Chapter 9
ICT Is Not Gender Blind:
A Literary Analysis of ICT Gender Inequality and its Socio-Economic Impact in the Developing World

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ABSTRACT

This chapter critically reviewed literature on gender disparity associated with access and usage of ICT, focusing on the less developed world, especially Sub-Saharan Africa. The authors used relevant online literature sourced from research databases such as Google Scholar, Elsevier and Wiley Online Library. With the aid of graphical illustrations, the chapter aligned its argument with some critical global research findings regarding gender-based mobile phone and Internet usage and the concept of ICT and gender. The chapter concluded that ICT gender gap negatively affects the socio-economic development of women, and recommended that ICTs manufacturers should integrate gender-balanced software and hardware right at the time of production of the technologies.

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INTRODUCTION

Information and communication technologies (ICTs) are regarded as drivers of knowledge flows and catalysts of innovation. Garcia-Muniz and Vicente (2014) describe ICTs as general-purpose technologies. Breshnahan and Trajtenberg (1995) defined ICTs as some phenomena whose prominent characteristics are their fast path of technological improvement, pervasiveness across the full economy and their role as innovation enablers. ICTs also make possible the drastic reduction of geographical barrier, which had hitherto been insurmountable. Significantly, however, ICT facilitate the creation of new knowledge and its faster diffusion through more efficient processes information dissemination (Garcia-Muniz & Vicente, 2014).

Furthermore, according to Njoh (2011),

ICT comprises all devices, systems and facilities that can be deployed to collect, process, store and diffuse information. Thus, ICTs include not only technologically sophisticated tools such as computers and the Internet, but also oft-ignored conventional communication media and facilities such as radios, television, fixed telephones, roads and streets. (P. 343)

ICT has become a necessity rather than luxury, especially in transforming social-economic and political aspects of people's life globally (Chisenga, 2001; ITU, 1998; Olatokun, 2008; UNESCO, 2005). Olatokun (2008) observes that ICT can be said to have become a *sine qua non* factor of development to the extent that "without its incorporation into the information age, there is little chance for countries or regions to develop" (p. 5).

However, as ICT adoption and use get more momentum, some groups of members of society seem to have been disadvantaged from accessing and using ICT; they seem to have been veiled from ICT by socio-cultural factors (Chisenga, 2001; Joseph, 2012; UNESCO, 2005). Therefore, concern is being shown about the impact of the digital divide on those left on the disadvantaged side - the female folks in most developing countries - are often shielded from the information age than their male counterparts whose poverty they share (Chisenga, 2001; ITU, 1998; Olatokun, 2008; UNESCO, 2005).

Since access to and use of ICT is directly linked to social and economic development, therefore, it is imperative to ensure that women in developing countries understand the significance of ICT and use them in order to avoid marginalising them from using ICT for personal and socio-economic development of society (Buskens & Webb, 2009; Gillwald, Milek & Stork, 2010; Jorge, 2000). In order to address ICT-related gender bias, it is imperative that gender is considered early in the process of the introduction of ICT in developing countries "so that gender