HOW SOCIABLE ARE WOMEN ON SOCIAL MEDIA? AN EXPERIENTIAL STUDY ON NIGERIAN WOMEN

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Abstract

This study explores the how women utilize the social media for social engagement and empowerment. Also, this study is anchored on the uses and gratification theory, which stipulates how women use the social media and the gratification they seek and derive from the media. The method adopted was survey and the instrument was a questionnaire. Five research questions were raised and answered in the study. This study found out that the social media empower and encourage women in diverse ways, one of which is that the social media encourage women to engage in economic activities that build networks with colleagues, business partners, workers and clients. This study concludes that women make use of the social media as a veritable source of empowerment in different spheres of life.

Keywords: Social media, women, empowerment and Nigeria

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INTRODUCTION

Scholars agree that the Internet is regarded as the most enveloping medium of communication that has unbridled influence on all spheres of life (Okorie, 2009; Okorie, Ekeanyanwu & Obanua, 2010; Okorie & Oyedepo, 2011). The power of the Internet has significantly contributed to the augmentation and expansion of the social media in the 21st century (Okorie, Ekeanyanwu & Obanua, 2010; Okorie & Oyedepo, 2011; Okorie, Oyedepo & Usaini, 2012). In addition, the social media are products of the influence of the Internet that has re-invented the way individuals interact with one another at a global scale.

The aim of the social media are to create a social, relaxing networking or linking platform for people from all over the world to communicate and exchange ideas and also build friendships, with the diverse emerging sites, people have loads of variety to choose from. For Jones (2009), social media are essentially a category of online media where people are talking, participating, sharing, networking and bookmarking online. Social media give people the feeling of being connected and linked with other sites, resources or people. Social media is therefore made up of a wide variety of sites that can be categorised into several basic groupings or social media types. People often engage the use of the social media for various vocations. Some use it as a source of information, some others use it as their own medium to disseminate information, some use it as a platform to meet new people and build relationships or alliances, some use it to date and some others use it as channel to view the activities of others.

In any African society, women have been placed synonymously with the art of talking, many men are of the opinion that women "NAG" rather than communicate, and with their shift to the social media sphere, this study is to expatiate on what exactly women use the social media for. Many are of the opinion that women just use the social media to gossip and scheme, This research will explore what draws women to the social media and what keeps them interested, how useful are these social media to them, does it make them feel emancipated from the oppression of men, or do they see it as a private getaway, from the responsibilities of being a woman, or better still does it give them the voice they have been longing for.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of this study are

1. To find out the extent to which women use the social media.

2. To investigate the types of social media used and for what purpose.

3. To determine if the use of the social media empowers women (politically, socially, economically etc).

4. To find out if demographic characteristics of women influence the usage of social media.

5. To find out the activities women engage in through the social media

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. To what extent do women use the social media?

2. What types of social media do women use and for what purposes?

3. In what way(s) does the use of social media empower women?

4. Do Demographic characteristics of women influence the usage of the social media?

5. What activities do women use social media for?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Okunna (2002) agrees that women are not only under-represented in the media, but their images found in the media leaves quite a number of things to be desired. She also agrees that women are still being represented in roles like traditional ones that only strengthen gender stereotypes. From this statement, it is obvious that the manner in which both sexes are portrayed is very different. The male sex has consistently held the lead, while the female is still considered the subordinate even to this modern day. According to Odejide (1996, p.43), "the media often depicts women as being influential in the domestic sphere". Based on this statement it is obvious that there has always been inequality in the sex portrayal by the media. Effective communication which operates in a society through the mass media cannot operate in isolation; it has to operate with the society so as to reflect the needs of the people (Oyesomi, 2013).

According to Carter (2010),

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It turns out that sociolinguists have found women to be innovators when it comes to communication, especially with new forms of languages. The shift from "ye" to "you" in 15th Century England? Women were behind it. Common phrases such as, "Like, ohmigod," known as Valley Girl up talk, were started by young women from California. And in the mid-20th century a group of young women from Oberwart, Austria shifted the primary language of a bilingual community from Hungarian to German, which was a powerful move in a community that had resisted the influence of the German language for close to 400 years.

