INTERNET AND WOMEN SELF-EMPOWERMENT: OPPORTUNITIES, STRATEGIES, AND CHALLENGES

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ABSTRACT
In all spheres of life, women have been experiencing one form of discrimination, marginalisation or domination or the other by men. The patriarchal social structure in Africa provides a framework upon which the marginalization and discrimination are based. This many believed are responsible for the exclusion of women’s interests in the decision-making process and development paradigms. The traditional mass media many argued also help in the marginalization of women. Anchored on the Diffusion of Innovation Theory, the study evaluated if female university students in South-east Nigeria can be self-empowered through their use of Internet which can lead to tangible developments in their lives. Survey conducted among 300 female students of universities in the south-east, Nigeria revealed that although the Internet use among the women is mainly for leisure purposes, it can lead to empowering them for sustainable development. The study recommends that women should aggressively utilize the opportunities provided by the Internet for self-empowerment by searching for information that can boost their economic standard, and approach the Internet to fight the marginalization against them that have been crippling their development effort.

Key Words: Internet, Women, Self-Empowerment, Opportunities, Strategies, Challenges, Development.

Introduction
Gender bias and discrimination against women is still a powerful negative force in significant percentages of the world population (PCI, 2016), despite the fact that women are the primary caretakers of the home. They are central to maintaining and developing the collective values, including sustainability resource management, transfer of indigenous knowledge and maintaining cultural identity and family food security (AIPP, 2014). They are expected to be responsible for the family and to maintain the traditional perception of a woman rather than self-fulfillment (McLanahan, 1988; Hirschman, 2016), yet they are still reduced to “unproductive stereotype” (Aldoory & Parry-Giles, 2005). This hampers women’s ability to lift
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themselves from poverty and secure improved options to improve their lives (Carmon, 2013). This is a reflection of the forced economic independence many women live under.

The empowerment of women in our present society is a significant topic of discussion in regards to development. It is a process of assisting women to explore their inert potentials, access information and acknowledge; and acquiring skills that will improve their lot; moving from enforced powerlessness to a position of power (Carmont, 2013). Women empowerment has become a major factor in economic development and is increasingly at the core of countries’ competitiveness in the global economy (Acha, 2014). Thus women can become economically, educationally, socially and even legally aimed at widening the scope of their economic activities, strong flaming their economic competence. There is a need to provide women and girls with the right information that will encourage them to better their lots.

It has long been recognized that the media can play a fundamental role in highlighting gender issues in the process of development. The traditional media of newspaper, radio and television reinforce the stereotype perception of women as helpless victims who are not good enough to contribute to the economic development of the family and the society at large (UNDP, 2012; AIPP, 2014). They draw attention to the central role that women are perceived to play by the wider public thereby helping in perpetrating more harm to women’s image.

In order to promote women's empowerment, it is necessary to create an environment that will allow women to participate in the production, shaping news agenda and reporting; and be given a voice in things that affect them. Unfortunately, according to (AIPP, 2014), men outnumbered in every job level in media outlet across the globe; 73 percent of men are in top management media job, 64 percent are in reporters’ rank, while 59 percent are of senior media professional The implication of this is that women may not be in a better position to determine the direction of news as regards their portrayal.

The emergence of the Internet as a medium of mass communication has brought a great competition to the world of conventional media, like radio, television, newspaper and magazine among others (Ezeh, 2015). It has affected access to information and media use. The Internet is seen as a freedom device because of its unrestricted content nature. It is “unquestioned public and economic good to which all citizens have the right to access” (Livingstone, 2005; p.14); and control does not exist in the content presentation at the moment, as applicable to the conventional media, with censorship establishments in various garbs. Women can now have a voice in the content of the media and can now help in structuring media content that will address their issues. The underlying assumption is that if women have information that will help them understand their conditions, know their rights and learned skills traditionally denied to them by the society and the traditional media, empowerment would follow (Medel-Anonuevo and Bochynek, 1995).

It becomes necessary, therefore, to understand if Internet use has exerted any influence in the empowerment of women in Nigerian. The study, therefore, investigated how female undergraduate students in Nigerian universities, particularly those in selected universities in the South-East geo-political zone, used the Internet to access and provide information on issues that affect them as to improve their situation in the short term and emancipate them in the long run.

