

“Facebook Love” on Online Social Networking Platforms: An Analysis of the Linguistic Expression and Portrayal of Love in a Selected Nigerian Hip-Hop Track

Onanuga, Paul Ayodele

Doctoral Student

Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile Ife, Osun State, Nigeria

E-mail: emperornugadellio@yahoo.com

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Abstract

This research work discussed the expression of love relationships in new media, particularly in a social networking platform; *Facebook*. Its objectives were achieved through the juxtaposition of this idea in line with further exploration as expressed in a Nigerian song titled *Facebook Love*, a seminal hip-hop song which expressed goings-on on the social networking site, *Facebook*. It noted that love relationships took two dimensions which are positive and negative. The study found that love relationships across new media platforms are easy to start up, interactive with chat and instant messaging facilities, and provide a wider array of networking possibilities. In contrast to these however, the kind of love proclaimed there is riddled with deceit, lies, addiction, and infatuation among some other things that people tend to avoid in face-to-face communication.

Keywords: Linguistics, Social networking platforms, Computer-Mediated Discourse, Love relationship

1. Introduction

A social network service is an online service, platform, or site that focuses on building and reflecting of social networks or social relations among people. They thus seek to link together people who share interests and/or activities. A social network service essentially consists of a representation of each user (most often through a self-created profile), his/her social links, and a variety of additional services like picture-sharing among others. Most social network services are web-based and provide means for users to interact over the internet, such as e-mail and instant messaging. Social networking sites allow users to share ideas, activities, events, and interests within their individual networks.

The main types of social networking services are those which contain category places (such as former school-year or classmates), means to connect with friends (usually with self-description pages) and a recommendation system linked to trust. Popular methods now combine many of these, with *Facebook* and *Twitter* widely used worldwide; *MySpace* and *LinkedIn* being the most widely used in North America; *Nexopia* (mostly in Canada); *Bebo*, *Hi5*, *Hyves* (mostly in The Netherlands), *StudiVZ* (mostly in Germany), *iWiW* (mostly in Hungary), *Tuenti* (mostly in Spain), *Nasza-Klasa* (mostly in Poland), *Decayenne*, *Tagged*, *XING*, *Badoo* and *Skyrock* in parts of Europe; *Orkut* and *Hi5* in South America, India and Central America; and *Friendster*, *Mixi*, *Multiply*, *Orkut*, *Wretch*, *renren* and *Cyworld* in Asia and the Pacific Islands and *Twitter*, *Orkut* and *Facebook* in India (www.wikipedia.com). In short, these networking platforms are also assuming the form of protecting national identity.

In continuation, web based social network services make it possible to connect people who share interests and activities across political, economic, and geographic borders. Through e-mail and instant messaging, online communities are created where a gift economy and reciprocal altruism are encouraged through cooperation. Information is particularly suited to gift economy, as information is a non-rival good and can be gifted at practically no cost. *Facebook* and other social networking service providers are increasingly becoming the object of scholarly research. Scholars in many fields have begun to investigate the impact of social networking sites, investigating how such sites may play into issues of identity, privacy, social capital, youth culture, and education. A popular use for this new technology is social networking between businesses. Companies have found that social networking sites such as *Facebook* and *Twitter* are great ways to build their brand image. According to Jody Nimetz, author of *Marketing Jive*, there are five major uses for businesses and social media: to create brand awareness, as an online reputation management tool, for recruiting, to learn about new technologies and competitors, and as a lead tool to intercept potential prospects. These companies are able to drive traffic to their own online sites while encouraging their consumers and clients to have discussions on how to improve or change products or services.

One other use that is being discussed is the use of Social Networks in the Science communities. Julia Porter Liebeskind et al. have published a study on how new Biotechnology firms are using social networking sites to share exchanges in scientific knowledge. They state in their study that by sharing information and knowledge with one another, they are able to "increase both their learning and their flexibility in ways that would

not be possible within a self-contained hierarchical organization." Social networking is allowing scientific groups to expand their knowledge base and share ideas, and without these new means of communicating their theories might become "isolated and irrelevant".