The issue of gender inequality has been an issue of discussion both in the academic and non-academic environment. Women are at a disadvantage as regarding the issue of gender equality and every area of their lives. Women are not given as much notice as that of their male counterparts, more so women outnumber men and this makes them really important and instrumental to the development of the society as well as the men, but they are treated as the minority group with no regard to their positions as equal to the male folk.

According to Oyesomi (2011), the Beijing Conference of 1995 on women articulated some areas considered crucial to the empowerment of women. These include poverty, education, healthcare, violence against women, effects of conflict on women, power-sharing and decision-making mechanisms to promote the advancement of women, management of natural resources and the environment and the girl child. Oyesomi (2013) is of the opinion that Nigerian women have indeed come a long way as far as politics and leadership are concerned. They have proved their mettle when given the opportunity to play any role. There is no doubt that the present Fourth Republic remains their shining glory, taking into account their exploits in the political terrain.

The Internet is the international networking of computers. Web 2.0 suggests a new version of the World Wide Web, it does not refer to an update to any technical specification, but rather to cumulative changes in the ways software developers and end –users use the web. Web 2.0 unlike Web 1.0 allows for interaction of web users, it supports social interaction and provides the platform for several users to communicate with each other.

According to Anttiriko and Savolainen (2007, P.1)

> Online communities, social media and user generated content production are bringing new elements to the development of the service sector. These new features are based on a new logic of the Web, referred to as Web 2.0 or alternatively social media. This new trend urges public libraries to reconsider their role as mediators between local

and global knowledge processes and as a local institution that can contribute to the increase of local human capital''.

According to (comScore , 2012) On average, women spend more time online per month, 24.8 hours compared to 22.9 hours for men. But, when it comes to the social web, there's an even bigger divide between the genders. "Nearly 56 percent of adult women say they use the Internet to stay in touch with people, compared to 46 percent of adult men," according to the report. ComScore also pinpoints higher activity levels in social categories such as social media, instant messenger and e-mail. Those behaviours equate to women spending an average of 16.3% of their online time per month on social networks, a percentage that continues to rise month-to-month. Men spend just 11.7% of their time on the same activities.

(ComScore, 2012) discovered that Twitter's reach is only marginally higher among women than among men. Women also outpace men in the adoption of Twitter, but only marginally. There are only slight differences between men and women in usage of Twitter, also women use twitter more for finding deals, following celebrities and their own self-defined purposes than to post tweets or read tweets from the people they follow.

The social media give women confidence, women from diverse backgrounds and orientations. Companies are drawn to thinking that women are only talking about shoes and babies, little do they know that social networks are giving female entrepreneurs a place to nurture and grow their ideas and businesses.Social media offers benefits and improvements to a woman's quality of life. Whether it's adding convenience to a work arrangement, harnessing information for decision-making, managing relationships, or juggling a variety of other responsibilities, social tools provide a convenient and efficient way for women to manage the various aspects of their lives. The practical benefits that social media affords, combined with it's emotionally fulfilling features make it likely that women will not only continue to engage with social media, but with future related innovations, as well (Faye 2010).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The uses and gratification theory which could also be called "utility theory" seeks to explain what function a particular kind of media content serves in a particular circumstance (Asemah, 2011). Uses and gratification theory seeks to answer the question, what do the people do to the media? Who uses which content from the media and under what conditions and for what

reason? According to Asemah (2011), the theory talks about reciprocal gesture between the media and the media consumers. The media is useful to the society and the society is also useful to the media; hence it is called uses and gratification theory. The theory is simply concerned with how people use the media for gratification of their needs. It propounds the fact that people choose what they want to expose themselves to. Okorie, Ekeanyanwu and Obanua (2010) citing Chandler (1994, p. 1) state that the

