

Chapter 67

Digital Leisure or Digital Business?

A Look at Nigerian Women Engagement with the Internet

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ABSTRACT

The fourth world conference on women in Beijing in 1995 was a springboard for women acceptance to explore various media possibilities to enhance their global visibility for societal recognition, address the negative media portrayal of women, and strengthen the gender equality struggles. Their platform for action on women and the media was to strategically increase the participation and access of women to expression and decision-making in and through the media and new technologies of communication. These declarations and strategies were clear indications and a call for creating new avenues for expression and participation for the purpose of empowering women. These plans of action and adoption of new technologies of communication must translate into relevant engagement with these technologies to be able to achieve the set goals. Engaging with technologies for leisure purposes (digital leisure) are likely to be of little significance to serious Internet activities relevant to women empowerment drive (digital business). The purpose for which women engage these new technologies should reflect issues that are in tandem with women empowerment drive. This Chapter examined what area Nigerian women are engaging the Internet. Findings showed that more Nigeria women access the Internet through mobile devices such as smartphones and tablets. Nigerian women engage the Internet for both digital leisure and digital business but they do more leisure-based Internet activities than serious activities that facilitate women empowerment (their Internet activities are more leisure oriented than business oriented) The women Internet empowerment drive can only be realised if Nigerian women up their game in digital business activities on the Internet.

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INTRODUCTION

When women accepted (at the fourth world conference on women in Beijing in 1995) to explore the use of ICTs as one of their options to enhance their global visibility for societal recognition, strategically increase the participation and access of women to expression and decision making, it was a call for serious business of engaging with new technologies for desired global impact. Are Nigerian women using ICTs for leisure or the business of women empowerment? Digital leisure oriented activities such as downloading beauty tips, latest fashion styles, latest movies; teens flirting on social network sites and virtual gaming may seem like typical behaviour in developed countries where these technologies have been appropriated in their everyday life, yet in the context of developing countries, it is seen as unusual and perhaps an anomaly in their new media practice especially when viewed from the perspective of the need to focus on more serious issues that would translate into some form of socio-political and economic advantages (Arora & Rangaswamy, 2013).

Nigerian women participation at various global fora for women attest to the fact they are not isolated from the global trends in respect of women. Nigerian Women visibility at the Beijing Conference in 1995 indicates their acceptance of the positions of the conference its platform for action on women and the media. The growing penetration of ICTs since 1998 and the formulation of Information technology Policy, which although does not reflect gender characteristics, make it necessary to explore how ICT such as the Internet manifest in the lives of women and their quest for empowerment. Wilson and Lawan (2015) notes female undergraduates in Nigeria use the Internet for various purposes but do not make inputs (which is an important activity on the Internet towards empowering others with useful information) on the Internet.

Since several Internet activities take place among Nigeria women, how relevant are these activities to women empowerment drive? Are the activities leisure-based or based on the business of women empowerment?

The Chapter examines whether Nigerian women activities on Internet is for leisure or for women empowerment. The study has the following objectives: to identify ways through which women access the Internet (Internet access platform) and to examine the activities they engage in on the Internet. The study focused on women from various walks of life (Women academicians, women working in private and public sector, self-employed/business women and full time house wives) in two Nigerian cities in North Eastern Nigeria: Yola, Adamawa State and Maiduguri Borno State in 2015. Somolu (2012) sums up the profile of women online in Nigeria, thus, predominantly young: Up to mid-40s, Undergraduate Level Education, Professional / 'White-Collar' Careers. Women professionals form an important part of actualization of the ICTs for empowerment process (a process by which women gain control over resources such as income, knowledge, information technology, skills and training, challenge the ideology of patriarchy and participate in leadership, decision-making process, enhance self-image of women, to become active in the process of change and to develop skills for enhancement (Komar, 2012) These professionals are also vital in policy and contents development as well as mobilization of younger women and housewives to adopt and make maximum use of these technologies to realise their empowerment .

Developments in Information and communication technologies (ICTs) have resulted in human engagement with these technologies for different purposes. Individuals, public and private organization and interest groups globally have embraced technologies as tools for facilitating their global impact. . These show that in modern societies, the ICTs encloses various possibilities by creating new spaces for political expression and participation; increased opportunity for a more active involvement in delibera-

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