

## DIGITAL ECONOMY AND INNOVATION IN NIGERIA: EXAMINING THE IMPACT OF GENDER INNOVATION IN NIGERIAN ECONOMY

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### Abstract

*This article examined the impact of gender contribution to innovation in the digital economy in Nigeria. The objective of the study is to investigate how gender inequality affects innovation and digital economy in Nigeria. However, departs from previous studies which focused mainly on the developed countries. Qualitative method of data gathering was employed for the investigation. The theory of liberal feminist was adopted. The study discovered among other things, low women gender participation and creativity in the digital economy of Nigeria. The study further unveiled that lack of political will to balance gender inequality in the digital economy of Nigeria still hinder efforts to a large extent. The study recommended policy dialogue with strong government political will of implementation as imperative to change the narrative in the country as the globally economy is changing from industrial base to knowledge base, to enhance the needed transformation, creativity, and innovative balance in the country.*

**Keywords:** Gender, Inequality, Innovation, Digital and Economy.

### Introduction

There is a historical global notion for centuries pointing at the fact of gender inequality worldwide. Undeniably, empirical studies show that women are excluded in economic, social, political and cultural activities, modern digital economy inclusive. This crisis of inequality traps women more than their men counterpart mostly in the developing countries in the informal sectors. The digital tools for innovative and transformation opportunities are enormous for women to harvest the advance digital technological economy to bridge the teething challenge. This becomes imperative as the digital age is unequal harnessed by the men and women. This digital divide is more pronounce among the women living not only in the marginalised communities but from poor countries. Statistical data from reputable empirical works of scholars and index bodies no doubt indict lack of adequate engagement and little or absence of digital infrastructures traps women on the wrong side of the digital economy, and further ignites digital divide.

Recently, Africa, Nigeria inclusive is on the forefront to write the wrong and to encourage the poor and marginalise communities to key in both the digital conversation and harness the digital technology for economic, political and cultural inclusiveness for the growth and development of the economy. Currently over 400 million adults in the Africa do not have access to the digital economy and nearly 60 percent are women United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF, 2019).

In Nigeria, enhancing Financial Innovation and Access (EFInA WEE), sourced data from (A2F, 2023) survey which revealed female adult population at 56.3 million of 22% of the number which is 12.5million are regarded as empowered in the entire country. The survey unveiled that digital education and financial literacy are the fundamental drivers of inclusiveness and empowerment in any economy.

## **Overview of Gender Inequality, Innovation and Digital Economy in Nigeria**

Globally, emergence of digital life technologically is taking away analogy approach to life. In Nigeria, the federal government, state and local governments and non-governmental organisations domestic and internationally are making various efforts to undoubtedly transform the country to a leading digital economy. The essence of this move is to ensure quality life and undiluted digital economy for everyone in the area of governance, health, education, communication, economic growth and trade etc. in the country.

This is very necessary as digital economy is a prevailing trend in the modern economy and also very important to daily life of every Nigerian. Gender Mobile Gap 2022 report shows that over 140 million Nigerians subscribe to internet in Nigeria (Gender Mobile report 2022). National Bureau of Statistics, (2022) confirms that the percentage of internet subscribers was 36% of the total population of the country in the same year. In Nigeria as a developing nation notable differences exist when it comes to gender accessibility and usage of internet.

However, the inequality exists which affects the gender mainstreaming in relation to innovation and digital economy in the country. This is the area this study tends to unveil as it concerns gender inequality, innovation and digital impact on Nigerian economy.

Unarguably, there is a notable disparity between the access, usage and impacts of digital technologies and other political representation as noted by reputable scholars, such as Oyekanmi & Orulebaja, (2014); Akeusola, Oyekanmi & Shittu, (2018), (Ofong, 2002), Agbalajobi, (2010), and Oyekanmi & Orulebaja, 2014 Oniye, 2010; Akeusola, Oyekanmi & Shittu, 2018) domestic, international and non-government organisational annual reports in the field of gender (women and men) in the country. The statistic records in relation to mobile phone ownership, usage and access to engage in trade or financial inclusion and other conversations favours men compared to women as illustrated in the data presented below.

## **Theoretical Framework**

The study adopts one of the feminist theories (liberal Feminist theory) for the theoretical framework application, explanation and justification of the work. Liberal Feminist is associated with the works of Wollstonecraft (1792), as the core proponent etc. it emerged in 18th century with the women's suffrage movement late 19<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> century. The central proposition of the theory is anchored on the promotion of gender equality through elimination of gender discrimination. The theory advocates for equal opportunities, rights, individual freedom of men and women in the society. It further promotes women representation in politics and leadership legal and policy rights, changes, reproductive right and equal pay. The theory also advocates for women equal access to education, health care, communication and employment opportunities.