Statement of Problem

Over the years, the developing countries of the world have been battling poor economic condition, mostly because they were not able to fully maximize both the capital and human resources. Women who constitute the greater chunk of the population are often neglected or ignored in development sphere and it is pertinent to note that they can only be ignored at the detriment of the economy.

Access to relevant information directly to women as to be capable of stimulating them for self-empowerment is a problem in Nigeria. The women need authentic communication channels through which to access vital information that can help them for self-development. It becomes necessary to understand if the internet channels are effective in information delivery to women, as to effectively emancipate them from dependency. Economic development can only be achieved if the women population, their welfare, and contributions are significantly put in place.

Objectives of the Study

1. To determine if women are less empowered than men in Nigerian society.
2. To assess the extent to which female university undergraduate students in the South-East Nigeria utilize the internet for self-empowerment.
3. To examine the Internet strategies use in women self-empowerment.
4. To ascertain the challenges in the use of the Internet for self-empowerment among female university undergraduate students in South-East Nigeria.
Research Questions

1. To what extent are women less empowered than men in Nigerian society?
2. To what extent do female university undergraduate students in South-East Nigeria utilise the Internet for self-empowerment?
3. What is the Internet strategies used in women’s self-empowerment?
4. What are the challenges in the use of the Internet for self-empowerment among female university undergraduate students in South-East Nigeria?

Literature Review

Women and Empowerment

According to (Medel-Anonuevo & Bochynek, 1995) “Empowerment” has become one of the most widely used development terms, as women’s groups, non-governmental development organisations, activists, politicians, governments and international agencies refer to empowerment as one of their goals. To them, “the nature of empowerment renders it difficult to define. On the one hand, it is often referred to as a goal for many development programmes/projects. On the other hand, it can also be conceived as a process that people undergo, which eventually leads to changes (p. 25)”. Empowerment enables a person to gain insight and has an awareness of what is undesirable and unfavorable about the current situation, perceive a better situation, the possibilities of attaining it and realising what is within reach and what could be done to get to a better situation (Lazo, 1995). The term is therefore more relevant to the marginalized groups- the poor, the illiterates, the voiceless, landless, the powerless, the indigenous communities (Lazo, 1995; Medel-Anonuevo and Bochynek, 1995; McCracken, 2015); and of course, the subordinate position of women in society, makes them to cut across these categories.

Women empowerment in Nigeria is an economic process that involves empowering Nigerian women as a poverty reduction measure. It is the development of women in terms of politics, social and economic strength in nation development. It is also a way of reducing women vulnerability and dependency in all spheres of life (Okemakinde, 2014).

‘Economic empowerment’ is defined as the ability to earn one’s own money, ability to support oneself, knowledge of budgeting and planning one’s own money. It is the ability of women to engage in a productive activity that will allow them some degree of autonomy, no matter how small and hard to obtain at the beginning (Medel-Anonuevo and Bochynek, 1995). Although gender gaps in employment rates are narrowing in most countries, as more women enter the labour force. However, the earnings differentials between men and women are still pronounced (McCracken, Unterhalte, Márquez, & Chelstowska (2015).

The educational empowerment entails the opening of adequate access for women to attain formal education, basic literacy; science and technology. Though girls may outperform boys at school, families and communities’ expectations of their future careers may prevent them from translating educational success into career success. Unterhalte, Márquez, and Chelstowska (2015), believes that girls seem to do better than boys in terms of leaving school early and also in numbers of higher education graduates. On the other hand, there are more male than female graduates in mathematics, science and technology. Subjects that are linked to better occupational outcomes and higher wages are mainly reserve for boys; and girls and women receive less encouragement, experience and opportunities in these areas because teachers and school managers consider it a ‘male’ subject, for which women do not have skills, understanding or aptitude. Subsequently, girls are discouraged from following what are traditionally viewed as ‘male’ subjects of science, engineering, technology or mathematics subjects; more so, more men are in secure and senior positions in the institutions’ hierarchies.

Political empowerment is addressed by moves to provide information and training to encourage women to participate in political process, appointing more women in key positions, decision-making bodies in government, political parties and trade unions. The political rights of women remain greatly constrained by culture and practices (Eliasoph, 1998; CIRDDOC, 2002) as some of the cultures forbid such equal rights. In Africa, the belief that “women are to be seen, not heard” and “women education ends in the kitchen” make many women shy away from political participation so as not to be labeled ‘wayward’ or subjected to public ridicule (Ezeh & Enwereuzo, 2015).

