various ways, posing several problems for couples. One primary issue is the erosion of trust within the relationship. Excessive use of digital devices, such as smartphones or social media platforms, can lead to secretive behaviour such as hiding conversations or activities, which can undermine trust between spouses. This lack of transparency breeds suspicion and insecurity, ultimately destabilizing the marital bond. Another problem arises from the distortion of communication patterns within relationship. Digital intimacy interference can lead to a shift in the quality and quantity of interpersonal communication between the relationships.

Digital intimacy interference can lead to a shift in the quality and quantity of interpersonal communication between partners. Instead of engaging in meaningful face-to-face interactions, couples may become more preoccupied with their online connections, leading to a breakdown in effective communication. Misinterpretation of digital cues, such as tone or intention in text messages or social media posts can also escalate misunderstandings and conflicts, further straining the marital relationship. Digital intimacy interference can exacerbate feelings of neglect or disconnection among spouses. When one partner prioritizes their digital interactions over spending quality time with their spouse, it can leave the other feeling isolated or unimportant. This sense of emotional distance can weaken the emotional connection between partners and diminish feelings of intimacy and closeness, ultimately jeopardizing marital stability. Therefore, this study sets to examine the moderating factors on digital intimacy interference and marital stability of couple in Rivers State.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study was to ascertain the moderating factors on digital intimacy interference and marital stability of couple in Rivers State. However, the objectives of the study were to:

1. Identify the cultural/societal norms in Rivers State that may moderate the relationship between digital intimacy interference and marital stability of couple;
2. Examine the role of individual characteristics, such as attachment styles, in moderating the impact of digital intimacy interference on marital stability in Rivers State; and
3. Determine the moderating factors on digital intimacy interference that facilitate marital stability of couple in Rivers State.

Literature Review

Conceptual Review

Digital Intimacy

Digital intimacy refers to the level of emotional closeness and connection that can be established through technology-mediated communication (TMC). TMC includes various forms of online interactions such as texting, video calls, social media and online dating apps (Levordashka et al., 2020). With the exponential growth of digital communication platforms, individuals are increasingly relying on these tools to establish and maintain relationships, both platonic and romantic with others (Levordahka et al., 2020). One key aspect of digital intimacy is the ability to disclose personal and private information to others through TMC. Research has shown that individuals tend to disclose more personal information online compared to face-to-face interactions, especially to individual they do not know well (Chen & Lee, 2013). This phenomenon, known as the 'online disinhibition effect' is believed to occur because individuals perceive a sense of anonymity when communicating behind screens (Chen & Lee, 2013).

Digital intimacy also involves the exchange of intimate conversations and emotional support through TMC platforms. Valkenburg and Peter (2007) find that, adolescents who engage in intimate self-disclosure online often report higher levels of perceived emotional support from their online friends. These findings suggest that, digital platforms can provide individuals with a sense of connection and emotional fulfilment, even when physical proximity is lacking. It is important to note that digital intimacy is not without its challenges. Despite the advantages and convenience offered by technology-mediated communication, research also highlights the limitations of digital communication in fostering a truly intimate connection. Harris et al. (2020) posit that, individuals reported feeling less emotionally connected to others when communicating through video calls compared to face-to-face interactions. This may be due to the absence of non-verbal cues and physical touch, which are important elements in building emotional intimacy.

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 (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).

Romantic relationships are of the deepest of interpersonal relationships. As individuals' transition from adolescence into adulthood, romantic relationship intensity gradually increases. In the early stages, adolescent relationships are casual, superficial, and brief (Feiring, 2016). From middle adolescence and beyond, interaction and interest in members of the opposite sex increase (Shulman & Scharf, 2010). During late adolescence, it becomes more important that intimacy and social support increases between relationship partners. Throughout early adulthood, romantic partners develop intense feelings of affection and deep intimacy and commitment to one another (Ponti *et, al*., 2010). They also demonstrate more care and comfort, and become more sexually active (Ponti *et al*, 2010). Consequently, as adolescents get older and lead into adulthood, romantic partners rank higher within their social networks because they are able to indulge each other's need for intimacy and support (Ponti *et al*, 2010). Prior to the digital age, the notion that communication fosters a healthy relationship most commonly referred to traditional offline communication, whereby couples maintained intimacy primarily through face-to-face interaction. However, the proliferation of the Internet, mobile phones and social media revolutionised the way the world communicates within social networks. Social media in particular make it 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.