The theory of liberal Feminist is apt for this study because of the relevance of accessibility of digital technologies through digital literacy. Educated women are at advantage of digital trade, access to health care, and political leadership in the society. As it will induce financial inclusiveness, create employment opportunities, and high pay especially those from the marginalized communities which will increase the growth and development of the country.

## **Methodology**

For the purpose of investigation of this study qualitative method of data collection was employed. As a result qualitative data was sourced from secondary sources. In depth interview journals, national annual reports of National Bureau of Statistics, media reports academic papers, media publications, legislations, research reports, international instruments, conferences, protocols, and important private and public documents and publications, international instruments, law reports and conventions etc. were applied in the secondary sources with the use of histogram for clear understanding.

## **Gender and Innovation in the Digital Economy**

The world is shifting from industrial base to knowledge base. Innovation is vital to digital base for social engineering and transformation. Change drives the old to new in the advanced technologies in the economy. Disparity in the contribution to digital economy shall affect the growth and development of any country.

Innovation is the ability to be innovative to introduce a new idea, knowledge to unthinkable. It means to introduce new idea for new products, through various ways such as changing of processing style of a product, improved products, services, or models through evaluation, testing, development, idea selection and idea generation and implementation. It is a way of enhancing performance and undoubtedly increasing competitiveness in all creating value. It occurs in the organisation, business model and trade, service innovation, process and social innovation. Put differently, putting new ideas into practice. The key to innovative tendencies include but not limited experimentation, creativity, collaboration and risk-taking and learning therefore, technology is apt for robust digital economy in the country.

Gender divides halt or restricts economic growth in the fast growing digital economy; however, the benefits inherent in the innovation through assessment of digital technologies are enormous such as efficiency, job creation, competitive advantage and increase revenue growth etc. The giving women opportunities to inclusive financial and learning shall not only drive the digital economy but positively change the narrative with gender balance.

## **Digital Opportunities in Nigerian Economy**

1. Digital Economy Revenue. In Nigeria, technological growth shows that the economy grows from 0.9 billion in 2019 to 7.13 billion in 2020 and 9.97 in 2021. The expectation is that the digital economy shall continue to rise to the projection of 18.30 billion in 2026.
2. Digital Transformation Plan (DTP). The plan is geared toward repositioning the plan to achieve an increase in the GDP as follows; 11.7 to 12.8, employment 15.4 to 40.9 and exports by 16.9 to 58.8 billion
3. National Digital Economy Policy and Strategy. This shall encourage the diversification of the economy.
4. Nigeria is leading Africa in the start up business. The major aim is to encourage and fundamentally invest in the growth and development of the digital economy.
5. Federal government expenditure is increasing to boost the development of digital infrastructure in the country.

6. **Budgeting.** In the recent years the federal government shows budget tremendous increase for instance, in five years the sum of 3.3 billion was allocated to digital infrastructure to encourage growth.

### **Factors Responsible for the Digital Inequality in Nigeria Economy**

1. **Economic Challenge.** However, in the access to mobile phone. A significant disparity exists between the women and men in the ownership of mobile phone. As the women records 88 percent against 92 percent of the men counterpart as a result of low opportunities of financial strength to purchase the android phones and other makes.
2. **Education.** The level of digital literacy of women is very low because of poor educational background in some cases, it is tied to cultural and traditional tendencies with lower autonomy of access to finance and opportunities of acquiring higher positions and empowerment compared to men in the government (Ugbede, O. E. (1997), Ukee, B. O. (1991), Umoh, S. H. (1998).

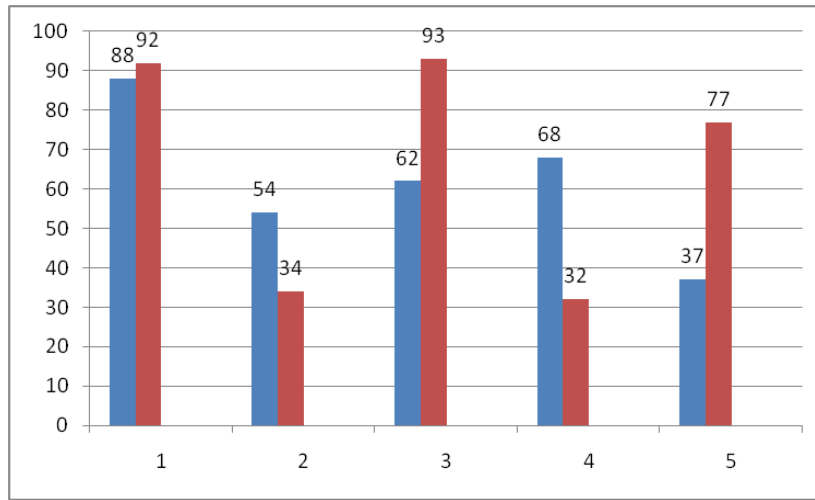
The absence or little skills, knowledge or innovations not only hinder the chances of engaging in the digital technologies within their environment but cripples innovation and creativity.