New Media, New Opportunities, New Uses
The Internet has revolutionized in the way people communicate among each other, access information, communicate, access services, work, live, by acting as a facilitator for easier, faster, wider communication and access to information, at all levels (local, regional, national and international) (Marzocchi, 2015). The flexibility of the internet allows users to have access to relevant information; it promotes a secure digital environment for women and protects their online and offline freedom of expression. It is considered a democratizing medium, as every member of the society, has equal freedom and access to contribute to the political issues of society, thus offering space for audience and offering new spaces for interpersonal interaction in which one own text is also created” (Liebes, 2005; p. 357).

The Internet empowers and promotes the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion, economic or other status. These developments have a strong potential for the empowerment of women especially young women; since they are more eager to have access to the Internet because a friend is hooked on it; it becomes a misnomer for him or her not to be online (Oyesomi, Ahmadu and Itsekor, 2014). The internet reaches a broad audience, offering new possibilities for women employment; which are accessible via simple search engines or pop-ups, chat rooms and spam mail. Internet tools are becoming increasingly popular as recruitment tools (Marzocchi, 2015).

Women have begun to use Internet tools like Facebook, Blogs, Youtube, Whatsapp, Twitter etc. for online activism. Through online activism, women are able to empower themselves by organizing campaigns and voicing their opinions for equality rights without feeling oppressed by members of society (Churchyard, 2009).

With the easy accessibility and affordability of e-learning (electronic learning), women can now study from the comfort of their homes. By empowering themselves educationally through new technologies like e-learning, women are also learning new skills that will come in handy in today's advancing globalized world (Radovic-Markovic, Nelson-Porter & Omolaja, 2012).

In recent years, blogging has also become a powerful tool for the educational empowerment of women. Among the more well-known, generalist blogs are the single-interest who are highly educated and well positioned in their careers that see blogs as a quick and efficient way to make a change. They share their experiences and others' experiences; women can better educate themselves and apply strategies that their fellow bloggers suggest (Stepp, 2009). Though there are many questions concerning the long-term viability of blogs and the depth of their content, their accomplishments are significant (McKenna, 2007).

Facebook is very popular and accessed on a daily basis by half its members (David-Steves, 2010; Eugene, 2010), and no medium of communication seems to engage people the way facebook does. Whatsapp on the other hand is fast becoming popular among the social networking channels. It offers its users, the ability to share messages like videos, but only between themselves. Twitter is simple to use, fast and can spread quickly to millions of people all over the world. The Internet channels no doubt have expanded beyond the scope of a simple networking site where people went to socialize with friends to now a place where people also go to seek and discover important information.

As technology advances, women and girls have increasingly become targets of cyber-stalking and digital voyeurism, harassment, blackmail and threats (Radovic-Markovic, Nelson-Porter & Omolaja, 2012). That notwithstanding, the Internet remains a great tool for women empowerment.

Theoretical Framework

Diffusion of Innovation Theory

Diffusion of Innovation Theory developed by Rogers in 1962, originated in communication to explain how, over time, an idea gains momentum and diffuses (or spreads) through a specific population or social system. According to Rogers, an innovation is an idea, practice, or object that is perceived as new by an individual or another unit of adoption. Diffusion is a special type of communication concerned with the spread of messages that are perceived as new ideas. Diffusion of Innovation, therefore, is the process by which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among the members of a social system (Roger, 2003). The members or units of a social system may be individuals, informal groups, organizations, and/or subsystems.

Rogers explained that when a new idea is introduced, an initial few people are open to the new idea and adopt its use. As these early adopters communicate the idea through various channels, more and more people become open to it. Over time, the idea becomes diffused amongst the population until a saturation point is achieved.

With the emergence of Internet technology, there is a shift from fixed to human capital, from muscle power to brain power; and technology is seen as a product and enhancer of this shift, in particular through the master concept of Innovation. (Garnham N., 2002;288). However, factors that determine the rate of
adoption of innovation in a social system include; availability of information concerning the innovation (like relative advantage, compatibility), observability to people within the social system, etc.), adopters properties (like past experience), characteristics of the social system (like social norms, availability of social agents like gatekeepers and opinion leaders), and the communication process (through which media, like mass media or interpersonal communication) (Lyytien and Damsgaard (2001).