> Uses & Gratification arose originally in the 1940s and underwent a revival in the 1970s and 1980s. The approach springs from a *functionalist* paradigm in the social sciences. It presents the use of media in terms of the gratification of social or psychological needs of the individual (Blumler & Katz, 1974). The mass media compete with other sources of gratification, but gratifications can be obtained from a medium's content (e.g. watching a specific programme), from familiarity with a genre within the medium (e.g. watching soap operas), from general exposure to the medium (e.g. watching TV), and from the social context in which it is used (e.g. watching TV with the family). U & G theorists argue that people's needs influence how they use and respond to a medium. Zillmann (cited by McQuail 1987: 236) has shown the influence of *mood* on media choice: boredom encourages the choice of exciting content and stress encourages a choice of relaxing content.

McQuail (1983) identifies the following common reasons for media use:

i. Information

Finding out about relevant events and conditions in immediate surroundings, society and the world; seeking advice on practical matters or opinion and decision choices; satisfying curiosity and general interest; learning; self-education; and gaining a sense of security through knowledge

ii. Personal Identity- Finding reinforcement for personal values; finding models of behaviour; identified with valued others (in the media); and gaining insight into oneself

iii. Integration and Social Interaction- Gaining insight into the circumstances of others; social empathy; identifying with others and gaining a sense of belonging; finding a basis for conversation and social interaction; having a substitute for real-life companionship; helping to carry out social roles and enabling one to connect with family, friends and society.

iv. Entertainment- Escaping or being diverted from problems; relaxing; getting intrinsic cultural or aesthetic enjoyment; filling time and emotional release

This theory is related to this study because it examines how people use the media and the gratification they seek and derive from the media. Uses and gratification theory seeks to answer the question, what do the people do to the media? Who uses which content from the media and under what conditions and for what reason?

METHOD

The survey method was used for this study. Ikeja Local Government is a very large settlement of 313,196 people and due to this population figure the study population was stratified to a very commercial and industrial locality under this region, Agidingbi, Lagos State, Nigeria. Therefore, the study population of this research work was the residents of Agidingbi.   The sample size was 400 respondents.

For the purpose of this research work, the researcher made use of the purposive sampling method, which is a non-probability sampling method in which decisions concerning the individuals to be included in the sample are taken by the researcher, based on a variety of criteria which may include specialist knowledge of the research issue, or capacity and willingness to participate in the research. According to Wimmer and Dominick (2006), a purposive sample includes subjects or elements selected for specific characteristics or qualities and eliminates those who fail to meet these criteria.

A survey design that employed the use of questionnaire for data collection was used in this study. The study examined the use of the social media network among women in the Agidingbi community. Before the respondents were selected to respond to the questionnaires, certain questions were asked to determine if they qualify or not to respond to the questions. The questions include (Do you have access to the internet, and are you familiar with the term Social media?) if the respondents answered affirmative to the above, then the researcher administered the questionnaire to them. The questionnaire was self-administered. This is to ensure 100% return rate. All the 400 copies of the questionnaires were filled correctly.

Table 1: ACCESS TO THE INTERNET

RESPONSES	PERCENTAGES
Yes	90%
No	10%
Total	100% n=400

Accessibility to Internet facilities are very important to the use of the social media and to the extent at which it is use. As signified in the table, a majority of the respondents have access to

the Internet; this would broaden our knowledge on how familiar the respondents are with the social media.

Table 2:FAMILIARITY WITH THE SOCIAL MEDIA

RESPONSES	PERCENTAGES
Yes	86%
No	14%
Total	100% n=400

For the extent of usage of the social media to be properly determined, respondents have to be familiar with the social media, and from the above table, it is evident that the respondents are conversant with the social media, as only a minute percentage of the respondents indicated that they are not familiar with the social media.

