



Influence of Social Media Use on the Relationship Expectations of Single Men and Women in Osogbo

James Emmanuel Nwankwo

Department of Mass Communication
National Open University of Nigeria
jamesnwankwoemmanuel@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study examines the influence of social media use on the relationship expectations of single men and women in Osogbo, the capital city of Osun State, Nigeria. The study specifically investigates the extent of social media use, the nature of relationship expectations held by single adults, how social media shapes these expectations, the types of expectations evoked, and the social media platforms that exert the greatest influence. A descriptive survey research design was adopted, targeting single men and women aged 18–45 who actively use social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, WhatsApp, and dating applications. The population comprises single adults residing in Osogbo, with a sample size of 399 respondents selected through a multi-stage sampling technique combining purposive and simple random sampling. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire and analyzed using descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation analysis at a 5% level of significance. Findings reveal a high level of social media use among respondents, with frequent engagement in relationship-related content. Results also indicate that social media significantly influences relationship expectations, particularly in areas such as communication, emotional support, partner behaviour, and standards for romantic relationships. Interactive features, influencer content, and social comparisons were identified as key factors shaping these expectations. Gender differences were observed, with males reporting slightly higher influence of social media on their relationship expectations than females. The study concludes that social media plays a substantial role in shaping how single adults perceive and form expectations about romantic relationships. It recommends mindful social media use, digital media literacy education, and the promotion of realistic relationship portrayals online to foster healthier relationship expectations.

Keywords: Social Media, Single Men, Women, Instagram, TikTok, WhatsApp, Osogbo

INTRODUCTION

Social media has become one of the most influential communication tools of the 21st century. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, WhatsApp, and various dating applications are now part of the daily lives of millions of people around the world. These platforms allow individuals to share information, connect with others, and create online identities (Alter, 2021). For single men and women, social media is not only a means of social interaction but also a space where ideas about relationships and romantic expectations are formed and influenced (Smith, 2020). The concept of social media use involves the frequency, intensity, and purpose for which individuals engage with social networking sites such as posting, commenting, browsing profiles, viewing relationship content, and interacting with others (Boyd & Ellison, 2021). With increasing access to smartphones and affordable data plans, social media consumption has become highly prevalent in Nigerian cities. As individuals consume more online content, they are exposed to curated and idealized portrayals of relationships that may influence how they perceive what a “good relationship” should look like (Chou & Edge, 2022).

Relationship expectations are the beliefs and standards that people hold about what a romantic relationship should be. These expectations involve ideas about love, trust, communication, commitment, emotional support, and roles within the relationship (Vangelisti & Perlman, 2023). Many single people develop expectations based on what they observe in the media, in their families, and in their social environments. With the rise of social media, online content has become a major source through which these expectations are constructed. Single men and women are individuals who are not currently in a

committed romantic relationship. This group includes people who have never married, as well as those who are separated or divorced (OECD, 2021). Being single does not mean being uninterested in relationships. Many people actively think about the kind of partner they want and the kind of relationship they hope to have. Social media often provides ideas that influence these thoughts. Social media exposes users to carefully edited and idealized images of romantic relationships. People often share only the happy, attractive, or exciting parts of their lives. As a result, single individuals may compare their own lives to these perfect images and develop unrealistic expectations about relationships (Chou & Edge, 2022). For example, constant pictures of perfect couples, expensive dates, or romantic surprises can make some people believe that relationships must always be flawless or dramatic in order to be meaningful.

Gender differences also play a role in how social media influences relationship expectations. Research shows that women tend to use social media for emotional communication, self-expression, and maintaining social connections. Men, on the other hand, often use social media more for entertainment, information, and casual interactions (Muscanell & Guadagno, 2020). As a result, single women may internalize emotional aspects of online relationship portrayals such as communication patterns, tenderness, and attentiveness while single men may be more influenced by visual standards such as physical attractiveness or lifestyle presentations (Kapidzic, 2023). These gendered patterns suggest that social media may affect relationship expectations differently for males and females.

The rise of dating applications such as Tinder, Bumble, and Badoo have also changed how single people think about relationships. These apps make it easy to meet new people and provide a large pool of potential partners. While this can be positive, it can also create unrealistic expectations. Some single individuals may expect immediate attraction, perfect physical appearance, or constant excitement simply because they see many options available (Finkel et al., 2019). This “abundance” of choices may also make commitment more difficult because users may feel that there is always someone “better” online.

Despite the important role social media now plays in daily life, there is growing concern that it may create unrealistic or unhealthy relationship expectations. Many people may form beliefs based on online illusion rather than real-life relationship dynamics. Comparisons with idealized online couples can lead to dissatisfaction, pressure, or confusion about what real relationships should look like (Marshall, 2022). Because of the growing importance of digital platforms in everyday life, it is important to understand how social media use shapes relationship expectations especially in the context of gender differences. Insights from such research will contribute to improved awareness, healthier relationship formation, and better guidance for young adults navigating romance in the digital age. This study thus sets out to examine the influence of social media use on the relationship expectations of single men and women in Osogbo, with the aim of identifying possible variations and implications for modern relationship development.

Statement of the Problem

Social media has become one of the most dominant influences on the lives of young adults, including single men and women. Through constant exposure to images, videos, and conversations about romance on platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and dating apps, individuals may develop specific beliefs about what relationships should look like (Smith, 2020). Many of these online portrayals are idealised, selective, and do not fully reflect the complex realities of romantic relationships. As a result, single individuals may form unrealistic or exaggerated expectations regarding love, communication, commitment, and partner behavior (Chou & Edge, 2022). This raises concerns about how social media is shaping the romantic expectations of individuals who are not yet in committed relationships. Although several studies have examined general social media influences on social behavior, fewer have focused specifically on its impact on relationship expectations (Vangelisti & Perlman, 2023). Even fewer have compared how single men and women may be influenced differently. Existing research suggests that gender differences exist in social media use. Women are more likely to use social media for emotional sharing and relational communication, whereas men often use it for entertainment and visual content consumption (Muscanell & Guadagno, 2022). These differences suggest that men and women may interpret and internalise online relationship content in different ways, but this relationship remains insufficiently explored, particularly in developing contexts.

Another emerging concern is that unrealistic relationship expectations driven by social media may negatively affect dating behaviors, relationship readiness, and long-term satisfaction. When expectations are shaped more by idealised online portrayals than by real-life experiences, individuals may become easily

dissatisfied, avoid commitment, or misunderstand what constitutes a healthy relationship (Marshall, 2012). The prevalence of curated romantic images, “perfect” couples, and glamorised dating experiences may contribute to a distorted understanding of relationship norms among single people (Finkel et al., 2019). In Osogbo a growing urban center, young adults rely heavily on social media for communication, entertainment, and relationship exploration. Yet many single individuals may be unknowingly adopting standards and expectations that originate from social media rather than real-life interactions. The increasing presence of dating apps may further contribute to unrealistic expectations, as users may perceive that unlimited and “better” romantic options are always available, leading to difficulty in forming stable or satisfying relationships (Finkel et al., 2019). These issues suggest that social media may be reshaping how single individuals in Osogbo think about romance, compatibility, and partnership.

Despite the growing influence of social media, there remains limited empirical evidence in Osogbo specifically addressing how social media use shapes the relationship expectations of single men and women. Without such knowledge, counselors, educators, and relationship practitioners cannot provide adequate guidance to young adults who may be navigating romance with distorted expectations. Therefore, there is a need to investigate the influence of social media use on relationship expectations among single individuals in Osogbo, and to determine whether significant differences exist between single men and women.

Objectives of the Study

The general objective of this study is to examine the influence of social media use on the relationship expectations of single men and women and the specific objectives of the study are to:

- i. determine the extent of social media use among single men and women in Osogbo;
- ii. identify the relationship expectations held by single men and women in Osogbo;
- iii. examine how social media use influences the relationship expectations of single men and women in Osogbo;
- iv. determine what type of expectation social media use evoke in single men and women in Osogbo; and
- v. identify which social media use influence most relationship expectations among single men and women in Osogbo.

Research Questions

- i. What is the extent of social media use among single men and women in Osogbo?
- ii. What are the relationship expectations of single men and women in Osogbo?
- iii. How does social media use influence the relationship expectations of single men and women in Osogbo?
- iv. What types of relationship expectations are evoked by social media use among single men and women in Osogbo?
- v. Which aspects of social media use most influence the relationship expectations of single men and women in Osogbo?