With training in the use of the technology and information that comes from it, people can be provided with all kinds of skills which are increasingly demanded in the post-industrial society (Bell, 2004). Knowledge accumulation and application have become major factors in economic development and are increasingly at the core of many countries’ competitive advantage in the global economy (Acha, 2015). Information, is, therefore necessary for developing countries especially to; experience higher economic growth, reduce the incidence of poverty, increase average wage, and improve health. Women who key into the adoption of Internet innovation are more likely to be empowered, which will eventually lead to the economic growth of the country.

Method
Survey Research Method (Quantitative Method) was adopted in this study for obtaining relevant data. It means that the research was conducted in the field (Goode and Hatt, 2001) and within the environment where the phenomenon was occurring (Wimmer and Dominick, 2000).

The multistage sampling procedure was used to select a sample of 300 female university students drawn out of the total population of 206,854 students from the nine universities, out of the 18 universities that exist in the South-East geopolitical zones, of Nigeria. The researchers made a list of the universities in each of the three types of a university (private, state and federal) in five states in South-east zone of Nigeria. Three universities were randomly selected from each type. Of the nine selected universities, three were privately owned; three were state universities while the other three were federal universities. The second stage of the sampling involved selection of faculties to be studied from the various institutions that had been chosen. Again the researchers made a list of faculties/colleges into which the selected universities were organized. One faculty/college was selected from each of the chosen university using simple Random method. The third stage involved selection of one department from each of the faculties/colleges that had been chosen using also simple Random method.

A sample size of 300 is considered apt, since according to Wimmer and Dominick (2000), a sample size of “50 = very poor; 100 = poor; 200 = fair; 300 = good; 500 = very good and 1,000 = excellent. The choice for female students arouses from the facts that they that more likely to use the Internet and spend more time online than other cohorts. The main instrument used for data collection was a set of structured questionnaire. To achieve reliability of the instrument, a pilot or preliminary study was conducted in the three universities where the instrument was used. The response provided an avenue for corrections and improvement on the instrument. The data generated was analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

Result
The results of the study are presented, analyzed and discussed below using SPSS statistical tool. Three hundred copies of the questionnaire were administered on the respondents by hand. However, 271 copies of the questionnaire were valid for this study. The details of results are as follows;
RQ1: Are females less empowered than males in Nigerian society?
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The status of male and female in Nigerian society was rated so as to determine if female gender is less empowered than male as claimed by some gender scholars. As can be read from Table 1 above, women are marginalised in many areas except in the area of education which is significant at $3.42 > 3.0$. Though areas like earning, access to labour market and self-confidence are insignificant at $< 3.0$, there is an improvement in what it used to be. Areas that are grossly insignificant are political participation and ability to make their own decision which are $1.91 < 3.0$, and $1.80 < 3.0$ respectively.

The Table also shows that females were under-represented in politics as few of them occupy a position of public decision-making. This corroborates with (Ezeh and Enwereuzo, 2015) submission that the under-representation of women in politics and decision-making processes have been responsible for the exclusion of the interests of women in development paradigms. Interestingly, their access to education and self-confidence has greatly improved in the study area. Their gain of self-confidence may not be unconnected with their level of attainment in education as education to a great extent bestows self-confidence and self-esteem.

RQ2: To what extent do female university undergraduate students in South-East Nigeria utilise the Internet for self-empowerment?

Table 2: Extent of Internet use for self-empowerment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Extent of Internet use</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Frequently</th>
<th>Not always</th>
<th>None</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2 hr and above</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>33.2%</td>
<td>14.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 hr</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>31.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>less than 1 hr</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>14.8%</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
<td>21.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>64.2%</td>
<td>28.8%</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The result from Table 2 shows that almost all the respondents in one way or the other used the Internet for self-empowerment, as 64.2 % of the respondents use Internet frequently. Also, 28.8% of the respondents said that they use the Internet but not too frequently, while just 7.0% did not indicate their usage of Internet for self-empowerment. The extent of use of Internet for self-empowerment seems to increase with the number of hours spent on the Internet daily. This suggests that the more the respondents use Internet for online communication, the more they are likely to come across messages that will encourage them to have self-confidence and improve themselves.
Applying chi-square to the table, since P-value is less than 0.05, we accept that the extent of use of Internet for self-empowerment depends on the average time spent on the Internet. It can be deduced that people who spend more time on the Internet are more likely to get empowered.