3. **Cultural barriers.** The tradition, customs and societal norms are impediments to women both in accessing and making use of digital technologies as restriction of interactions in some societal engagements are woes to them unlike the men counterpart with high digital freedom.
4. **Regulatory Framework and Digital Policies.** The government poor performance in enacting laws with the mindset to close the disparity adds salt to injury. The non-challant attitude promote women barriers and increase the evils of the digital divide.
5. **Absence or power supply** network distance rural women in the developing country such as Nigeria to access digital infrastructure and improvise women in innovation and connectivity.
6. **Phobia.** The low levels of knowledge of women in rural and marginalized communities' still distance them from touching and accessing digital technologies. The fear of inferiority complex and lack of basic skills for transformation contribute to worsen the digital inequality.
7. **Insecurity.** The freedom of women moving freely in the society limits their opportunity of engaging in the digital technologies and innovation as hoodlums, bandits and militants rape, kill, kidnap, maim and threatened they lives in several engagements in the society.

### **Presentation of Data and Analysis**

S/N	Indicators	Women	Men	Urban	Rural
1	Mobile Phone Ownership	88	92		
2	Mobile Phone Usage	54	34		
3	buying phone	62	93		
4	ownership of smart phone	68	32		
5	adolescent girls own phones	37	77		

Sources: The Mobile Gender Gap Report 2022 ; Real girls, real lives, connected , 3  
The State of ICT in Nigeria in 2018



**Gender inequality is fostered by Accessibility.**

Significant gap exist between men and women, the girls and women rate of accessibility to digital technologies are not the same that of women lower which triggers of the existing socioeconomic inequalities. Survey shows accessibility and affordability 35%, non-approval by family 10%, social norms restrict. Northern Nigeria in the study carried out by Centre for Information Technology and Development shows 55% of the men strongly oppose their wives from using internet, 61% from their concerns on their daughters couple with gender gap of awareness on the access to mobile internet, 83% of women compared to 90% of men

**Literacy and digital skills**

26% of the women encounter the problem of reading and writing, this challenge is a big barrier to participate effectively or own a mobile phones on the digital economy and engaging in a meaningful innovative. 41% are aware women and 32 of men but have used it.

**Safety and Security.**

Risks of technologyfacilitated gender-based violence including harassment and cyberbullying, act as a deterrent to women's and girls' technology use.61%, online abuse or violence, 88 percent think online harassment (Plan International study,), that more than half (58 percent) of girls aged 15-25 across 22 countries, including Nigeria, have been harassed or abused online( Mobile gender gap report 2022).

**Conclusion**

The issue of gender is a global phenomenon confronted with inequality of socio-cultural, political and economic life. The digital economy deals with technologies and innovation of new ideas. It is knowledge driven to create new value. The transformation is anchored on change of more advanced technology.

The study unveils the statistical level of engagement of women in the digital economy of the country. It shows the gap or level of involvement of men, women, boys and girls in the digital economy. The lower rate of participation of women is not a favour to the digital economy as distort economic growth and development of the country.

Though the study edicts, rate of accessibility, affordability, usage, norms and digital literacy of internet and mobile technologies, improvement is recorded on the building of self confidence and using digital platform to learn new skills, create values and transform to new changes with new aid of technologies.

### **Recommendations**

1. There is need for policy dialogue in gender issue in Nigeria. The federal government and other relevant stakeholders of gender mainstreaming should support pro-gender policies with sincerity in implementation to strengthen economic independence or financial inclusion and power to engage in better informed decisions in the accessibility and usage of digital technology to encourage gender equality.
2. Mobile phones and Internet is a digital means of digital communication technology, creating awareness and opportunities by governments and non-governmental organizations will drive new ideas with online peers, welcome innovations, build solidarity, express views, raise their voices in the areas of processing, business modeling of products, services, organizations and social innovation thereby addressing environmental challenges of gender gap.
3. Rights of women are easier to achieve by government assistance, protection of gender-based violence. There is need for government and non-governmental organizations to crate enabling environment for women and girls to use the digital tools to know their rights in the political participation, creative models and digital trade.

To overcome Structural barriers there is urgent need to bridge the gap on information on production to farmers and entrepreneurs production, storage, prices, transportation, or weather etc.

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