Hypotheses

1. H_0 : There is no significant relationship between social media use and the relationship expectations of single men and women.
2. H_0 : There is no significant difference between single men and women social media use and its influences on their relationship expectations.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it examines how social media shapes the relationship expectations of single men and women at a time when digital platforms heavily influence interpersonal behavior. As social media continues to grow in popularity, especially among young adults, understanding its impact on romantic beliefs and expectations has become increasingly important. The findings of this study will contribute to a deeper understanding of how online interactions and exposure to relationship-related content shape individuals’ perceptions of love, communication, commitment, and desirable partner qualities. The study will also benefit relationship counselors, psychologists, and mental health

professionals, as it provides insights into how unrealistic expectations formed through social media may influence dating patterns and relationship readiness. By understanding the specific ways social media affects single individuals, professionals can offer more effective guidance, counseling strategies, and educational programs aimed at promoting healthy relationship development. Additionally, the study will be useful to educators, youth development workers, and family life practitioners. As many young adults rely on social media as a primary source of relationship information, educators can use the findings to design awareness programs that encourage realistic expectations and critical consumption of online content. The research will further benefit social media researchers and scholars, as it adds empirical data to existing literature on gender differences in social media use and relationship perception. By comparing single men and women, the study highlights important variations that may inform future studies in communication, psychology, and digital culture.

Finally, the study will benefit single men and women themselves, as it will increase awareness of how social media may be shaping their beliefs and expectations, often unconsciously. Understanding these influences can help individuals develop healthier attitudes toward relationships, reduce unrealistic expectations, and make more informed decisions in their romantic lives.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Review

Social Media

Social media refers to a collection of internet-based applications that enable users to create, share, and interact with content and connect with others across digital networks. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) define social media as “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content”. Boyd and Ellison (2021) define social network sites as web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. This definition focuses on the structural and relational components of social media, emphasizing networks, connectivity, and visibility.

Safko and Brake (2019) describe social media as an online, digital tool that enables people to communicate, share, collaborate, and interact in virtual communities and networks. This perspective highlights the communicative and collaborative functions of social media, framing it as a medium that facilitates both information exchange and social interaction. According to Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, and Silvestre (2021), social media can be understood in terms of its functional building blocks, which include identity, conversations, sharing, presence, relationships, reputation, and groups. This functional perspective emphasizes that social media is not a single platform but a set of technological tools that allow users to manage their identity, maintain social connections, and participate in collective activities. From a psychological standpoint, social media is also viewed as a space for self-expression, identity exploration, and social comparison. Valkenburg, Peter, and Schouten (2023) define social networking sites as web-based communication platforms that allow users to construct a public or semi-public profile, articulate connections with other users, and interact with others’ content to manage impressions and maintain social ties.

Fundamentally, social media provides platforms where individuals can communicate, collaborate, and participate in virtual communities in real time or asynchronously. These platforms have transformed traditional communication patterns by shifting the focus from one-way dissemination of information to interactive, participatory engagement. The rise of smartphones, improved internet accessibility, and the proliferation of digital devices have further accelerated the growth of social media, making it an integral part of daily life, particularly for young adults.

Types of Social Media

Social media encompasses a wide range of platforms that serve diverse functions, including communication, content sharing, collaboration, and social networking. Scholars often categorize social media based on its primary purpose and functionality, recognizing that these platforms influence user behavior in different ways (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Broadly, social media can be classified into several

major types: social networking sites, microblogging platforms, multimedia sharing sites, messaging applications, and content communities. Social networking sites (SNS) are platforms designed primarily for building and maintaining relationships, connecting with friends, family, colleagues, or acquaintances. Examples include Facebook and LinkedIn, which allow users to create personal profiles, connect with others, share content, and participate in online communities (Boyd & Ellison, 2021). SNSs emphasize relational interactions and the construction of online social networks, making them significant spaces for socialization, identity formation, and information exchange.

Microblogging platforms, such as Twitter/X and Tumblr, enable users to share short updates, opinions, or media content with followers. These platforms emphasize brevity, immediacy, and widespread dissemination of information. Microblogging can influence perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors by exposing users to trending topics, opinions, and real-time social commentary (Kietzmann et al., 2021). Users often engage in discussions, debates, or awareness campaigns, making these platforms influential in shaping social norms and individual expectations, including those related to relationships.

Multimedia sharing sites focus on visual and audio content, allowing users to upload, share, and comment on images, videos, and music. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube are prime examples, offering avenues for self-expression, entertainment, and social interaction. On these platforms, users often engage in content curation and comparison, which can affect self-image, social identity, and relationship expectations (Vogel et al., 2024). The popularity of such platforms among young adults in Nigeria has grown rapidly, with Instagram and TikTok particularly influencing perceptions of lifestyle, romance, and social status.

Messaging applications are platforms designed for private or group communication, enabling real-time interaction via text, voice, or video calls. Examples include WhatsApp, Telegram, and Messenger. While these platforms are primarily used for communication, they also facilitate information sharing, social bonding, and community participation. In Nigeria WhatsApp is widely used for maintaining friendships, family connections, and romantic relationships, allowing individuals to negotiate relationship expectations, express emotions, and coordinate social activities. Content communities are platforms that allow users to create, share, and interact with content based on shared interests or expertise. Examples include Reddit, Pinterest, and Quora, which focus on knowledge exchange, discussion, and collaborative content creation. These communities often influence behavior, opinions, and expectations by providing a space for users to engage with like-minded individuals, seek advice, or learn about social norms and relationship dynamics (Safko & Brake, 2019). It is also important to note that many platforms serve hybrid functions, combining features of multiple social media types. For instance, Instagram integrates multimedia sharing, social networking, and messaging functionalities, while TikTok allows both content creation and interaction with followers. This convergence has amplified the influence of social media on users' attitudes, behaviors, and expectations, as individuals are simultaneously exposed to diverse content and interactive experiences.

Function of Social Media

General trends in social media use indicate a growing dependency among young adults. Globally, young adults are among the most active users of social media, spending several hours per day on various platforms. According to the Pew Research Center (2021), approximately 84% of adults aged 18–29 in the United States use at least one social media platform regularly. This pattern is mirrored in developing countries, including Nigeria, where urban youth increasingly adopt social media for socialization, entertainment, and information-seeking purposes (Omotayo, 2020). Several factors contribute to this trend, including the accessibility of affordable smartphones, high-speed internet, and the desire for social connection and self-expression. Social media also offers platforms for individuals to cultivate online identities, present idealized versions of themselves, and interact with broader social networks beyond immediate geographic boundaries (Zhao et al., 2018).

Among young adults, social media use serves multiple purposes. First, it fulfills social and relational needs, providing avenues for maintaining friendships, establishing romantic connections, and participating in peer networks (Pempek, Yermolayeva, & Calvert, 2019). Second, it caters to informational needs, as platforms enable users to access news, educational content, and trending topics. Third, social media serves entertainment purposes, offering interactive content such as videos, games, and memes that provide amusement and relaxation (Whiting & Williams, 2023). Finally, social media acts as a medium for self-presentation and identity formation, allowing individuals to curate profiles, post selectively, and manage

how they are perceived by peers and broader audiences (Manago et al., 2022). These multiple functions illustrate the versatility of social media and its centrality in contemporary social life.

In recent years, patterns of engagement have shifted with the emergence of algorithm-driven content and features that encourage continuous participation. Platforms like TikTok employ highly personalized algorithms to deliver content tailored to user preferences, while Instagram and Facebook use feeds, stories, and reels to maintain attention and engagement. This has contributed to increased screen time, frequent checking of notifications, and heightened exposure to peer-generated content, all of which may influence perceptions, attitudes, and expectations regarding social relationships (Andreassen et al., 2022). Moreover, social media facilitates a form of constant social comparison, as users are exposed to curated depictions of others' lives, which can shape their self-evaluations and expectations, particularly in areas such as physical appearance, social status, and romantic relationships (Vogel et al., 2024).

In Nigeria social media has become a central medium for communication and social interaction. Studies indicate that platforms such as WhatsApp, Instagram, and TikTok are highly favored among young adults for networking, information sharing, and entertainment (Omotayo, 2020). These platforms not only enable peer interaction but also provide exposure to cultural trends, global lifestyles, and normative behaviors regarding relationships, career ambitions, and social conduct. The pervasive nature of social media among this demographic highlights its potential influence on the relationship expectations of single men and women, as online interactions and observations contribute to the formation of ideals, aspirations, and evaluative standards in romantic contexts.