TABLE 3: EXTENT TO WHICH WOMEN USE THE SOCIAL MEDIA

RESPONSES	PERCENTAGES
High Extent	52%
Low Extent	43%
No Extent	5%
Total	100% n=400

From the above table, it is clearly shown that majority of the respondents agree with the notion that women engage in the use of the social media to a high extent (52%). However, as there are always two sides to a coin, a small percentage of the respondents (5%) are of the opinion that women use the social media to a low extent, and the rest of the respondents do not use the social media at all.

Table 4: THE SOCIAL MEDIA RESPONDENTS ARE MOST FAMILIAR WITH

RESPONSES	PERCENTAGE
Facebook	49%
Twitter	43%
MySpace	2%
Others	4%
Total	100% n=400

Facebook offers its users a lot of interactive options, and as such the above table indicates that majority of the respondents are most familiar with Facebook, closely followed by twitter, but Twitter is limited by the fact that it only offers its users with 140 characters called tweets. Facebook is also popular because it offers its users the option of collating their pictures into various photo albums; it also has an organised format which makes it very engaging and interactive. MySpace on the other hand is not very popular in Nigeria, and according to extensive research is well accepted among teenagers and high school students in America. As indicated in the above table, only a little percentage of the respondents are familiar with MySpace. Others in the table represent the likes of Yahoo messenger, you tube, keek, Instagram to mention a few.

Table 5: THE PURPOSE FOR WHICH RESPONDENTS USE THE SOCIAL MEDIA

So

RESPONSES	PERCENTAGE
Entertainment	43%
News	18%
Education	5%
Information	34%
Total	100% n=400

Table 6: ACTIVITIES FOR WHICH RESPONDENTS USE THE SOCIAL MEDIA

RESPONSES	PERCENTAGES
View/Create Profiles	54%
Watch Video Clips	7%
Read blogs/Web logs	16%
Upload pictures to a site	15%
Leave Comments on a site	8%
Total	100% n=400

Table 7: REASONS RESPONDENTS VISIT A SOCIAL MEDIA SITE

RESPONSES	PERCENTAGES
Network professionally	33%
Stay up-to-date with friends	34%
Get advice	18%
Find New Friend	15%
Total	100% n=400

Tables 5 through to 7 represent the purposes for which the Social media are being used, the activities in which the social media are being used for and the reasons for visiting a social media site. As table 5 indicated, majority of the respondents use the social media for entertainment. Viewing and creating profiles, leaving comments on various sites, reading blogs, staying up to date with friends etc. However, among the lot a percentage of the respondents as seen in table 4.7 say they use the social media to network professionally.

TABLE 8: USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA EMPOWERS WOMEN

RESPONSES	PERCENTAGES
Strongly Agree	16%
Agree	64%
Undecided	16%
Strongly Disagree	4%
Total	100% n=400

TABLE 9: EXTENT TO WHICH THE SOCIAL MEDIA EMPOWERS WOMEN

RESPONSES	PERCENTAGES
High Extent	80.5%
Low Extent	19.5%
Total	100% n=400

Tables 8 and 9 indicate that women agree that they are highly empowered by using the social media.

This is because they get advice from one another on the social media; some women even have blogs that focus on marriage counselling, some on various recipes that women can cook and some just put up daily inspirational quotes, that other women enjoy reading.

TABLE 10: WAYS THROUGH WHICH SOCIAL MEDIA EMPOWERS WOMEN

RESPONSES	PERCENTAGES
Encourage women to network professionally	67%

creating political programmes to encourage women's participation in politics	8%
Encourage women to participate in economic activities	23%
Creating information about the information of women's education to PhD level	2%
Total	100% n=400

Table 10, however, lists the various ways women are inspired by engaging the use of the social media. As clearly indicated in the table, majority of the respondents say the social media encourages women to network professionally. Women are encouraged to join the LinkedIn network, develop a profile for themselves or their businesses and upload their resumes for employers of labour or even other job seekers to benefit from.

RESEARCH QUESTION 1

To what extent do women use the social media?