Social networks are also being used by teachers and students as a communication tool. Because many students are already using a wide-range of social networking sites, teachers have begun to familiarize themselves with this trend and are now using it to their advantage. Teachers and professors are doing everything from creating chat-room forums and groups to extend classroom discussion to posting assignments, tests and quizzes, to assisting with homework outside of the classroom setting. Social networks are also being used to foster teacher-parent communication. These sites make it possible and more convenient for parents to ask questions and voice concerns without having to meet face-to-face. In addition, they used by activists as a means of low-cost grassroots organizing. Extensive use of an array of social networking sites enabled organizers of the 2009 National Equality March to mobilize an estimated 200,000 participants to march on Washington with a cost savings of up to 85% per participant over previous methods.

The use of online social networks by libraries is also an increasingly prevalent and growing tool that is being used to communicate with more potential library users, as well as extending the services provided by individual libraries. A final rise in social network use is being driven by college students using the services to network with professionals for internship and job opportunities. Many studies have been done on the effectiveness of networking online in a college setting, and one notable one is by Arabie and Wind (1994) published in *Advances in Social Network Analysis*.

Many social networks provide an online environment for people to communicate and exchange personal information for dating purposes. Intentions can vary from looking for a one time date, short-term relationships, and long-term relationships. Most of these social networks, just like online dating services, require users to give out certain pieces of information. This usually includes a user's age, gender, location, interests, and perhaps a picture. Releasing very personal information is usually discouraged for safety reasons. This allows other users to search or be searched by some sort of criteria, but at the same time people can maintain a degree of anonymity similar to most online dating services. Online dating sites are similar to social networks in the sense that users create profiles to meet and communicate with others, but their activities on such sites are for the sole purpose of finding a person of interest to date. Social networks do not necessarily have to be for dating; many users simply use it for keeping in touch with friends, and colleagues.

However, an important difference between social networks and online dating services is the fact that online dating sites usually require a fee, where social networks are free. This difference is one of the reasons the online dating industry is seeing a massive decrease in revenue due to many users opting to use social networking services instead. Many popular online dating services such as *Match.com*, *Yahoo Personals*, and *eHarmony.com* are seeing a decrease in users, where social networks like *MySpace* and *Facebook* are experiencing an increase in users. To this effect, the number of internet users in the U.S. that visit online

dating sites has fallen from a peak of 21% in 2003 to 10% in 2006. Whether it is the cost of the services, the variety of users with different intentions, or any other reason, it is undeniable that social networking sites are quickly becoming the new way to find dates online.

In all, social networking services have become incredible tools for building and strengthening friendships and relationships across multifarious domains.

2. Facebook and Love Relationships

Before anything else, it is necessary to provide information on the origin, growth and effects of *Facebook*. *Facebook* is a social networking website launched in February 2004 that is operated and privately owned by Facebook Incorporated. It was founded by Mark Zuckerberg, a Harvard University student then, with his college roommates and fellow computer science students, Eduardo Saverin, Dustin Moskovitz and Chris Hughes. The website's membership was initially limited by the founders to Harvard students, but was expanded to other colleges in the Boston area, the Ivy League, and Stanford University. It gradually added support for students at various other universities before opening to high school students, and, finally, to anyone aged 13 and over. Since its inception, it has grown to more than 500 million active users in July 2010, which is about one person for every fourteen in the world (*Techtree.com*). The website enables users to add people as friends and send them messages, and update their personal profiles to notify friends about themselves. Additionally, users can join networks organized by workplace, school, or college. The website's name stems from the colloquial name of books given to students at the start of the academic year by university administrations in the US with the intention of helping students to get to know each other better. *Facebook* allows anyone who declares themselves to be aged 13 or older to become a member of the website.