Marital Stability

Marital stability refers to a firm, steady well balance and healthy marital relationship between couples. Stability is ensured as each member fulfils his/her role in the relationship. Echebe (2010) observes that marital stability lead to a well-balanced and well-adjusted family which in turn lead to well-adjusted progressive society, marital stability and happiness are to large extent reflected in the ratio of positive to negative behaviour in the relationship. Garba (2016) refers to marital stability as any interpersonal relationship which is most meaningful when it is dynamic and evolving rather than fixed or final. Thus, there may be periods of joy and excitement followed by times of conflicts, struggle, pain and distance. Unless two persons in this regard have settled for

complacency, there are probably not too many long periods in which they are growing and changing, both separately and together, their relationship is bound to change. Dada and Idowu (2016) assert, that before marriage, couples in love have an idea and tendency to emphasis the similarities in their way of life rather than their differences. Husband and wife idealised each other. After wedding, they will find their beginning a metamorphosis. In other couples, the changes embarrass these newly wedded pairs.

Marital stability is described as a situation where a marriage is likely to stay together without any reason for termination, separation or divorce (Harman, 2015). Marital stability is achieved when married couples abide, work and constantly support each other in a given task, interest or a set goal. But when there is no common goal to be achieved, no co-operation, support and when there is lack of understanding, instability could set in (Fitzsimons *et al*., 2015). Mustapha *et al*. (2017) state that, if a union remains inherently together, it is a stable marriage. Chris (2015) opines that, couple who are happy in their marriage share common features, such as friendship, togetherness, affection, other-focused and shared spirituality. They enjoy affection, mutual feelings, emotional pleasures and love which promote their marital stability. Nadam & Sylaja (2015) posit that, couple can enjoy a stable marital relationship if they can successfully adjust to marital life. Gottman (1999) and Lisitsa (2013) reveal that, certain types of behaviours could affect relationship among couples negatively. These are: criticism, contempt, defensiveness and stonewalling. When couples avoid criticism, contempt, defensiveness and stonewalling, they will enjoy satisfactory, stable and enduring marriages.

Moderating Factors on Digital Intimacy Interference

Several moderating factors influence the relationship between digital stability among couples in Rivers State. Firstly, the level of communication and trust within the relationship plays a significant role. Duggan (2013) states that, couples who maintain open and honest communication, both online and offline are better equipped to navigate digital intimacy issues without it significantly impacting their marital stability. Therefore, couples who prioritise effective communication and trust are less likely to experience negative consequences from digital intimacy interference. Secondly, individual attitudes and beliefs towards technology usage can moderate the impact of digital intimacy interference on marital stability. According to Drouin (2015), individuals with more positive attitudes towards technology tend to integrate it into their relationships in a way that enhances intimacy rather than disrupts it. Conversely, those with negative attitudes or excessive reliance on digital communication may experience greater interference, leading to potential strains on marital stability. Therefore, individual perceptions and behaviours regarding technology usage can either exacerbate or mitigate the effects of digital intimacy interference within couples. Lastly, cultural and societal norms also influence the moderating factors of digital intimacy interference on marital stability. Wang and Kenny (2014) aver that, cultural attitudes towards privacy and boundaries in relationships impact how couples perceive and manage digital intimacy. In regions where there is a stronger emphasis on privacy and traditional gender roles, digital intimacy interference may be viewed more negatively and have a greater impact on marital stability. The understanding and addressing these cultural dynamics

are essential for developing interventions and strategies to mitigate the negative effects of digital intimacy interference on couples' relationships in Rivers State.