Relationship Expectations

Relationship expectations refer to the beliefs, standards, and assumptions that individuals hold regarding the behaviors, roles, and attributes of their romantic partners or the dynamics of a romantic relationship. These expectations act as a cognitive framework that guides how individuals interpret interactions, evaluate partner behavior, and anticipate the progression and quality of a relationship (Knobloch & Solomon, 2023). Relationship expectations can be both explicit, such as communicated desires, and implicit, formed subconsciously through personal experiences, social norms, and media exposure. Relationship expectations are widely discussed in social and psychological literature as the beliefs, standards, or anticipations individuals hold regarding the behavior, roles, and outcomes of their interpersonal and romantic relationships. Fletcher and Simpson (2020) define relationship expectations as the personal ideals and standards that individuals hold regarding what a partner should provide emotionally, physically, and socially in a romantic relationship. This definition emphasizes that expectations are both personal and relational, influencing how individuals evaluate partners and the overall quality of their relationships.

According to Guerrero and Floyd (2022), relationship expectations are socially and culturally informed standards that individuals use to interpret partner behaviors, evaluate relationship satisfaction, and navigate relational roles. This definition brings attention to the social and normative dimensions of expectations, noting that cultural context, family upbringing, and peer influence significantly shape what individuals anticipate in a relationship. Hazan and Shaver (1987), in their attachment theory framework, conceptualize relationship expectations as internalized schemas about intimacy, trust, and commitment that guide romantic behavior and influence the perception of partner responsiveness. From a behavioral perspective, Muise, Christofides, and Desmarais (2019) explain that relationship expectations are standards and anticipations shaped by personal experience, media exposure, and social interactions, which dictate acceptable behaviors and relational outcomes. This definition integrates media influence, acknowledging that exposure to social media, television, and peer interactions informs what individuals perceive as normative or desirable in romantic partnerships.

Relationship expectations are multi-dimensional and can be categorized into emotional, financial, physical, lifestyle, and communication expectations. Emotional expectations refer to desires for love, empathy, understanding, support, and affection from a partner (Finkenauer, Engels, & Baumeister, 2024). Single individuals expect partners to respond to emotional needs, validate feelings, and provide companionship and security. Financial expectations concern economic responsibility, stability, and contribution in the relationship, encompassing shared expenses, financial planning, or support. These expectations are particularly relevant in contexts where economic considerations strongly influence relationship decisions, such as among young adults in urban Nigeria, where financial security is often

intertwined with cultural perceptions of suitability for partnership. Physical expectations involve sexual intimacy, physical attraction, and displays of affection. These expectations are shaped not only by personal desire but also by societal norms, peer influence, and exposure to media portrayals of idealized relationships (Muise, Christofides, & Desmarais, 2019).

Lifestyle expectations reflect compatibility in daily routines, values, leisure interests, and long-term goals, ensuring that partners can harmoniously navigate life together. For instance, young adults in Osogbo may expect a partner to share similar educational ambitions, cultural practices, or religious values, which are significant factors in partner selection in Nigerian society. Communication expectations involve preferences for how partners interact verbally and non-verbally, manage conflict, express affection, and maintain openness. Effective communication is widely recognized as a cornerstone of relationship satisfaction and stability (Guerrero & Floyd, 2020). These five dimensions collectively illustrate the multifaceted nature of relationship expectations and highlight the diverse ways in which individuals assess potential partners and relationships. The formation of relationship expectations is influenced by a combination of personal experiences, social norms, and media exposure. Personal experiences include attachment styles, family dynamics, and previous romantic encounters, which shape anticipations regarding partner responsiveness, emotional availability, and relational conduct (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). For example, individuals raised in supportive family environments may expect similar emotional consistency from partners, while those with histories of neglect or instability may have lower or guarded expectations. Social norms also play a critical role. Cultural, religious, and community values inform what is considered acceptable behavior, desirable traits, and appropriate roles within a relationship. Peer groups further influence these norms, as young adults often adjust their expectations to align with the standards and experiences of their friends and social networks (Finkel et al., 2022).

Media exposure, particularly through social media, has become an increasingly important source of expectation formation among young adults. Platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and WhatsApp expose users to curated depictions of romantic relationships, often emphasizing idealized emotional support, financial stability, physical attractiveness, and lifestyle alignment (Chou & Edge, 2022). These portrayals can establish benchmarks that influence users' own relationship standards. Social media also amplifies social comparison processes, where users evaluate their own or potential partners' qualities relative to others online, reinforcing or reshaping expectations in the process (Vogel et al., 2024).

Social Media and Human Behavior

Social media has transformed human behavior, perceptions, and attitudes in profound ways, particularly among young adults. The interactive and pervasive nature of these platforms allows users to engage with diverse content, communicate with peers, and observe the behaviors of others, which can shape cognition, emotions, and social expectations (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, & Silvestre, 2021). By offering immediate feedback through likes, comments, shares, and followers, social media reinforces certain behaviors while discouraging others, creating feedback loops that influence how individuals perceive themselves and their social environment. Consequently, social media is not merely a tool for communication; it functions as a psychological and social influence mechanism, affecting decision-making, self-perception, and interpersonal conduct.

One significant way social media affects human behavior is through its influence on social interactions. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp enable constant connectivity, allowing users to maintain relationships over long distances, participate in group activities online, and engage in peer networking (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2017). However, this constant connectivity also introduces new behavioral patterns. Individuals may prioritize online interactions over face-to-face encounters, seek validation through social feedback, or selectively present aspects of their lives to create idealized online personas (Manago, Graham, Greenfield, & Salimkhan, 2020). These behaviors can shape social attitudes, as individuals begin to equate social approval or popularity with personal worth, leading to changes in interpersonal dynamics, social priorities, and even conflict resolution strategies.

Social media also exerts a considerable influence on self-image and self-perception. Exposure to curated images, highlight reels, and idealized portrayals of peers and influencers often encourages social comparison, which can affect self-esteem, body image, and identity formation (Vogel, Rose, Roberts, & Eckles, 2024). Upward social comparison, where users compare themselves to those perceived as superior, can generate feelings of inadequacy, anxiety, or pressure to conform to perceived social norms. Conversely,

downward comparison may boost self-esteem but create distorted perceptions of one's social standing (Buunk & Gibbons, 2021). In urban Nigerian contexts, young adults often encounter globalized lifestyle representations alongside local cultural norms, creating hybrid standards for attractiveness, lifestyle choices, and relational behaviors. These comparisons can directly influence expectations for relationships, career ambitions, and personal achievements.

The influence of social media on romantic relationships is particularly pronounced. Platforms provide unprecedented access to information about potential partners, expose users to varying relationship norms, and facilitate both the initiation and maintenance of romantic connections (Fox & Warber, 2024). Social media enables individuals to monitor partners' behaviors, communicate frequently, and display relational status publicly. While these functions can strengthen intimacy and enhance connectivity, they may also foster unrealistic expectations, jealousy, or pressure to conform to idealized romantic standards. For single men and women in Osogbo, constant exposure to peers' and influencers' curated romantic content may influence their perceptions of ideal partners, acceptable behaviors, and relationship milestones. Social media thereby shapes not only what individuals expect from partners but also how they approach dating, courtship, and communication in romantic contexts.

Moreover, social media's behavioral influence extends beyond the personal to the social and cultural level. By disseminating trends, normative behaviors, and popular values, platforms shape collective attitudes and expectations within peer groups and communities. Individuals often adopt behaviors and attitudes observed online, such as communication styles, fashion choices, leisure activities, and social norms, to align with perceived social standards (Pempek, Yermolayeva, & Calvert, 2019). In the Nigerian urban context, these influences are amplified by high mobile internet penetration, widespread social media usage, and the integration of globalized content into everyday life. Consequently, social media acts as both a mirror and a mold: it reflects societal trends while simultaneously shaping user behavior, perceptions, and attitudes.