RQ3: What are the social media strategies used in female’s self-empowerment?

Table 3: Preferred Internet channel for self-empowerment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Internet Channels for Self-Empowerment</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>271</td>
<td>3.79</td>
<td>1.114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td>271</td>
<td>2.12</td>
<td>1.164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youtube</td>
<td>271</td>
<td>2.01</td>
<td>1.163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whatsapp</td>
<td>271</td>
<td>3.03</td>
<td>1.372</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blog</td>
<td>271</td>
<td>2.88</td>
<td>1.334</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email</td>
<td>271</td>
<td>2.34</td>
<td>1.367</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This study sought to find out female university students’ preferred Internet channels for self-empowerment. Reading across the table 3, Facebook recorded 3.79>3.0 ranking highest among other channels, followed by Whatsapp which ranked second at 3.13>3.0. Others are insignificant at they scored below the decision point of 3.0. Among the insignificant channels are; Blog recorded 2.88<3.0 bringing it to the third position, while Email records 2.34<3.00. Twitter and Youtube ranked lowest (fifth and sixth) with 2.12<3.0 and 2.01<3.0 respectively.

Since Facebook is the most significant channels, it seems to suggest that it is more popular when compared with other channels. This popularity may not be unconnected with the fact that facebook is easier to operate. It shows that people are embracing facebook communication en mass. This is in line with previous studies that suggest that facebook is accessed on a daily basis by half its members (David-Steves, 2010; Eugene, 2010), and no medium of communication seems to engage people the way facebook does.

Table 4: Internet Uses for Self-empowerment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/N</th>
<th>Internet Uses for Self-empowerment</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Political Participation</td>
<td>271</td>
<td>2.30</td>
<td>1.275</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Access to information that translated to self-esteem and confidence</td>
<td>271</td>
<td>3.45</td>
<td>1.275</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Education and training</td>
<td>271</td>
<td>3.16</td>
<td>1.386</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>271</td>
<td>2.07</td>
<td>1.159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Entrepreneurship</td>
<td>271</td>
<td>2.79</td>
<td>1.358</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this table 4, the different uses of the Internet for self-empowerment were rated. The use of Internet for, “Access to information that translated to self-esteem and confidence” had the highest mean score of 3.45>3.0 as the most significant use by the respondents. “Education and training” is also significant at a mean score of 3.16>3.0. The rest are insignificant at mean score < 3.0, as 3.0 is the decision point for this measurement.
This implies that more women are going into various educational training unlike before now. This will definitely broaden their horizons and prepare them in attaining the economic level that was previously exclusively reserved for men.

RQ4: What are the challenges in the use of the Internet for self-empowerment among female university undergraduate students in South-East Nigeria?

Table 5: Challenges in the use of the Internet for women self-empowerment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenge</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cyber bullying</td>
<td>271</td>
<td>2.44</td>
<td>1.321</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cyber fraud</td>
<td>271</td>
<td>3.81</td>
<td>1.199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial fraud</td>
<td>271</td>
<td>3.43</td>
<td>1.409</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infrastructural Constraint</td>
<td>271</td>
<td>2.52</td>
<td>1.416</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insufficient Internet skill and knowledge</td>
<td>271</td>
<td>1.99</td>
<td>1.090</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valid N</td>
<td>271</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The study further sought to know the challenges female university students encounter in the use of the Internet for self-empowerment “Cyber fraud” had the highest mean score of 3.81>3.0 as the most significant challenge “Financial Constraint” is also significant at 3.43>3.0. Other factors are insignificant at mean score < 3.0, as 3.0 is the decision point for this measurement. However, factors like “Infrastructural Constraint” though insignificant came third while “Cyber bullying” came fourth. “Insufficient Internet skill and knowledge” is grossly insignificant at 1.99< 3.0.