Theoretical Framework

Social Network Interference Theory

The social network interference theory is hinged on the assumption that marriage is largely an exclusive institution that can be affected negatively by external influences from one or both partners' social networks. Pioneers of the theory Dickson-Markman and Markman (1988) and Johnson and Milardo (1984), argue that, interferences from external networks including friends, parents and acquaintances contribute to marital challenges. When individuals begin romantic relationships or marry, they are expected to spend more time with their new family, and as a result spend less time with the members of their social network. However, when this arrangement is altered as a result of interference, there may be friction in the marriage and conflict may occur. Trotter et al., (2019) have also explain that, marital relationships thrive and solidify when there is less exogenous influence such as from friends, family, and society. For these scholars, couples need seclusion or *social withdrawal* to build intimacy, love, interdependence, and trust which are important pillars of enduring relationships. When this exclusiveness is breached or interrupted, there may be tension in the marriage as the couple struggle to meet the needs of the two domains.

Marriage has been described as a "greedy institution" that weakens relationships with parents (Sarkisian & Gerstel, 2008) and social networks (Johnson & Milardo, 1984). Married adults are less likely than single adults to communicate with, provide help to, and receive help from their network (Sarkisian, & Gerstel, 2016). When individuals begin romantic relationships and/or marry, they spend less time with the members of their social network (social withdrawal). As a result, some members may be resentful and, therefore, intentionally interfere with the relationship (Johnson & Milardo, 1984). In a study of social network influence on relationship stability, Felmlee (2001) reports that, participants openly acknowledged their friend's disapproval of their romantic relationship was due to the time spent with romantic partners, reducing the time available to spend with their friend.

This theory is relevant as it posits that, interactions on social networking sites (SNS) can intrude upon and disrupt real-life relationships. In the context of this study, this theory becomes highly relevant. The study could explore how SNS usage affects the intimacy and stability of marital relationships, particularly in the digital age. Factors such as frequency of SNS use, types of interactions online and individual perceptions of privacy and trust could moderate the extent to which SNS interfere with marital intimacy and stability. Also, cultural norms and societal pressures in Rivers State may influence how couples navigate digital interactions and their impact on marital dynamics. By considering social network interference theory, the study can provide insights into the complex interplay between digital technology, social relationships and marital wellbeing in the specific context of Rivers State.

Social Penetration Theory

Social penetration theory was first examined by Altman and Taylor in 1973. They metaphorically described people as onions that have wedges or areas of personality each of which has multiple layers of progressive depth. Couples move from superficial layers, middle layers, and inner layers to core personality. Irwin Altman and Dallas Taylor first looked at relationship as an uninterrupted linear development of relationship to greater openness and intimacy as well as desires for independence and closeness. In 1987, they acknowledged the weakness of the theory and amended their ideas to accommodate the tension that exists between independence and closeness (Wood, 2004).

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 (Asemah, 2020). 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).

This theory is relevant because it suggests that, relationships develop through gradual and reciprocal self-disclosure, leading to increased intimacy and closeness. The study could investigate how digital communication platforms facilitate or hinder the process of self-disclosure among couples in Rivers State. Factors such as the depth of self-disclosure online, perceived privacy levels and cultural norms regarding communication between digital intimacy interference and marital stability. The study could explore whether couples who engage in deeper self-disclosure on digital platforms experience greater intimacy interference or marital instability compared to those who maintain more superficial interactions online. Also cultural attitudes towards privacy and openness in Rivers State may influence how couples navigate digital intimacy and its impact on marital dynamics. By applying this theory, the study can shed light on how digital communication practices shape the development and maintenance of marital relationships in Rivers State, offering insights into the role of self-disclosure in digital intimacy and its implications for marital stability.

Empirical Review

Johnson and Amadi (2023) carried out a study on "**The impact of social media use on marital satisfaction: A quantitative analysis among couples in Rivers State.**" The study examined the relationship between social media use and marital satisfaction among couples in Rivers State, Nigeria. A survey was conducted among married couples in Rivers State, assessing their social media usage patterns and marital satisfaction levels using standardized questionnaire. Statistics analysis, including correlation and regression analyses were employed. Findings revealed that, a significant negative correlation between social media use and marital satisfaction among couples in Rivers State. Specifically, higher levels of social media use were associated with lower levels of marital satisfaction. This implied that, social media usage contributed to digital intimacy interference and subsequently impact marital stability negatively.

