Chapter 34
Public Demand Aggregation as a Means of Bridging the ICT Gender Divide

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ABSTRACT

More men use ICTs than women globally. This is not because there are more men than women globally. Rather, it is because of social, economic and cultural challenges that work against the adoption of ICTs by women. In this chapter, public demand aggregation of ICT content is promoted as a means of bridging the ICT gender gap. The argument presented here is; the promotion of useful e-government service(s) in a country will enable equal adoption of ICTs by both men and Women. The argument for content is inspired by the examples proposed in this chapter as well as a synthesis of results from the Ghana Wireless Project and a research visit to Jaribu and Kerege in Tanzania. This chapter concludes, that the adoption of mandatory national e-government initiatives will result in more women identifying other uses of ICTs in other areas of their lives, spurring sustainable adoption of ICTs.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides an argument on the importance of public sector demand aggregation as a means of bridging gender digital divide. It is written from an ICT policy perspective. This implies that this piece is designed to recommend a policy approach towards bridging the ICT gender divide. The chapter is an academic discussion backed by some empirical findings from the Ghana Wireless Project and a study visit to two villages in Tanzania. The Tanzanian villages were namely, Jaribu and Kerege, located

in the central region of Tanzania. These empirical findings are extracted from findings carried out for other research purposes by the authors of this chapter. However, snippets of those findings, as it relates to this topic, are narrated in this chapter. The introductory section of this chapter is divided into two sections. The first section narrates the overview of the argument raised in this piece. This section provides a roadmap about how the central argument of this piece was crafted. The second section provides the objectives of this chapter.

AN OVERVIEW ON THE ARGUMENT

The empirical findings were chosen because they pointed to the fact that users - in general - adopted ICT services based on how the service fits into their daily routine. This insight aligns with the use and gratification theory. This is a media theory that explains that media adoption is dependent on how the media meets the desires of the user as well as the potential for gratification presented by the media to the user (Katz, Elihu, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974). Though the studies in Ghana and Tanzania were aimed at finding solutions aimed at bridging the digital divide in general, there was an opportunity to find out why ICT adoption in the cases studied became a possibility. Here there were few female citizens identified in the cases studied, who did not adopt ICTs. Their response was that they found no usefulness for the ICTs in their daily lives. In contrast, female citizens who adopted the ICTs were those who found the ICTs to be useful to them.

It is believed that certain factors such as the social status of women, the level employment status of women, the cost of affording the Customer Premise Equipments (CPE), knowledge on how to use ICTs, the availability of Customer Premise Equipments and formal education are often attributed as reasons for the ICT gender digital divide (see (Hafkin & Huyer, 2008) (Primo, 2003) (Gillwald, Milek, & Stork, 2010). Though, the influence of these factors is not in doubt, in cases studied, these factors did not play a role, as there were uneducated females using ICTs. It was evident that local shops in rural areas were selling ICT equipments which were mostly mobile telephone and their accessories. However, few desktop local computers were sighted. In areas where there were no electricity, local shops provided generators and solar panels to charge the mobile phone at a fee. Hence the CPEs were provided by local entrepreneurs, once there was demand for it. However, the uneducated females, who adopted ICTs did so because they could interact with social radio programs. Here they could vote for their favorite musician on Facebook as well as download ringtones. In the process, some of them got to know about YouTube and its value to them. Hence, they learned by doing. In such cases, the female users' cognitive learning process is deployed. The cognitive learning is enhanced by the fascination and interest of the female user as well as the perceived satisfaction, the female user expects from adopting the ICT. In this process, the female users could identify a need for the service and find gratification for the ICT services provided.

Based on this insight extracted from the aforementioned studies, it was glaring that the demand and supply of ICTs - aimed at bridging the ICT gender divide – can be facilitated by promoting an ICT service that will provide gratification to the female user. To facilitate the aforementioned diffusion and adoption process, a brainstorming process was conducted by the authors of this chapter to identify which ICT service would be useful as well as provide gratification to women. The first line of thought directed towards the social tendency of women. This implied that women will adopt more relevant ICTs in their work and daily lives, if they are comfortable using the ICTs for social purposes. This idea did not fly because, every woman may not be social. Another fact that went against promoting the social media

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