Discussion of Findings

The status of women in South-East Nigerian society was rated. The indicator for the rating includes; education, access to labour market, political participation, self-confidence and self-esteem, and ability to make own decision. The study found that there has been unequal power relations and discrimination against women. Only female students’ level of education is significant at 3.42>3.0, others are insignificant at <3.0. The implication of this result is that women are more educated than their male counterparts in the area of study, but men occupy more strategic positions that will earn better remuneration in the society. This could be as a result of women’s decision to go for less lucrative jobs in the society. This corroborates with (McCracken et al, 2015) findings that more males study subjects that are linked to better occupational outcomes which result in more access to labour market and higher wages than females.

It is expected that educated will go a long way in empowering women and make them more marketable in terms of employment, but because of societal stereotype and stigmatisation on certain subjects, women have been forced into less paid jobs. It is the class which women are been placed in the society that makes them withdraw or pretend not to be interested in the career.

Political participation of women is grossly insignificant at 1.91<3.0. This corroborates (Ezeh and Enwereuzo, 2015) suggestion that women are reluctant to neither seek political nor participate in political activities and politicians hardly court them; They stay away from politics so as not to be labeled ‘wayward’ or subjected to public ridicule. The political non-challancy and sub-ordinate role women play in the society make them not to participate in decision-making processes even in issues that affect them directly as can be seen in Table 1, where decision- making is also grossly insignificant at 1.8<3.0.

The study also sought to understand the extent to which women utilized the Internet for self-empowerment. It was found that women to a reasonable extent utilize the Internet for self-empowerment. It suggests that the extent of use of the Internet for self-empowerment increases with the number of hours spends on the Internet daily.

Access to Internet has resulted in access to information that translated to women gain of self-esteem and confidence. Women now appreciate their values and contributions to their families and society whether remunerated or not. They now have self-esteem and confidence in their worth because they are empowered through education and training received from the internet. What remains unsettled is the
transmission of such training into economic empowerment as can be seen from Table 4, that political participation, employment, and entrepreneurship which are the engine of economic empowerment is still insignificant. The study also noticed an improvement in the indices (political participation, employment and entrepreneurship) because of women’s use of the Internet in seeking self-empowerment. This suggests that although the Internet provided information that educates and train the women for self-empowerment, it did not significantly induce them for economic empowerment which is a major way of reducing women vulnerability and dependency in all spheres of life.

The theory of Diffusion of Innovation is applicable here since technology can provide education and skills that will guarantee knowledge and skill, the application of such knowledge and skill becomes a major factor in economic development and is increasingly at the core of advantage in the global economy (Acha, 2015). Women’s application of empowerment knowledge and skill acquired through the Internet technology will go a long way in their economic empowerment. The Internet is a freedom media, and as people surf the net, they join some social networks and consequently stumble on information that will consciously or unconsciously lead to their self-development.

Some of the drawbacks to the effective utilization of Internet for empowerment are cyber fraud and financial constraints. Due to the faceless and impersonal nature of the Internet, issue of trust also becomes a serious concern to prosumers of the internet as many have been duped in a bid of getting empowered through the Internet. The high cost of Internet technologies like computers, cell phones, modems, etc., have been a problem in internet empowerment, as many people cannot afford them in Nigeria. Few who can afford the technology, the high cost of subscription for data and slow speed of servers constitute the bottleneck to effective deployment of the Internet for self-empowerment.

Insufficient Internet skill and knowledge is grossly insignificant at 1.99<3.0. The implication of this is that Internet skill has been improved in Nigerians especially among the university students (Ezeh, 2015). Young people are particularly well-positioned to take advantage of the opportunities offered by the Internet and digital technology—including entertainment, data gathering, production, and networking—which have been part of their socialization (Jennings and Zeitner 2003). This also corroborates with (Environics Research Group, 2003), assertion that the Internet is becoming a defining part of young people’s culture and an integral part of their daily lives.

Conclusion

Although the internet provided information that educates and train the women for self-empowerment, it did not significantly induce them for economic empowerment which is a major way of reducing women vulnerability and dependency in all spheres of life.

Recommendations

The study recommends that:

1. Women should aggressively approach the Internet to fight the marginalization against them that have been crippling their development effort.
2. Women should be empowered through networking, education, and capacity building activities with the overall goal for indigenous women to assert, promote and protect their right.
3. The government should develop strategies for preventing, detecting and containing the threats associated with the use of Internet.
References