As a sign of its worldwide acceptability and evidence of its growth, a January 2009 Compete.com study ranked *Facebook* as the most used social network by worldwide monthly active users, followed by MySpace. Entertainment Weekly put it on its end-of-the-decade 'best-of' list, saying, "How on earth did we stalk our exes, remember our co-workers' birthdays, bug our friends, and play a rousing game of Scrabulous before *Facebook*?". In addition to these, according to *comScore*, *Facebook* is the leading social networking site based on monthly unique visitors, having overtaken main competitor, *MySpace*, in April 2008 (Hasselback, 2009). ComScore reports that *Facebook* attracted 130 million unique visitors in May 2010, an increase of 8.6 million people. The website is the most popular for uploading photos, with 50 billion uploaded cumulatively. *Facebook* is the most popular social networking site in several English-speaking countries, including Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States. In December 2008, the Supreme Court of the Australian Capital Territory ruled that *Facebook* is a valid protocol to serve court notices to defendants (www.theage.com, 2009). It is believed to be the world's first legal judgement that defines a summons posted on *Facebook* as legally binding. In March 2009, the New Zealand High Court associate justice David Glendall allowed for the serving of legal papers on Craig Axe by the company Axe Market Garden via *Facebook*. Employers (such as Virgin Atlantic

Airways) have also used *Facebook* as a means to keep tabs on their employees and have even been known to fire them over posts they have made (Cochran, 2008).

From the language perspective, by 2005, the use of *Facebook* had already become so ubiquitous that the generic verb "facebooking" had come into use to describe the process of browsing others' profiles or updating one's own. In 2008, Collins English Dictionary declared "Facebook" as their new Word of the Year. In December 2009, the New Oxford American Dictionary declared their word of the year to be the verb "unfriend", defined as "To remove someone as a "friend" on a social networking site such as *Facebook*. As in, "I decided to unfriend my roommate on *Facebook* after we had a fight."

Despite all these applause and commendations, *Facebook* has met with some controversy. It has been blocked intermittently in several countries including Pakistan, Syria, the People's Republic of China, Vietnam, Iran, and North Korea. It has also been banned at many places of work to discourage employees from wasting time using the service. *Facebook's* privacy has also been an issue, and the safety of their users has been compromised several times. *Facebook* settled a lawsuit regarding claims over source code and intellectual property. The site has also been involved in controversy over the sale of fans and friends.

It must be added that from the above discussion on *Facebook*, it is clear that this social network's success is hinged on its introduction of blogs (which has been named "notes" on individual pages), friendly interface and use of pictures, webcam video, and instant messaging in addition to the ability to add friends and write testimonials. This availability of innovative functionality increases communication alternatives and personalizes the online experience. "Find old friends, meet people, date" is the webpage's advanced search application's tagline. This implies that the site is interested in fostering love relationships between people, male and female, young and old.

With respect to the relationship that exists between *Facebook* use and love relationships, a recent study makes the claim that "increased *Facebook* use significantly predicts *Facebook*-related jealousy" in romantic relationships. The study, published in the *CyberPsychology & Behavior Journal*, analyzed the effect of *Facebook* use on the romantic relationships of college students. The report concludes that there is a "significant association between time spent on *Facebook* and jealousy-related feelings and behaviors experienced on *Facebook*." To buttress this result, a simple search of the keywords "love relationship and *Facebook*" on the popular search engine "Google" brings out several thousands of possibilities mostly pointing to the negative effects of facebooking on love relationships. This *Facebook*-related jealousy is gradually spreading even beyond the *Facebook* realm into the social lives of the people concerned. Michelle Schmeer (2010) states that "recent studies on how *Facebook* affects relationships show that there may be a number of negative effects that the social networking site has on relationships of the heart." Some of those things mentioned are jealousy, neglect of a partner, cheating, and "an obsession with communication" where the obsession with adding people to friends' lists has gone beyond just wanting to keep in touch with old friends and new colleagues. The result of this growing trend is another growing trend that involves broken relationships and broken hearts.

3. “Facebook Love”: An Instance of Current Trends?

In the foregoing, a background has been provided on the realizations from earlier research works which have looked into the influence of social networking, with particular attention paid to *Facebook*, on love relationships. These realizations portray a very gloomy picture of the relationship between the two. They show that love relationships on social networking media are usually not solidified through its usage; rather they stoke the embers of jealousy, flirting, and spousal cheating. However, in this work, a bipolar analysis is adopted in discussing the kind of love relationship in new media as expressed in the hip-hop track “Facebook Love”. This is accomplished through the identification of the positive and negative portrayals of love relationships in new media communication.