Social media have been found useful in the social sciences to study relationships between individuals, organizations or even groups. While the social media presents women with diverse opportunities for influence and professional development, the extent to which women engage the platform is very crucial. Findings reveal that the women in this community are not only familiar with the social media but they also adequately engage the social media very often. Their extent of usage is enhanced by their accessibility to Internet facilities

RESEARCH QUESTION 2

What types of social media do women use and for what purposes?

A majority of the respondents identified Facebook as the social media they are familiar with. From the analysis, Facebook was the most popular social media among the respondents closely followed by Twitter. Facebook was top-rated because its features and characteristics appeal to them. The fact that they are able to upload pictures and chat with friends gives Facebook an added advantage over other social media.

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RESEARCH QUESTION 3

Does the use of social media empower women?

Social media have the possibility of empowering individuals who adequately engage in it and judiciously use the medium for that purpose. The extent to which the social media empowers women in Agidingbi community in Ikeja Local Government Area was examined. Findings reveal that the social media empowers the women in this community.

From Table 9 and 10, social media serve as a potent source of knowledge acquisition. The media help women to connect and reconnect with clients, workers, business partners and colleagues. Also, social media empowers women to participate in the political development of their country.

RESEARCH QUESTION 4

Do Demographic characteristics of women influence the usage of the social media?

The demographic characteristic of a woman holds a great importance in determining the use of social media. Findings of this research reveal that a number of these demographic characteristics influence the use of social media by women in Agidingbi community in Ikeja Local Government Area. Among the factors that determine the use of the social media are the social demographic characteristics of the respondents. It holds a great importance in determining the usage of the social media by women.

Findings of this research reveal that the demographic characteristics that influence women usage of the social media in Agidingbi community in Ikeja Local Government Area was examined include age, educational qualification, marital status and employment status with the aid of cross tabulated tables.

People of the younger age bracket have ample time to engage in the use of the social media. Also, those who are employed hardly have time for the social media, and try to squeeze out time during their break periods, except if their organisations actively use the social media. The self-employed on the other hand have flexible working hours. All these factors have contributed to determine the extent of the usage of the network in by the women in this community. The married and the single also actively use the social media to a high extent.

RESEARCH QUESTION 5

What activities do women use social media for?

Social media have been found useful and engaged for so many activities While the social media presents women with diverse opportunities for empowerment and development, the actual activities that the network is used for is very crucial. Findings of this research reveal

that women use the social media for activities such as: economic activities, social interaction and to place and source information on various issues including education, economic activities and professional networking.

Thus, women use the social media to strengthen and build networks with their business partners, colleagues and clients. In essence, social media promotes veritable platforms for business exploits and transactions.

CONCLUSION

A look at the findings of this study reveals that women use the social media to a very large extent for a number of purposes. Some of which include staying in touch with friends, networking professionally, getting advice etc. A majority of the respondents agreed that the use of the social media as a form of entertainment, to view and create profiles, read blogs, upload pictures and even leave comments on sites.

This study also found out that the social media empower and encourage women in diverse ways, one of which that carries majority opinion that the social media encourage women to engage in economic activities and also network professionally.

Furthermore, this study shows that the use of the social media is influenced by certain demographic characteristics of the respondent (women) which include age, educational qualification, marital and employment status. As regarding age, the older you get the more your responsibilities and as such having time for the social media is limited. According to this findings, women of younger age brackets have ample time to engage in the social media. Employment status has a great influence on the use of the social media because those who are employed hardly have time for the social media, except if their organisation has a profile on the social media, even with that still try to squeeze time probably during their break periods. Those who are self employed on the other hand have flexible working hours and as such can sneak a peep at their profiles, using their handheld devices.

The unemployed people have some amount time to use the social media because they are not confined to any organisation, also many of them submit their resumes to online profiles of organisations and as a result check the profiles every now and then for news or information or even job vacancies. The undergraduate use the social media a lot, apart from keeping in touch with old friends and making new ones, majority of them source for materials as regarding projects and term papers on the internet and as a result usually open an extra tab for social media profiles.

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