Nwachukwu and Okoro (2022) conducted a survey on "**Cultural differences in online self-disclosure patterns among married couples: A comparative study between Rivers State and Western contexts.**" The objective was to compare online self-disclosure patterns among married couples in Rivers State with those in western cultural contexts and explore the cultural factors influencing these behaviours. A mixed-methods approach was employed, which involved online surveys and qualitative interviews, to collect data from married couples in Rivers State and a Western cultural context. The survey assessed participants' online self-disclosure behaviours, perceived privacy concerns and cultural values related to communication. Qualitative interviews provided in-depth insights into the cultural factors shaping online self-disclosure. Findings revealed the differences in online self-disclosure patterns between Rivers State and Western cultural contexts. Married couples in Rivers State engaged in more cautions online self-disclosure due to cultural norms surrounding privacy and interpersonal communication. Conversely, couples in the Western context exhibited higher levels of online self-disclosure, reflecting cultural norms emphasising openness and self-expression.

Mohammed and Eze (2024) did a study on "**The role of communication patterns in mediating the relationship between digital intimacy interference and marital stability: Evidence from Rivers State.**" A longitudinal study was conducted, involving married couples in Rivers State, who completed survey assessing their experiences with digital intimacy interference, communication patterns and marital stability at multiple time points. Structural equation modelling (SEM) was employed to analyse the data and test the proposed mediation model. Findings showed that communication patterns significantly mediated the relationship between digital intimacy interference and marital stability among couples in Rivers State. The effective communication, characterised by openness, empathy and active listening, attenuated the negative impact of digital intimacy interference on marital stability. The findings underscored the importance of communication skills in mitigating the adverse effects of digital technology on marital relationships.

Methodology

The research design adopted for this study was descriptive survey design. A descriptive survey design is used to document existing attitudes, characteristics, or opinions of a specific population or sample. The choice of the descriptive survey research design was informed by the need to assess moderating factors on digital intimacy interference and marital stability of couple in Rivers State, Nigeria. According to National Population Census, 2006 population census of Rivers State, the population of married male and female by age 18 and above was 1,366,590. The total population for the study stood at 1, 366,590 (one million, three hundred and sixty six thousand, five hundred and ninety). This was projected at 2.8% as growth rate for 17 years (that is from 2006-2023), which gave a projection of 1,404,855 (one million, four hundred and four thousand, eight hundred and fifty-five). Hence, the population for this study comprised married male and female residents of Rivers State from age bracket of 18 and above. Therefore, the population for this study was 1,404,855 (one million, four hundred and four thousand, eight hundred and fifty-five).

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 assumed 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 involved the clustering Rivers state into Rivers-East Senatorial District, Rivers-West Senatorial District and Rivers-South-East Senatorial District. The second stage involved 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 was 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 18 items which were rated on a 4-points Likert scale. 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. $4 + 3 + 2 + 1 = 10) \div 4 = 2.5$.

Data Presentation Analysis and Discussion of Findings

Table 1: Cultural/Societal Norms in Rivers State that Moderate Relationship between Digital Intimacy interference and Marital Stability of Couples

Items	SA	A	D	SD	Total	Total Weighted (fx)	Remark
I feel comfortable sharing personal information on digital platforms, considering societal expectations	83 (332)	70 (210)	120 (240)	100 (100)	882	2.31	Disagreed
Cultural norms influence my perception of privacy when communicating online.	149 (596)	176 (528)	57 (114)	0 (0)	1,238	3.24	Agreed
Societal pressure to maintain traditional family values affects my digital communication patterns	154 (616)	183 (549)	45 (90)	0 (0)	1,255	3.297	Agreed
Societal expectations regarding gender roles impacted the way I interact digitally	164 (656)	188 (564)	30 (60)	0 (0)	1280	3.35	Agreed
Cultural norms regarding relationship boundaries influence my use of digital devices and social media within my marital relationship	149 (596)	176 (528)	57 (114)	0 (0)	1,238	3.24	Agreed
I feel obligated to conform to societal norms regarding online behaviour, even if it interferes with marital intimacy and stability	139 (556)	168 (504)	13 (26)	62 (62)	1148	1.54	Agreed
Grand Mean					**1,174**	**3.07**	**Agreed**