Before delving fully into the analysis of the music lyrics, it is important to provide a summary of the content and thematic preoccupation of the song. The song is by a Nigerian female artiste by the pseudonym *Essence* in collaboration with another Nigerian male, *Jaywon*. From the title of the track, one has an inkling into its substance. It is about a love relationship between a guy and a girl which started online through the use of the networking site, *Facebook*. They add each other as friends and exchange messages through which they have expectations of knowing themselves better. However, soon into the relationship, they start feeling “in sync” and begin revealing the lies and half-truths they had exchanged at the initial stage of their relationship. The girl opens up to the listeners that the picture she used on her profile page actually is not hers; in fact the whole information she filled in are not true about her. The guy on the other hand has fallen in love, in fact, he is addicted. He goes online regularly just to be in touch with the girl, always requesting for when she would be online. The fact that he is always online is linked to the information that he may be an “internet bandit”, a “yahoo-yahoo” in local parlance. Thus, the lady too could be in love with a prospective swindler. Soon enough, the girl starts feeling guilty of her deceit and begins contemplating creating another *Facebook* account so she can come out clean to the guy, with the hope that he would still love her for her true self. The focal point of the song is deceit, which has been made easily possible since face-to-face communication, where one may not be too brazen in telling such white lies, is not available.

4. Positives

As mentioned earlier, the analysis carried out in this study is bipartite since it accounts for both the positive and negative representations of love relationship on social networking sites. Thus, the following are instances of positive representations.

5. Ease of Communication:

As the lyrics is about the ease with which people can meet and communicate, it is quite straightforward to deduce that the use of *Facebook* as a networking platform helps to link individuals from different backgrounds and nationalities. The chance to add people who share same or similar interests as well as the access to meet friends of friends increases the chances of meeting vast number of people. In addition to this is that *Facebook* as a networking site has as part of its advantages the seamless ease through which it has been able to blend

various applications such as the use of pictures, instant messaging, use of notes, ability to share materials, etc, on its platform. This simplifies communication as creates a sense of communality.

I like it when you poke and I poke back
You make me feel like osoba (a king)
Said I love it when you buzz and I buzz back
On my profile page
Facebook love, I'm waiting for your message on my wall

As well as the earlier stated reasons, the above extracts point to the various available means through which one can connect with another *Facebook* friend. You could “poke” or simply “buzz” a friend. Both of these signals are used to show that one is thinking of the other person or simply just to know if the other person is online, thus ready for some chat. These means are quite easy to achieve as against the traditional use of snail mail. In addition, one does not need to have been a friend before you can contact them. This ability widens the scope of possibilities of “friending”. So also is the possibility of sending messages to another person’s inbox (this is personally delivered to the individual for whom it is meant), or leaving messages on a person’s wall or profile page (this is usually open to all other friends to see). These various possibilities enhance love relationships because they allow show of affection while also notifying the “public” that something exists between these people. Thus for instance while “buzz” has a sort of playful friendliness about it, “poke” is a slangy expression which refers to having sex. Therefore when the artiste says she “like(s) it when you poke and I poke back” and “I love it when you buzz and I buzz back”, there is that veiled information about the form of romance that is already in play between them.

The extract below also refers to the ease in which one can create user accounts; these accounts being the platform on which one is represented.

I will put up another account and pray that you will know it's me ah! Ah!
Should I put up another account?
Will he know it's me anyhow?

The girl in the heat of emotions, while regretting her earlier action in which she had deceived the guy into believing her for what she is not, considers creating a new account on which she hopes to redeem her battered image. She feels opening a new account will provide her a soft landing where she would confess her wrongdoing while praying the man will realize her identity and make-up with her. It is shown here that one can do anything for love. This is because at the outset when the girl felt nothing for the guy, she was ready to shield herself from his prying eyes, willing to withhold information and even lies claiming that “I was fooling around that time” and asking “Why would I give out all my information online?” However, when she catches the love bug, she is remorseful as she is now “sorry that I lied.” They both agree that “the matter don pass play, play”. Thus, as is available in face to face communication, certain hindrances fade off as people get to know themselves better. This ensures a smooth sail for the relationship.

6. Wider Network Possibilities:

The use of *Facebook* as a social networking site creates an avenue through which one can meet millions of people. This is unlike whatever existed before the advent of social networking. The ease of linking up with people begins on one's profile page where friends are suggested based on shared likes, related backgrounds, or even just because they are friends of one's friends.