Theoretical Framework

Social Comparison Theory

Social Comparison Theory (SCT) was first proposed by Leon Festinger in 1954 as a framework for understanding how individuals evaluate themselves in relation to others (Festinger, 1954). Festinger posited that humans have an innate drive to assess their abilities, opinions, and social standing, and that in the absence of objective standards, people rely on comparisons with others to form judgments. The theory emphasizes that individuals are motivated to compare themselves with others who are similar in relevant attributes, as comparisons with dissimilar individuals provide little meaningful information. This process of evaluation influences self-perception, self-esteem, and behavior in significant ways. The theory identifies two primary forms of social comparison: upward comparison and downward comparison. Upward comparison occurs when an individual evaluates themselves against someone perceived as better off in a specific domain, which can inspire self-improvement but may also generate feelings of inadequacy, envy, or lowered self-esteem (Buunk & Gibbons, 2017). Conversely, downward comparison involves evaluating oneself against someone perceived as worse off, which can enhance self-esteem but may also foster complacency or inflated self-perceptions (Collins, 1996). Social Comparison Theory further identifies three key motivational drives behind comparison: self-evaluation, aimed at accurate assessment of one's abilities or opinions; self-enhancement, focused on maintaining or boosting self-esteem; and self-improvement, which encourages learning from those perceived as superior (Suls, Martin, & Wheeler, 2012).

The theory has been widely applied to the study of social behavior, including interpersonal relationships, peer interactions, and media consumption. With the rise of social media, SCT has gained renewed relevance. Platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok provide continuous exposure to curated portrayals of others' lives, creating frequent opportunities for both upward and downward comparisons (Vogel, Rose, Roberts, & Eckles, 2024). Users may compare themselves to peers, influencers, or idealized images, shaping expectations regarding appearance, lifestyle, social status, and relational behaviors. For example, single men and women in Osogbo may develop heightened expectations of romantic partners based on the lifestyles, physical attractiveness, and communication patterns they observe online. Upward comparisons may lead to idealized or even unrealistic standards for potential

partners, while downward comparisons may provide reassurance about one's own desirability or social standing.

Despite its utility, SCT has faced criticism. Festinger's original assumption that individuals primarily compare with similar others has been questioned, as research shows that people often compare themselves with dissimilar others, particularly in aspirational or competitive contexts (Mussweiler, 2013). Critics also note that the theory overemphasizes self-evaluation while underestimating other motivational factors such as social influence, cultural norms, or technological mediation (Wood, 1996). In the context of social media, the frequency, visibility, and curated nature of online content amplify comparison processes in ways that Festinger could not have anticipated, affecting both psychological well-being and relational expectations (Vogel et al., 2024). For this study, SCT provides a theoretical lens to understand how exposure to social media content influences relationship expectations among single men and women in Osogbo. It explains the cognitive and emotional processes through which individuals interpret and internalize information about potential partners. Observing peers' and influencers' romantic behaviors online may lead to comparisons that shape beliefs about desirable partner attributes, communication habits, and lifestyle standards. Additionally, SCT highlights why gender differences may emerge in comparison processes, as men and women often focus on different attributes or relational goals when evaluating potential partners. By applying SCT, this study can explore the psychological mechanisms behind social media's influence on relationship expectations, providing a foundation for understanding the interplay between online exposure, social comparison, and individual expectation formation.

Uses and Gratifications Theory

The Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) was developed by Elihu Katz, Jay Blumler, and Michael Gurevitch in 1973 to explain why individuals actively choose particular media to satisfy their personal needs (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973). Unlike earlier media effects theories that focused on passive audiences and the influence of media content, UGT emphasizes the active role of the media user in selecting content according to their motivations and goals (Ruggiero, 2020). The central premise of the theory is that media consumption is purposeful and serves to fulfill specific psychological or social needs, rather than being a random or purely habitual activity. These needs may include information seeking, personal identity formation, entertainment, social interaction, and integration into social networks (Katz et al., 1973). UGT suggests that the gratifications obtained from media use are highly subjective, as the same medium can satisfy different needs for different users. For instance, one individual may use social media to follow news about potential partners, while another may engage with it primarily for entertainment or to seek social validation. The theory also emphasizes that users actively evaluate the effectiveness of media in meeting their needs and adjust their usage patterns accordingly, reflecting a dynamic interaction between the individual and media environment (Whiting & Williams, 2023).

In the context of social media and romantic relationships, UGT has become particularly relevant. Platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and Twitter allow users to deliberately engage with content that aligns with their personal motivations. Single individuals may use social media to monitor potential partners, understand prevailing social norms regarding relationships, or gather relational advice from peers and influencers (Whiting & Williams, 2023). Such goal-directed engagement means that social media exposure is not passive, but guided by the user's underlying needs, which may, in turn, shape perceptions and expectations about relationships. For example, a single woman may follow lifestyle or relationship influencers to gain insights into desirable partner qualities, whereas a single man may monitor peers' dating experiences to inform his own expectations regarding communication, commitment, or social status.

Despite its widespread application, UGT has been subject to criticism. Some scholars argue that the theory overemphasizes user agency while underestimating the influence of media content, structure, and broader social forces on behavior (West & Turner, 2020). Additionally, UGT has been criticized for being largely descriptive rather than predictive, meaning it explains why media are used but does not always predict the behavioral outcomes of media consumption. Critics also note that the theory may neglect the unintentional or subconscious ways in which media can shape attitudes, including the internalization of social norms and expectations conveyed through online content (Ruggiero, 2020).

Nonetheless, UGT provides a strong framework for understanding the motivational dimension of social media use, especially in relation to romantic relationships. For the present study, which investigates the influence of social media on the relationship expectations of single men and women in Osogbo, UGT is

particularly useful. It allows the researcher to examine why individuals choose to use social media whether for comparison, entertainment, information, or social interaction and how these motives influence the formation of expectations regarding potential partners. By integrating UGT, the study can explore the active decision-making processes behind media engagement, complementing Social Comparison Theory's explanation of the cognitive and emotional mechanisms triggered by social media exposure.

Empirical Review

Several studies have explored the relationship between social media use and romantic expectations, providing valuable insights for this research. For instance, Smith and Duggan (2023) examined the impact of social media on dating behaviors among young adults in the United States. Their study aimed to understand how social media platforms influence relationship formation. Using a survey design with 1,200 respondents, they found that frequent social media use was associated with higher expectations of partner availability and responsiveness. However, the study was limited by its reliance on self-reported data, which could introduce bias. Similarly, Valkenburg and Peter (2019) investigated how online communication affects adolescents' and young adults' romantic relationship expectations. The study aimed to determine whether online interactions influenced perceptions of ideal partners. A mixed-methods approach was used, combining surveys with in-depth interviews among 500 participants. Findings indicated that social media exposure increased the likelihood of idealizing partners based on online profiles, though the study was limited to a Western context and could not be generalized globally.

In a study by Hannah S. Shockley (2017), titled "How Social Media is perceived to affect romantic relationship satisfaction," the author aimed to explore how social media use affects perceptions of relationship satisfaction among young adults. Using an online survey (via Qualtrics), the study asked participants about their social media habits and perceived effects on trust, satisfaction, jealousy, and overall relationship quality. The findings suggested that many participants perceived social media to have a negative effect on romantic relationships especially in terms of trust and satisfaction though not all hypothesized effects (e.g. jealousy) were strongly supported. A limitation of this study is its reliance on perceptions rather than directly measuring actual relationship outcomes, which may introduce bias from subjective self-reporting.

Shangyi Li (2021) conducted a study titled "The Impact of Social Media on Intimate Relationships among Chinese College Students." The objective was to examine how social media influences perceptions of intimate relationships among young adults, including their views on commitment, love permanence, gender roles, and emotional independence. Using a questionnaire distributed among college students, the researchers found that heavy social media exposure was associated with relationship dissatisfaction and altered expectations many respondents reported more cautious attitudes toward commitment, greater emphasis on financial and emotional independence, and more concern about traditional relationship norms. A noted limitation was that the study focused only on college students, making generalization to older adults or non-student populations difficult.

In a broader meta-analytic review published in the journal *Computers in Human Behavior*, titled "Social networking site use and relationship quality: A double-edged sword", researchers analyzed 53 independent datasets involving 13,873 participants to assess how social-network-site (SNS) use correlates with relationship quality. The meta-analysis revealed that SNS use has both positive and negative associations with relationship quality. On one hand, SNS use can improve relational security and communication; on the other, excessive or public-focused SNS behaviors can harm intimacy and satisfaction. A limitation is that aggregated data from diverse studies may hide important context-specific differences (platform type, culture, user age) and cannot fully resolve causality.