Data in Table 1 show that, the cultural and societal norms in Rivers State that moderated the relationship between digital intimacy interference and marital stability of couples were societal expectations of sharing personal information on digital platforms, cultural norms on perception of

privacy when communicating online, societal pressure to maintain traditional family values, cultural norms regarding gender roles, relationship boundaries and online `behaviour.

Table 2: Role of Individual Characteristics in Moderating the Impact of Digital Intimacy Interference on Marital Stability in Rivers State

Items	SA	A	D	SD	Total	Total Weighted (fx)	Remark
My personality traits such as conscientiousness influences the impact of digital intimacy interference on my marital stability	103 (412)	157 (471)	83 (166)	39 (39)	1,088	2.85	Agreed
I believe my communication style such as assertiveness, openness or empathy affect how digital intimacy interference impact my marital stability	112 (448)	178 (534)	74 (148)	18 (18)	1,148	3.01	Agreed
In my opinion, emotional intelligence such as self-awareness and regulation, and social skill affect the impact of digital intimacy interference on my marriage	136 (544)	186 (558)	50 (100)	10 (10)	1,212	3.17	Agreed
Feeling anxious or insecure when spending a lot of time engaging in online interactions with others facilitates the impact of digital interference on my marriage	129 (516)	165 (495)	76 (152)	12 (12)	1,175	3.08	Agreed
I sometimes feel unimportant when prioritising online activities over spending quality time which moderate the impact of digital intimacy interference on my marriage	124 (496)	158 (474)	76 (152)	24 (24)	1,146	3.00	Agreed
I believe that excessive use of digital devices can negatively impact marital satisfaction and stability	167 (668)	198 (594)	17 (34)	0 (0)	1,296	3.39	Agreed
Grand Mean					**1,178**	**3.08**	**Agreed**

Table 2 reveals that, the role of individual characteristics in moderating the impact of digital intimacy interference on marital stability in Rivers State was personality traits, such as conscientiousness, communication style such as assertiveness, openness or empathy, emotional intelligence such as self-awareness and regulation, social skills, anxious or insecure, feeling of

unimportant when prioritising online activities and believing excessive use of digital devices negatively impact marital stability.

Table 3: Moderating factors on Digital Intimacy Interference that facilitate marital Stability of Couples in Rivers State

Items	SA	A	D	SD	Total	Weighted Total (fx)	Decision
Level of communication, trust and transparency play a significant role in my marital stability	122 (488)	184 (552)	72 (154)	4 (4)	1198	3.14	Agreed
I usually maintain shared values, goals and honest communication in online to navigate digital intimacy issues	88 (352)	134 (402)	128 (256)	32 (32)	1,042	2.73	Agreed
My individual resilience towards technology usage helped my marital stability	156 (624)	192 (576)	34 (68)	0 (0)	1,268	3.32	Agreed
Cultural norms towards privacy and boundaries in relationship impacted my management of digital intimacy	138 (552)	176 (528)	46 (92)	22 (22)	1,194	3.13	Agreed
Social support networks provided perspectives to navigate challenges related to digital intimacy interference, enhancing marital stability	148 (592)	165 (495)	69 (138)	0 (0)	1,225	3.21	Agreed
Adaptable and open to adjusting my digital habits and relationship dynamics helped me to maintain marital stability	162 (648)	204 (612)	16 (32)	0 (0)	1,292	3.38	Agreed
Grand Mean					**1203**	**3.15**	**Agreed**

Data in Table 3 show that, the moderating factors on digital intimacy interference that facilitate marital stability of couples in Rivers State were level of communication, trust and transparency, shared value and goals and honest communication, individual resilience, cultural norms towards privacy and boundaries, social support networks, being adaptable and open to adjusting digital habits and relationship dynamics.

