

Gender Differences in Access to and Use of ICTs in Nigeria

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INTRODUCTION

There are varying perceptions regarding gender equity in access to and use of information and communication technologies. Some argue that women have been maligned and are disadvantaged compared to their male counterparts while others are of the view that equal opportunities abound for both genders. Sanda and Kurfi (2013) submit that in their quest for empowerment and societal recognition, women have adopted and accepted ICTs as instruments for their advancement and empowerment. Although current information is fragmented, there is evidence suggesting that there are two schools of thought on gender differences in access to, and use of ICTs. The first school of thought argues that there are apparent gender differences in access to and use of ICTs (Kose, 2019; Olatokun, 2009; Nsibirano, 2009; Nsibirano, 2006; Agbonlahor, 2005; Brous, 2005; Stewart, 2004; Hafkin & Taggart, 2001). The second school of thought believes that women have come to a position of equal opportunities and platforms with their men counterparts in access to and use of ICTs (Olsson, Samuelsson & Viscovi, 2019; Bhandari, 2019). This view is also shared by Morahan-Martin (2000) who posit that females have reached parity with males in use of the internet and claims that digital divide in access to and use of ICT has disappeared. Gillwald, Milek and Stork (2010) also submit that women in some parts of the world have access to and make more use of ICTs when compared to men. This second school of thought also believed that male domination of the ICT field is not the case anymore.

When looking at the younger generation, especially the digital natives, the gender difference appears to be obliterated with both boys and girls seeming to be involved and interested in the use of various ICT tools, both at school and elsewhere (CERI, 2010). Furthermore, Tomte (2011) notes that there is

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the emergence of social media with seemingly more female participation. In light of this, there is a need to explore how the gender issue appears in youngsters' use of and attitudes towards ICTs, and how they perform and interact as producers and consumers of digital contents. The need to bridge the digital divide between men and women in access to and use of information and communication technologies is necessary given that ICTs play essential roles in human development as enablers of meaningful and sustainable development (Gillwald et al. 2010). Furthermore, the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women (2003) affirms that there is evidence suggesting that access to ICTs can break down the isolation of individuals, enhance their chances of economic and social inclusion as well as provide diverse avenues for women's social, political, and economic empowerment. To this end, ICTs are potential tools for job creation, social integration, women empowerment, poverty alleviation, and information dissemination. Consequently, access to and use of ICTs cannot be gender-defined but rather transcend gender, income, educational level, geographical location as well as social stratification.

Sorenson (2002) reports that widespread access to and use of ICTs do not necessarily give women equal position with men. Although studies have attempted to understand the gender gap, these studies only tell if women are included or excluded from access to and use of ICT without significant consideration of the factors responsible for this divide. Where attempts have been made to understand the causes of the gender divide, these tend to use dissimilar populations such as urban versus rural (Olatokun, 2009), educated versus uneducated, employed versus unemployed, and such likes without attempting a parallel assessment of gender difference using equal or similar criteria such as salary, employment, education level, social status etc. Given the importance of ICTs to women development, Gillwald et al. (2010) focused on ICTs in the context of Women in Development (WID), Women and Development (WAD) and Gender and Development (GAD). Other scholars also argue that studies on women and technology are sparse and often neglected (Kuschel Labra & Díaz, 2018; Orser & Riding, 2018; Dy et al., 2017; Kuschel & Lepeley, 2016). As interests deepen in studies focusing on gender inequality in access to and use of ICTs, there is an indication that the widespread adoption and application of ICTs to everyday life – both at home and the workplace is causing a shift towards an equilibrium in terms of male and female access to and use of ICTs. This study, therefore, assessed the gender difference in access and use of ICTs.

The following questions guided the study.

- i. Do males and females have equal access to ICTs in Nigeria?
- ii. What are ICTs mostly used by both males and females in Nigeria?
- iii. What are the factors that facilitate access to and use of ICTs among males and females in Nigeria?
- iv. What are the constraints to access and use of ICTs among male and female Nigerians?

Statement of Hypotheses

Based on the literature review, we hypothesise that

- i. There is no significant difference in access to ICTs between males and females in Nigeria
- ii. There is no significant difference in the use of ICTs between males and females in Nigeria
- iii. There is no significant difference between factors that facilitate access to and use of ICTs among males and females in Nigeria.
- iv. There is no significant difference between factors constraining access and use of ICTs among males and females in Nigeria.

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