I'm waiting for your message on my wall

Thus in the line above, messages are exchanged on "the wall", "the wall" being the profile page on which latest events, including postings from friends are displayed. However having access to another person's page or wall does not always mean that that person is a friend already. Many people just scour the database looking for people with lovely pictures or other flimsy things that catch their fancy. This is shown in the extract below where the male artiste sings:

I saw this baby, she's so fine
O da lomo (She is a pretty girl)
Only the picture, mo ti gor (I fell in love)

The two persona do not know each other before, however the guy coincidentally probably in living up to his internet addict / yahoo bandit portrayal, discovers the girl's picture, and thus began the whole drama. From these, one can see the limitless possibilities of meeting people that is available on the social networking site, *Facebook*. Thus, networking platforms, *Facebook* in particular, have very high incidents of people linking up who rarely know each other, that being the sole aim of social networking.

7. Negatives:

Even as we have been able to observe the positive aspects of the representation of love in social networking, it is pertinent that its negative sides are also brought out for discussion. This is realized below.

8. Deceit:

I saw this baby, she's so fine
O da lomo (She is a pretty girl)
Only the picture, mo ti gor (I fell in love)
Mo fe gbomo (i wanted her)

The idea of deceit is quite commonplace in online relationships. This is predicated upon the realization that there is no face-to-face communication, thus the person at the other side cannot quickly or instantly verify the truthfulness or otherwise of the claims of the other person. Thus, in the lines above, the guy, after seeing the picture of a lady as well as the other information she provided, falls in love. He takes the girl to be what she had portrayed herself to be. However, in the extract below, the girl confirms that the guy has fallen in love with a totally different person since she had supplied false background information on her age, work,

and even the picture used. This rampant use of deceit to draw the attention of other people is part of what has been generating negative hype around social networking platforms.

On my profile page I lied about my age
Where I live and what I do to get paid
The picture isn't mine

In addition to the above realizations of deceitful inclination on *Facebook Love*, the two lines below also provide further substantiation of this idea.

She's just 18, they call me edede (oldman)
Sugar daddy, internet addict, they don't even know if I'm a yahoo bandit
(fraudster)

In the first line, the guy, believing the girl's true age to be eighteen, confesses that among his pals, he is called "oldman", probably because he is substantially older than most of them. We may thus conclude that for the lady to have fallen in love with him, the guy must have trimmed his age to one closer to that of the lady's. We are made also to look beyond the "Mr nice-guy" portrayal of the male persona in the song in the second line. It is made known that he might actually be a sugar daddy, which then corroborates the earlier stance that he has in fact reduced his age to woo the girl, an internet addict or a yahoo bandit. From all these, we can see that *Facebook* is being conveniently used to distort personal information, thus deceiving others into thinking them to be what they are not.

Conclusively, one can say that *Facebook*, as well as other social networking platforms, serves as an outlet to create a false or doctored persona. This is because it is quite easy to create a profile and afterwards log-in under a phony username. In addition to this is the simple fact that one is unable to truthfully confirm if the person at the other end is genuinely what and where they claim to be. Thus it is difficult to confirm the identity of a person online.

9. Infatuation:

Now he keeps on buzzing me to come online
It's so funny how we clicked
How we are so in sync
I wanna be his chic
Oh man this is so sick

Another negative point in the portrayal of love on the social networking site, *Facebook*, is its rendering of true love as infatuation. While some people have found it hard to agree on whether making friends and having casual relationships or flings with online personalities can actually be termed "cheating", it is clear from the above extract that such online relationships can lead to infatuation, and some have actually claimed online relationships ruined their marriages. This is clear because despite the fact that the interlocutors have actually not met face-to-face, they are yearning to always be online together, as shown in the extract above. After exchanging personal information, which eventually turned out to be all false, they believe they have "clicked" and "are so in sync". By the time they realize what is actually

happening, they had become infatuated with each other. This thus shows what could be the end result of the difficulty in ascertaining the true identity of a person and know whether all the shared information are actually true or not. The man cannot stop “buzzing” the girl, while the girl is already getting sick of not being in touch with the guy.