Another important empirical work by Abdulgaffar Olawale Arikewuyo (2019) titled "An Evaluation of the Effects of Social Media on Romantic Relationships" examined how use of platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Snapchat affects romantic relationships. The study sampled 376 university students from various countries and used questionnaires to assess dimensions such as partner monitoring, trust, infidelity, satisfaction, and "relationship gratifications." The results showed that social media use was a significant predictor of relationship gratifications and increased partner monitoring, though it did not show a clear statistical link with trust, infidelity, or distraction. One limitation is that the study focused on students (largely young, possibly unmarried), so findings may not apply to different demographics.

Skye Bouffard and colleagues (2021) in the article “Social Media and Romantic Relationship: Excessive Social Media Use Leads to Relationship Conflicts, Negative Outcomes, and Addiction via Mediated Pathways” studied how intensive use of a particular platform (Instagram) affects relationship satisfaction, conflicts, and potentially social-media addiction. Employing structural equation modeling, the study found that increased Instagram usage was linked to lower relationship satisfaction, which in turn related to greater relationship conflict and negative outcomes, and even risk of addictive Instagram behaviors; but positive factors such as willingness to make sacrifices for one’s partner could mitigate those adverse effects. A limitation is that the study looked only at Instagram and may not generalize to other platforms or cultural contexts.

Li-Wei Wei (2024) in the study “Repercussions of Social Media Addiction on Relationship Closeness and Relationship Satisfaction amongst Chinese Undergraduates” examined how social media addiction relates to relationship intimacy and satisfaction among 583 undergraduates. Using validated scales to measure social media addiction and relationship closeness/satisfaction, the study found that high levels of social media addiction were significantly associated with lower closeness and satisfaction in romantic relationships. However, because the sample was limited to undergraduates and mostly young adults, the findings might not apply to older or non-student populations.

The study titled “Evaluating the use of social media in escalating conflicts in romantic relationships” by Abdulgaffar Olawale Arikewuyo and colleagues (2020) investigated how social media use relates to relationship conflict. They sampled 373 individuals in romantic relationships, and found a significant relationship between social media use and conflict with jealousy, monitoring, and infidelity (or perceived infidelity) being mediating variables. A limitation is that the sample consisted of people already in relationships (not singles), which may limit direct applicability to single-person expectations but offers insight into possible consequences of expectations formed when single.

Gül Esra Atalay, Yağmur Tanrıverdi, and Yıldız Arıcı (2024) in their qualitative study “Social Media Use in Romantic Relationships: A Qualitative Research” explored how social media affects the emotional dynamics of couples. Through interviews, they found that while social media can facilitate communication and emotional closeness for dating couples especially those separated physically it also often triggers jealousy, trust issues, and controlling behaviors initiated or amplified via online platforms. As with many qualitative studies, the findings are rich in context but limited in generalizability; results depend heavily on the small sample and participants’ willingness to be open.

In a slightly different angle, a 2024 review by Rebekah L. Rainey and Kelly L. Arney titled “The Romantic Influencer: A Review of Social Media’s Impact on Relationship Satisfaction” synthesized findings from numerous studies over the past decade to assess how social media usage relates to romantic satisfaction. Their review noted that while many studies report negative effects (jealousy, unrealistic expectations, conflict), others indicate potential positives, such as increased communication, easier maintenance of long-distance relationships, and greater relational flexibility reinforcing the idea that social media’s influence is not uniformly negative or positive, but depends heavily on how it is used. A limitation is that, as a literature review, it relies on the quality and heterogeneity of existing studies; thus, conclusions are limited by inconsistencies and varying methodologies in the sources reviewed.

Johnson, Adams, and Cox (2021) focused on gender differences in social media influence on dating expectations. The study’s objective was to examine how men and women differ in forming relationship expectations due to online content. They used a quantitative survey of 800 college students and found that women were more likely than men to compare potential partners with profiles seen on social media. A noted limitation was the focus on college students, which may not reflect broader populations.

In Nigeria, Adeyemi (2022) conducted a study on social media use and relationship perceptions among youths in Lagos. The study sought to identify the link between social media engagement and expectations of romantic partners. Using a cross-sectional survey with 400 respondents, Adeyemi found that social media increased the desire for partners with certain lifestyle and material attributes. Limitations included the small sample size and the focus on urban areas only.

Brown and McDaniel (2024) explored the psychological effects of social media on relationship satisfaction and expectations. Their objective was to determine whether online comparisons affect what individuals expect in their romantic lives. A longitudinal survey of 600 participants revealed that exposure to idealized online relationships often led to unrealistic expectations in real-life relationships. The limitation

was that the study did not differentiate between types of social media platforms, which could affect outcomes.

Williams et al. (2018) studied social media influence on partner selection among young adults in the UK. Their study aimed to identify the aspects of social media that most strongly shape partner expectations. Using questionnaires and content analysis of participants' online interactions, they discovered that lifestyle and appearance-related posts had the strongest impact on expectations. However, the study was limited by its cross-sectional nature, which prevented establishing causality.

Chen and Li (2018) investigated the role of social media in shaping relationship norms in China. The study's objective was to examine how online exposure to peers' romantic experiences influences individual expectations. Using surveys of 700 respondents, the findings showed that individuals who frequently engaged with friends' relationship content had higher standards for partner behaviors. Limitations included self-reporting bias and cultural specificity.

Miller and Hayes (2020) conducted a study on social media's role in romantic jealousy and expectation formation among young adults in the US. The study aimed to explore how social media comparisons affect expectations in relationships. Using an online survey with 500 participants, they found that heavy social media users were more likely to experience elevated expectations and jealousy. The limitation was that the study did not account for offline social influences.

In a similar context, Oladele and Akinyemi (2019) examined social media use and relationship expectations among university students in Ibadan, Nigeria. The study sought to explore how online content shapes expectations for future partners. Using a survey of 350 students, they reported that social media exposure influenced students to expect higher social status and lifestyle compatibility in partners. Limitations included the study being restricted to a single institution.

Finally, Lee and Sung (2020) explored how Instagram usage affects perceptions of romantic ideals among young adults in South Korea. Their objective was to examine the correlation between time spent on social media and ideal partner expectations. A survey of 600 respondents showed that heavy Instagram users tended to form unrealistic expectations based on curated online images. The study was limited by focusing only on one platform and using a cross-sectional design.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design to examine how social media use influences relationship expectations among single men and women in Osogbo. The population comprised unmarried individuals aged 18–45 residing in Osogbo, estimated at 240,169 persons, from which a sample size of 399 respondents was determined using the Taro Yamane formula. A multi-stage sampling technique—combining purposive and simple random sampling—was used to ensure representativeness. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire featuring mainly closed-ended questions (Likert scale and multiple-choice formats). The instrument's validity was ensured through expert review (content and face validity), while its reliability was confirmed via a pilot study, yielding a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.82. Data analysis involved both descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, mean scores) and inferential statistics, specifically the Pearson correlation coefficient, to test the relationship between variables at a 5% level of significance.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Table 1: Age Distribution of Respondents (N = 399)

Age Range (Years)	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Cumulative Percentage (%)
18–22	96	24.1	24.1
23–27	118	29.6	53.7
28–32	84	21.1	74.8
33–37	58	14.5	89.3
38–45	43	10.7	100.0
Total	399	100.0	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 1 shows the age distribution of the 399 respondents in the study. The highest proportion of respondents falls within the 23–27 years age group, representing 29.6% of the sample, followed by those aged 18–22 years at 24.1%. Together, respondents below 28 years constitute 53.7%, indicating that over half of the participants are young adults. Respondents aged 28–32 years make up 21.1% of the sample, while those aged 33–37 years and 38–45 years account for 14.5% and 10.7% respectively. The distribution shows that the study largely involved younger adults, who are more likely to be active users of social media, making the age composition suitable for examining the influence of social media on relationship expectations.

Table 2: Gender Distribution of Respondents (N = 399)

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Cumulative Percentage (%)
Male	201	50.4	50.4
Female	198	49.6	100.0
Total	399	100.0	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 2 presents the gender distribution of the 399 respondents in the study. The table shows that 201 respondents (50.4%) are male, while 198 respondents (49.6%) are female. The cumulative percentage reaches 100%, indicating that all respondents are accounted for. The distribution is almost evenly split between males and females, suggesting a balanced representation of both genders. This balance is important for the study as it ensures that the influence of social media on relationship expectations is examined fairly across both male and female single adults in Osogbo.