Discussion of Findings

From the Table 1, the findings revealed that, societal expectations of sharing personal information on digital platforms, cultural norms on perception of privacy when communicating online, societal pressure to maintain traditional family values, cultural norms regarding gender roles, relationship boundaries and online `behaviour were the cultural and societal norms in Rivers State that moderated the relationship between digital intimacy interference and marital stability of couples. These findings corroborated with the study done by Nwachukwu and Okoro (2022) which found out that, married couples in Rivers State engaged in more cautions online self-disclosure due to cultural norms surrounding privacy and interpersonal communication. Conversely, couples in the Western context exhibited higher levels of online self-disclosure, reflecting cultural norms emphasising openness and self-expression. The findings backed the assumption proposed by social penetration theory, which states that, individuals gradually disclose personal information based on societal expectations and cultural norms, and the social network interference theory, which explains how societal pressure and cultural norms influence online behaviour and communication patterns.

Table 2 findings showed that, the personality traits, such as conscientiousness, communication style such as assertiveness, openness or empathy, emotional intelligence such as self-awareness and regulation, social skills, anxious or insecure, feeling of unimportant when prioritising online activities and believing excessive use of digital devices negatively impact marital stability were the role of individual characteristics in moderating the impact of digital intimacy interference on marital stability in Rivers State. These findings are in tandem with the Mohammed and Eze's (2024) study which stated that, communication patterns significantly mediated the relationship between digital intimacy interference and marital stability among couples in Rivers State. The effective communication, characterised by openness, empathy and active listening, attenuated the negative impact of digital intimacy interference on marital stability. The backing of social penetration theory is based on the idea that personality traits, communication style and emotional intelligence are key factors in deepening intimacy and developing stronger relationships, which can positively impact marital stability. Similarly, the support for social network interference theory suggests that excessive use of digital devices can disrupt personal interactions, decrease emotional connection and lead to conflicts, thus negatively impacting marital stability.

The Table 3 findings revealed that, the level of communication, trust and transparency, shared value and goals and honest communication, individual resilience, cultural norms towards privacy and boundaries, social support networks, being adaptable and open to adjusting digital habits and relationship dynamics were the moderating factors on digital intimacy interference that facilitate marital stability of couples in Rivers State. These findings uphold Johnson and Amadi's (2023) study which posited that, a significant negative correlation between social media use and marital satisfaction among couples in Rivers State and the higher levels of social media use were associated with lower levels of marital satisfaction. Also, in consonance with the finding of Mohammed and Eze's (2024), which underscored that, the importance of communication skills in

mitigating the adverse effects of digital technology on marital relationships. The findings support social penetration theory by emphasising that, increased communication, trust and transparency lead to deeper interpersonal connections, which in turn promote marital stability. The finding aligns with social network interference theory by suggesting that, maintaining strong social support networks and adapting digital habits help mitigate external influences on marital relationships, contributing to stability.

Conclusion

The study concludes that, individuals' online behaviour and personal information sharing are greatly influenced by societal expectations, cultural norms and societal pressure to maintain traditional values, leading to different perceptions of privacy and gender roles in online communication.

The study establishes that, personality traits and communication style, along with emotional intelligence and social skills play a significant role in marital stability, while excessive use of digital devices is perceived as having a negative impact.

The study highlights that, factors such as communication, trust, shared values, resilience and adaptability play crucial roles in moderating digital intimacy interference and promoting marital stability.

Recommendations

Based on the strength of the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made to improve and foster harmonious relationship and marital stability among couples.

1. Coupe should encourage a more open discourse about online behaviour and privacy, as well as promoting awareness and understanding of diverse cultural norms, in order to create a more inclusive and respectful digital environment for all individuals.
2. Couple need to regulate digital device usage and develop effective communication skills to improve marital stability.
3. Couple should prioritise open and honest communication, build trust, share values, cultivate individual resilience, maintain social support networks and be adaptable in their digital habits and relationship dynamics to strengthen marital stability in the digital age.

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