10. Addiction:

In addition to the above, it is exposed that “*Facebook Love*” is quite addictive. It seems to end up as a place one wants to be every time, since it creates a false sense of security and communality. Thus the two personas in the song want to be online every time of the day, and when one of them is unavailable, the other person resorts to “buzzing” or writing messages on the other person’s wall.

You make me go online everyday
Bo n se shemi mi o orebe (the way I feel confuses me)
The truth bi say, the matter don pass play, play (The truth is that the matter is now serious)
E ma soro ere mo (it’s no longer a joke)

Although they both started the relationship seeking to outwit the other, they start feeling passionate and confess that the matter has gone beyond the ordinary. They had become addicted to being online and exchanging pleasantries and messages.

Despite not really being well known to each other, they get so consumed by the relationship that they cannot wait to be together in their “virtual world”. It gets to the point where they feel incomplete and need to share their “thoughts” with the other person. When eventually the girl starts feeling guilty of her lies, she could not cope with the reality of things. This affects her daily routine as she confesses that she now feels very bad, and this shows physically as she goes around wearing a frown.

I need to share my thoughts with you online
I need to know what you're thinking this time
My facebook love.
Now I’m walking around with a frown
Feeling oh so bad for my baby

All the above analyses show that, despite the popularity of *Facebook* as a social networking platform, and in line with the aim of its creation which is to engender relationships among people, the representation of love relationship there is one of duality since it has both positive and negative sides.

11. Conclusion

Humans are social animals who crave the attention and solidarity of others. This urge is what has continued to propel people to create different means through which individuals can link up with one another through technological means. This thus fuels the interest of people who use social networking sites. In the above analyses, it has been shown that the presentation of love relationships on the social networking website, *Facebook*, is bipartite. This is split into

positive and negative representations. Interestingly however, the lyrics of the song do not give a conclusive picture of what happens to the guy and the girl. Did the girl eventually reveal her falsehood to the guy or not? Were they able to continue with their love relationship? Regardless of whether answers are provided to these or not, we can on our part conclude from the earlier analyses that the portrayal of love in *Facebook* is one that we should be wary of. This is because despite the positives, which include ease of communication and provision of wider networking possibilities, its negative potentials are more enormous. For one, correspondences online are not trustworthy. This is because it is almost impossible to ascertain the true personality of the other person beyond what they want you to know. In addition to this are its addictive potential, its deceitful possibilities, and its propensity to encourage infatuation.

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Appendix

***FACEBOOK LOVE* by Essence and Jaywon**

Chorus:

Facebook love, I'm waiting for your message on my wall. Ni bo lo loh(where did u go?).

Igba wo lo n pada bo (when are you coming back)(repeat all twice).

Verse 1.

I saw this baby, she's so fine

O da lomo(She is a pretty girl)

Only the picture, mo ti gor (I fell in love)

Mo fe gbomo (I wanted her)

Yeah I don't know much about you skele (chic)

You make me go online everyday

Bo n se shemi mi o orebe (the way I feel confuses me)

She's just 18 they call me edede (oldman)

Sugar daddy, internet addict, they don't even know if I'm a yahoo bandit (fraudster)

Oh no! Baby, don't be so far away....

The truth bi say, the matter don pass play, play

E ma soro ere mo (it's no longer a joke)

Igba wo lo to ma de

When are you coming online?

Chorus

Refrain:

when are you coming online? (4x)

Verse 2:

On my profile page I lied about my age

Where I live and what I do to get paid

The picture isn't mine

Why would I give out all my information online?

But this guy, e get my time now I'm sorry that I lied.

I was fooling around that time

Now he keeps on buzzing me to come online

It's so funny how we clicked

How we are so in sync

I wanna be his chic

Oh man this is so sick

Should I put up another account

Will he know it's me anyhow?

Now I'm walking around with a frown

Feeling oh so bad for my baby

Chorus and refrain

Bridge:

I like it when you poke and I poke back

You make me feel like osoba (a king)

Said I love it when you buzz and I buzz back

Boy, you're making me feel like I'm all dat ooh!

It's happening so fast now, baby come closer

I will put up another account and pray that you will know it's me ah! Ah!

Chorus

Adlib

I need to share my thoughts with you online

I need to know what you're thinking this time

My facebook love.