Table 3: Marital Status of Respondents (N = 399)

Marital Status	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Cumulative Percentage (%)
Single (Never Married)	324	81.2	81.2
Divorced	50	12.5	93.7
Widowed	25	6.3	100.0
Total	399	100.0	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 3 shows the marital status of the 399 respondents. The majority of respondents, 324 (81.2%), are single (never married), reflecting the focus of the study on single men and women. Divorced respondents account for 50 (12.5%), while widowed respondents make up the smallest group with 25 (6.3%). The distribution indicates that most participants are single, which aligns with the study's objective of examining how social media use influences the relationship expectations of single adults in Osogbo. The inclusion of divorced and widowed respondents also allows for a broader understanding of social media's impact on relationship expectations across different experiences of singlehood.

Table 4: Occupation of Respondents (N = 399)

Occupation	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Cumulative Percentage (%)
Student	140	35.1	35.1
Civil Servant	85	21.3	56.4
Trader	72	18.0	74.4
Artisan	48	12.0	86.4
Professional	54	13.6	100.0
Total	399	100.0	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 4 presents the occupational distribution of the 399 respondents. The table shows that the largest group of respondents are students (140 respondents, 35.1%), followed by civil servants (85 respondents, 21.3%). Traders make up 18.0%, professionals 13.6%, and artisans 12.0% of the sample. The distribution indicates a diverse representation of occupations among single adults in Osogbo, with a significant portion

being students. This diversity is important as it ensures that the study captures the perspectives of respondents from different social and economic backgrounds, which may influence their social media use and relationship expectations.

Table 5: Extent of Social Media Use (N = 399)

S/N	Statement	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Decision
1	I use social media every day.	399	4.3	0.8	Positive
2	I spend a significant amount of time on social media daily.	399	4.0	0.9	Positive
3	I use more than one social media platform regularly.	399	3.8	1.0	Positive
4	I follow pages or accounts related to relationships and dating.	399	3.5	1.1	Positive
5	I use social media to meet or learn about potential romantic partners.	399	3.6	1.0	Positive
	Valid N (listwise)	399	3.84	0.96	Positive

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 5 presents respondents' perceptions of the extent of social media use. The mean scores indicate that all the listed items were rated positively, showing that social media is widely used among the respondents. The highest-rated statement was daily use of social media (Mean = 4.3), suggesting a strong consensus that respondents are consistently active on these platforms. Spending a significant amount of time on social media daily also received a high mean score (Mean = 4.0), reflecting the centrality of social media in respondents' everyday routines. Using multiple social media platforms regularly (Mean = 3.8) and following pages or accounts related to relationships and dating (Mean = 3.5) were similarly rated positively, indicating that respondents engage with diverse platforms and content, including relationship-oriented material. Furthermore, using social media to meet or learn about potential romantic partners (Mean = 3.6) shows that these platforms play a role not only in social interaction but also in shaping perceptions and experiences of romantic relationships. The standard deviations indicate moderate variation in responses, suggesting that while most respondents are highly engaged, there are differences in the intensity and purpose of social media use. Overall, the findings imply that social media is an integral part of the respondents' daily lives and may significantly influence their attitudes, expectations, and behaviors, particularly regarding social and romantic interactions.

Table 6: Relationship Expectations of Single Men and Women (N = 399)

S/N	Statement	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Decision
1	I have clear expectations about what I want in a romantic relationship.	399	4.2	0.9	Positive
2	I expect honesty and transparency from a future partner.	399	4.4	0.8	Positive
3	I expect emotional support from a future partner.	399	4.3	0.9	Positive
4	I expect my partner to share similar values and lifestyle with me.	399	4.1	1.0	Positive
5	I believe effective communication is essential in a relationship.	399	4.5	0.7	Positive
	Valid N (listwise)	399	4.3	0.87	Positive

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 6 presents respondents' perceptions of their relationship expectations. The mean scores indicate that all listed statements were rated positively, suggesting that respondents have clear and well-defined expectations regarding romantic relationships. The highest-rated statement was the belief that effective communication is essential in a relationship (Mean = 4.5), reflecting a strong consensus on the

importance of open and honest dialogue between partners. Expectations of honesty and transparency from a future partner (Mean = 4.4) and the expectation of emotional support (Mean = 4.3) were also rated highly, highlighting the value respondents place on trust, reliability, and emotional connection in relationships. Respondents further emphasized the importance of having a partner who shares similar values and lifestyle (Mean = 4.1), indicating that compatibility is a significant consideration in their relationship decisions. Overall, the average mean of 4.3 suggests that single men and women hold high standards and specific criteria for their ideal partners. The standard deviations show relatively low variation, which implies that these expectations are widely shared among respondents. These findings indicate that relationship expectations are well-established and may guide respondents' choices in seeking and evaluating potential romantic partners.

Table 7: Influence of Social Media on Relationship Expectations (N = 399)

S/N	Statement	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Decision
1	Social media influences what I expect from a romantic partner.	399	3.9	0.9	Positive
2	I compare potential partners with people I see on social media.	399	3.7	1.0	Positive
3	Social media has increased my expectations in relationships.	399	3.8	0.9	Positive
4	Social media makes me more selective when choosing a partner.	399	3.6	1.0	Positive
5	Relationships portrayed on social media influence how I view real-life relationships.	399	3.8	0.9	Positive
	Valid N (listwise)	399	3.76	0.94	Positive

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 7 presents respondents' perceptions of the influence of social media on their relationship expectations. The mean scores indicate that all listed statements were rated positively, suggesting that social media has a noticeable impact on how respondents view and evaluate romantic relationships. The highest-rated statement was that social media influences what they expect from a romantic partner (Mean = 3.9), reflecting that online content shapes respondents' ideas of ideal partners. Respondents also reported comparing potential partners with people they see on social media (Mean = 3.7) and noted that social media has increased their expectations in relationships (Mean = 3.8), highlighting the role of online portrayals in raising standards or ideals. Additionally, social media was reported to make respondents more selective when choosing a partner (Mean = 3.6) and to influence how they view real-life relationships (Mean = 3.8), indicating that virtual experiences affect offline behaviors and perceptions. Overall, the average mean of 3.76 suggests that social media plays a significant role in shaping relationship expectations, with relatively moderate variation among respondents. These findings imply that online interactions and content are important factors in influencing attitudes toward romantic relationships and partner selection.

Table 8: Aspects of Social Media Use Influencing Relationship Expectations (N = 399)

S/N	Statement	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Decision
1	Relationship advice or posts on social media influence my expectations.	399	3.7	0.9	Positive
2	The lifestyle and appearance of people on social media shape my idea of an ideal partner.	399	3.8	0.9	Positive
3	Likes, comments, and shares on social media affect my perception of relationship success.	399	3.6	1.0	Positive
4	Friends' or influencers' relationship experiences on social media affect my expectations.	399	3.7	0.9	Positive
5	Relationship-related content influences my expectations more than other social media content.	399	3.8	0.9	Positive

Valid N (listwise)	399	3.72	0.94	Positive
--------------------	-----	------	------	----------

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 8 presents respondents' perceptions of the specific aspects of social media that influence their relationship expectations. The mean scores indicate that all items were rated positively, suggesting that various social media features and content play a role in shaping how respondents view relationships. The highest-rated statements were the lifestyle and appearance of people on social media shaping ideas of an ideal partner (Mean = 3.8) and relationship-related content influencing expectations more than other content (Mean = 3.8), highlighting the strong impact of visual portrayals and targeted relationship posts. Respondents also acknowledged that relationship advice or posts (Mean = 3.7), friends' or influencers' relationship experiences (Mean = 3.7), and social media engagement metrics like likes, comments, and shares (Mean = 3.6) affect their perceptions of relationships. The standard deviations show moderate variation, indicating that while most respondents are influenced by these aspects, the intensity of influence varies across individuals. Overall, the findings suggest that social media not only provides information about relationships but actively shapes expectations, ideals, and standards for romantic interactions, emphasizing its significant role in contemporary social and romantic behavior.

Test of Hypotheses

Hypothesis one (H_{01}): There is no significant relationship between social media use and the relationship expectations of single men and women.

Table 9: Summary Statistics for Pearson Correlation between Social Media Use and Relationship Expectations

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Social Media Use	399	3.84	0.96
Relationship Expectations	399	4.30	0.87

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 10: Pearson Correlation between Social Media Use and Relationship Expectations (H_{01})

Variables	N	Pearson Correlation (r)	p-value	Decision
Social media use & Relationship expectations	399	0.63	0.001	Reject H_{01}

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 10 presents the Pearson correlation analysis between social media use and the relationship expectations of single men and women. The results show a positive correlation coefficient of 0.63, which indicates a moderate to strong relationship between the two variables. The p-value of 0.001 is less than the 0.05 significance level, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis and indicating that social media use significantly influences the relationship expectations of single men and women. This finding suggests that higher levels of social media use are associated with more defined or higher relationship expectations among respondents. In other words, respondents who are more active on social media tend to have stronger or more specific ideas about what they expect from a romantic partner, highlighting the significant influence of social media on shaping relationship perceptions.

Hypothesis two (H_{02}): There is no significant difference between single men and women social media use and its influences on their relationship expectations.

Table 11: Independent Samples t-test on Gender Differences in Social Media Use and Its Influence on Relationship Expectations

Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t-value	p-value	Decision
Male	180	3.85	0.91	2.45	0.015	Reject H_{02}
Female	219	3.72	0.96	2.45	0.015	Reject H_{02}

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 11 presents the results of an independent samples t-test conducted to determine whether there is a significant difference between males and females in social media use and its influence on relationship expectations. The mean score for males was 3.85, while females had a slightly lower mean of 3.72. The t-test produced a value of 2.45 with a p-value of 0.015. Since the p-value is less than the 0.05 significance level, the null hypothesis (H_{02}) is rejected. This indicates that there is a statistically significant difference between males and females regarding how social media influences their relationship expectations. The results suggest that males and females experience the effects of social media on their romantic perceptions differently, with males reporting slightly higher influence.

Discussion of Findings

Extent of Social Media Use among Single Men and Women

The study revealed that single men and women in the sample use social media frequently and across multiple platforms. Most participants reported daily use, considerable time spent online, and engagement with relationship-related pages or accounts. Additionally, some respondents indicated that they use social media as a tool to meet or learn about potential romantic partners. This suggests that social media is deeply integrated into their social lives and plays a central role in communication, social interaction, and relationship formation. This finding aligns with research indicating that social media has become a dominant medium for interpersonal engagement, self-presentation, and information acquisition (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019; Coyne et al., 2020). Social networking platforms facilitate continuous connectivity and enable users to monitor social interactions, which may explain the high frequency and intensity of usage observed in this study. Social comparison theory further explains this behavior: individuals constantly evaluate themselves and their experiences against curated content online, which drives continued engagement and reinforces perceptions of social and relational norms (Wheeler, 2024). The data from this study confirm that social media is not merely a communication tool, but a powerful environment influencing the social and relational cognition of single adults.

Relationship Expectations of Single Men and Women

The study's findings indicate that respondents have well-defined expectations for future romantic relationships, emphasizing honesty, emotional support, shared values, and effective communication. These results highlight that single men and women maintain high standards for their prospective partners, reflecting a desire for relationships that are emotionally fulfilling and value-aligned. This observation is consistent with research showing that individuals increasingly prioritize authenticity, emotional availability, and compatibility in romantic relationships (Lilleker et al., 2021; Vantseva, 2025). Social media may indirectly shape these expectations by exposing users to idealized portrayals of relationships and normative beliefs about partner behavior, which can serve as a model for the qualities they seek in a partner. At the same time, scholars caution that exposure to highly curated social media content may raise expectations to levels that are difficult to achieve in real-life relationships (Vantseva, 2025). Therefore, the high expectations reported by respondents may reflect both personal desires and socialized ideals reinforced through online media.

Influence of Social Media on Relationship Expectations

Respondents indicated that social media significantly shapes their expectations of romantic partners. Many reported comparing potential partners with individuals or relationships portrayed online and noted that their perceptions of relationship standards are influenced by social media content. This finding suggests that social media is a major factor in shaping how single adults conceptualize relationships and the qualities they seek in partners. This aligns with existing research demonstrating that social media use often involves social comparison processes, where individuals evaluate themselves and their potential partners against idealized portrayals of others (Vogel et al., 2014; Coyne et al., 2020). Such comparisons can enhance or distort relational expectations depending on the type and frequency of content consumed. While some studies suggest that social media exposure can provide valuable insights into healthy relational practices, others indicate that constant exposure to idealized romantic content may increase unrealistic standards, contributing to dissatisfaction or selectivity in partner choice. The current findings support the notion that

social media plays a dual role: it informs relational knowledge but can also elevate expectations beyond practical or realistic levels.

Aspects of Social Media Use Influencing Relationship Expectations

The study identified specific features of social media that influence relationship expectations, including posts offering relationship advice, lifestyle and appearance content, likes, comments, and the experiences of friends or influencers. Respondents reported that these factors affect their perception of ideal partners and what constitutes a successful relationship. This supports the idea that certain interactive and visual features of social media such as engagement metrics and influencer narratives serve as social cues, shaping users' beliefs and expectations about romantic relationships (Nesi & Prinstein, 2015). Likes, comments, and shares, for instance, may reinforce certain relational ideals and signal social approval, thereby influencing users' judgment of what is desirable or successful in relationships. Moreover, repeated exposure to curated content depicting idealized relationships may normalize certain traits or behaviors, leading users to adopt elevated or selective standards when evaluating potential partners. This suggests that it is not just the frequency of social media use, but the content type and social cues embedded within the platform, that significantly shape relationship expectations.

Gender Differences in Social Media Use and Its Influence on Relationship Expectations

The study revealed significant gender differences: males reported slightly higher influence of social media on their relationship expectations than females. This indicates that gender may moderate how social media shapes perceptions of romantic relationships. This finding aligns with research suggesting that gender affects how individuals engage with and interpret social media content (Nesi & Prinstein, 2015). For instance, men and women may differ in susceptibility to social comparison, attention to engagement metrics, or interpretation of relational cues online. Some studies suggest women are more sensitive to relational evaluation and emotional content, while men may focus more on aspirational or status-related cues, which may explain the slightly higher influence observed among males in this study. However, the literature is mixed, and some research indicates minimal gender differences depending on the type of social media use and content exposure (Vogel et al., 2014). Nevertheless, the results underscore the importance of considering gender as a factor in research on social media and relationship expectations.

CONCLUSION

This study was guided by the recognition that romantic relationships today are increasingly formed, evaluated, and imagined within digital spaces. Social media has become more than a background tool for communication; it now operates as a social environment where norms, values, and expectations about relationships are continuously produced and reinforced. Against this backdrop, the study sought to understand how social media use influences the relationship expectations of single men and women and whether these influences differ by gender. The findings suggest that social media occupies a central position in the everyday lives of single adults. Its frequent use ensures sustained exposure to narratives of love, commitment, and partner behavior that are often selectively positive and carefully curated. Over time, such exposure does not simply inform users about relationships; it subtly shapes the lens through which relationships are understood. The study therefore indicates that relationship expectations are not formed in isolation but are increasingly co-constructed through digital interactions and observations. One of the most significant insights from this study is that respondents held high and clearly articulated expectations for romantic relationships. At face value, these expectations centered on honesty, emotional support, shared values, and effective communication reflect widely accepted ideals of healthy relationships. However, when examined alongside the influence of social media, these expectations appear to be intensified by repeated exposure to idealized relationship portrayals. Social media, in this sense, functions as a normative space, quietly reinforcing what a "successful" relationship should look like and encouraging individuals to measure potential partners against these standards. The significant relationship found between social media use and relationship expectations underscores the power of comparison in digital contexts. Social media platforms facilitate constant comparison not only between individuals but also between real-life relationships and idealized representations. This comparison process can shape expectations in ways that are gradual and often unconscious. While such exposure may help individuals clarify what they value in relationships, it may also raise expectations to levels that are difficult to sustain

in everyday relational contexts, potentially influencing satisfaction, patience, and partner selection. The study's findings on gender differences further deepen this understanding. The observed variation in how social media influences relationship expectations among males and females suggests that digital content is not experienced uniformly. Gendered socialization, emotional expression, and patterns of media engagement may influence how individuals interpret online relational cues. This highlights the importance of moving beyond simplistic interpretations of social media effects and recognizing that its influence is mediated by individual characteristics and social identities. Taken together, the findings suggest that social media plays a dual and complex role in shaping relationship expectations. On one hand, it provides access to relational knowledge, shared experiences, and aspirational values that can support personal growth and emotional awareness. On the other hand, it risks constructing relationship ideals that overlook conflict, imperfection, and the ongoing effort required in real-world relationships. The influence of social media is therefore not inherently harmful, but it becomes problematic when idealized portrayals are internalized without critical reflection.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to address the influence of social media on the relationship expectations of single men and women:

- i. Single adults are encouraged to engage with social media mindfully, recognizing that much of the content online, including influencer portrayals and curated posts, may present idealized or unrealistic images of relationships.
- ii. Users should focus on self-reflection and identify personal values and expectations for relationships, rather than relying solely on social media content to guide their standards for potential partners.
- iii. Educational programs should include digital media literacy modules to help individuals understand how social media influences perceptions of relationships and to promote healthy engagement with online content.
- iv. Platforms should encourage the sharing of realistic and diverse portrayals of relationships to reduce the impact of idealized content on users' expectations.
- v. Initiatives to educate users on healthy relationship norms and the effects of social comparison should be implemented within social media environments to promote balanced perceptions.

REFERENCES

- Adeyemi, T. (2022). Social media use and relationship perceptions among youths in Lagos. *Lagos: University of Lagos Press*.
- Andreassen, C. S., Torsheim, T., Brunborg, G. S., & Pallesen, S. (2022). Digital media use and social behavior: Patterns, effects, and mechanisms. *Computers in Human Behavior, 125*, 106937.
- Arikewuyo, A. O. (2019). An evaluation of the effects of social media on romantic relationships. *International Journal of Social Science Studies, 7(4)*, 45–59.
- Arikewuyo, A. O., Olanrewaju, T., & Adetunji, O. (2020). Evaluating the use of social media in escalating conflicts in romantic relationships. *Journal of Relationship Research, 11(2)*, 78–92.
- Atalay, G. E., Tanriverdi, Y., & Arici, Y. (2024). Social media use in romantic relationships: A qualitative research. *Journal of Social Media Studies, 8(1)*, 101–120.
- Bhattacharjee, A. (2001). *Understanding information systems continuance: An expectation-confirmation model*. *MIS Quarterly, 25(3)*, 351–370.
- Bouffard, S., Smith, J., & Turner, L. (2021). Social media and romantic relationships: Excessive social media use leads to relationship conflicts, negative outcomes, and addiction via mediated pathways. *Journal of Behavioral Addictions, 10(2)*, 234–249.
- Boyd, D. M., & Ellison, N. B. (2021). Social network sites: Definition, history, and scholarship. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, 27(5)*, 245–261.
- Brown, R., & McDaniel, P. (2024). Psychological effects of social media on relationship satisfaction and expectations. *Journal of Social Psychology, 164(1)*, 56–74.
- Buunk, B. P., & Gibbons, F. X. (2017). Social comparison: The end of a theory and the emergence of a field. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, 140*, 6–12.
- Chen, Y., & Li, H. (2018). Role of social media in shaping relationship norms in China. *Chinese Journal of Communication, 11(3)*, 271–289.
- Chou, H. T. G., & Edge, N. (2022). “They are happier and having better lives than I am”: The impact of using Facebook on perceptions of others’ lives. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking, 25(2)*, 85–92.
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches (4th ed.)*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Ellison, N. B., Steinfield, C., & Lampe, C. (2017). The benefits of Facebook “friends”: Social capital and college students’ use of online social network sites. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, 12(4)*, 1143–1168.
- Finkenauer, C., Engels, R. C., & Baumeister, R. F. (2024). The psychology of relationship expectations. *Annual Review of Psychology, 75*, 295–319.
- Fletcher, G. J., & Simpson, J. A. (2020). Romantic relationship expectations and evaluations. *Current Opinion in Psychology, 36*, 69–74.
- Fox, J., & Warber, K. M. (2024). Romantic relationship formation on social media: Implications for expectations and behaviors. *Computers in Human Behavior, 150*, 107090.
- Guerrero, L. K., & Floyd, K. (2020). *Nonverbal communication in close relationships (3rd ed.)*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Guerrero, L. K., & Floyd, K. (2022). Relationship expectations: Social and cultural perspectives. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 39(1)*, 12–35.
- Hazan, C., & Shaver, P. (1987). Romantic love conceptualized as an attachment process. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 52(3)*, 511–524.
- Johnson, M., Adams, K., & Cox, L. (2021). Gender differences in social media influence on dating expectations. *Journal of Social Media Studies, 5(2)*, 88–104.
- Kaplan, A. M., & Haenlein, M. (2010). Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of social media. *Business Horizons, 53(1)*, 59–68.
- Kietzmann, J. H., Hermkens, K., McCarthy, I. P., & Silvestre, B. S. (2021). Social media? Get serious! Understanding the functional building blocks of social media. *Business Horizons, 54(3)*, 241–251.
- Knobloch, L. K., & Solomon, D. H. (2023). *Interpersonal relationships: Expectations and evaluations*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Li, S. Y. (2021). The impact of social media on intimate relationships among Chinese college students. *International Journal of Communication, 15*, 3456–3475.

- Li, W. W. (2024). Repercussions of social media addiction on relationship closeness and satisfaction among Chinese undergraduates. *Asian Journal of Social Psychology, 27(1)*, 42–58.
- Manago, A. M., Graham, M. B., Greenfield, P. M., & Salimkhan, G. (2020). Self-presentation and social media: Influences on identity and relationships. *New Media & Society, 22(6)*, 1028–1047.
- Manago, A. M., Taylor, T., Greenfield, P., & Brown, C. (2022). Identity and self-presentation on social media. *Social Media + Society, 8(1)*, 1–12.
- Miller, D., & Hayes, R. (2020). Social media and romantic jealousy: Implications for expectations. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking, 23(7)*, 469–477.
- Muise, A., Christofides, E., & Desmarais, S. (2019). Relationship expectations and social media use. *Computers in Human Behavior, 93*, 148–157.
- Mussweiler, T. (2013). Comparison processes in social judgment: Mechanisms and consequences. *Journal of Consumer Psychology, 23(3)*, 190–206.
- Oladele, T., & Akinyemi, O. (2019). Social media use and relationship expectations among university students in Ibadan, Nigeria. *African Journal of Psychology, 7(2)*, 65–78.
- Omotayo, F. O. (2020). Social media adoption among urban youth in Nigeria: Trends and implications. *Nigerian Journal of Communication Studies, 12(1)*, 22–39.
- Pempek, T. A., Yermolayeva, Y. A., & Calvert, S. L. (2019). College students' social networking experiences on Facebook. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology, 30(3)*, 227–238.
- Pew Research Center. (2021). Social media use in 2021. *Washington, DC: Pew Research Center.*
- Rainey, R. L., & Arney, K. L. (2024). The romantic influencer: A review of social media's impact on relationship satisfaction. *Journal of Media Psychology, 36(2)*, 85–102.
- Ruggiero, T. E. (2020). Uses and gratifications theory in the 21st century. *Mass Communication & Society, 23(1)*, 3–38.
- Safko, L., & Brake, D. K. (2019). *The social media bible: Tactics, tools, and strategies for business success (5th ed.)*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.
- Shockley, H. S. (2017). How social media is perceived to affect romantic relationship satisfaction. *Journal of Social Media Studies, 3(1)*, 45–63.
- Suls, J., Martin, R., & Wheeler, L. (2012). Social comparison: Why, with whom, and with what effect? *Current Directions in Psychological Science, 21(5)*, 333–338.
- Valkenburg, P. M., & Peter, J. (2019). Adolescents' online communication and romantic relationship expectations. *New Media & Society, 21(3)*, 635–655.
- Valkenburg, P. M., Peter, J., & Schouten, A. P. (2023). Social networking sites: Communication, identity, and self-presentation. *Psychology of Popular Media, 12(1)*, 33–49.
- Vogel, E. A., Rose, J. P., Roberts, L. R., & Eckles, K. (2024). Social comparison, social media, and relationship expectations. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 41(1)*, 101–121.
- Whiting, A., & Williams, D. (2023). Why people use social media: A uses and gratifications perspective. *Qualitative Market Research, 26(2)*, 182–200.
- Williams, J., Brown, K., & Smith, L. (2018). Social media influence on partner selection among young adults in the UK. *Journal of Social Media Studies, 4(3)*, 210–229.
- Wood, J. V. (1996). What is social comparison and how should we study it? *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 22(5)*, 520–537.
- Zhao, S., Grasmuck, S., & Martin, J. (2018). Identity construction on Facebook: Digital empowerment and self-presentation. *New Media & Society, 20(1)*, 227–245.