

Innovations

Impacts of Social Media on Self-Empowerment: The Case of Nigerian Female Graduates in Nigeria

¹Gloria Nwandu Ozor, ²Nwakaire, Esther N., ³Chinasa Abonyi

¹Technical University of Kenya, Department of Information Science, Languages and Communication Studies

²Department of English and Literary Studies, Faculty of Arts, University of Nigeria, Nsukka

³Department of English and Literary Studies, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria

Abstract: *Women empowerment is crucial for promoting self-esteem and healthy social development. Many Nigerian youths, especially female graduates, are left without jobs after graduation. This situation makes them vulnerable to various illegal activities, which jeopardise not only their lives but also the reputation of the country. The issue of unemployment is a global problem that every country is addressing. In this context, social media refers to interaction among people through various network platforms, where individuals create, share, and exchange information and ideas virtually. Currently, many youths in Nigeria are harnessing the opportunities created by different social media platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and Twitter, to develop themselves economically, and Nigerian women are also participating in this effort. This paper aims to examine how social media platforms provide inclusive opportunities for networking with individuals worldwide for personal and community development. It also focuses on how Nigerian women, particularly female graduates, are utilizing social media to empower themselves socially and economically through various creative means. This work approaches the topic from human development perspectives that emphasise on expanding people's resources, opportunities, and choices. The secondary data used in this study are those available in the public domain.*

Keywords: *self-empowerment, women's development, Nigeria, Nigerian female graduates, Social media*

Introduction

The promotion of women's empowerment is a critical factor in developing self-esteem and fostering healthy social interactions. In Nigeria, female graduates often find themselves unemployed, leaving them vulnerable to illegal activities that can jeopardise their lives and the country's reputation. Therefore, self-empowerment is

an essential tool for women to possess. It entails taking charge of one's life, thoughts, and actions while equipping oneself with the necessary mindset and willpower to steer life in a positive direction and maximize one's potential. Self-empowerment is a highly debated topic in gender studies worldwide, focusing on individuals taking control of their lives and making decisions based on their wants and needs. It is an aspect of empowerment that emphasises the individual's ability to take charge of her life, make decisions based on what she wants, and act in ways that promote positive outcomes. By empowering women through self-empowerment, we can create a society that values and respects their contributions, providing them with the tools they need to achieve their full potential. This is particularly important in business and academic settings where women's voices and perspectives must be heard and valued. In conclusion, self-empowerment for women is a critical aspect of personal and professional development, and it should be a top priority for all individuals and organisations committed to promoting gender equality and social progress.

Education is a powerful means of empowerment, providing advantages for both individuals and society. The notion of empowerment is complex and can differ based on context. Abbiramy (2021: np) suggests it involves moving from a condition of enforced powerlessness to one of power. In contrast, Perkins (2010, p. 207) approaches empowerment from a community angle, characterising it as a collective process that strengthens communities and institutions, fostering a more just society. Perkins also emphasises that community empowerment promotes sustainable development, positively impacting and transforming many lives rather than just individuals. ElishevaSadan (2004, p. 75) describes individual empowerment as an interactive process that helps shift feelings of worthlessness into self-acceptance as an assertive citizen equipped with socio-political skills. Meanwhile, Haddad and Toney-Butler (2023, np) view empowerment as a psychological concept that allows individuals to understand the link between their actions and outcomes, thereby granting them the capability to attain desired results. Empowerment encourages individuals to think independently, act, and manage their work autonomously (Bhat, 2015; Kaur, 2018; Jaysawal&Saha, 2023, p. 8). It entails enabling individuals to operate autonomously, allowing them to fulfil their goals.

Education is a powerful tool that empowers individuals to achieve their aspirations, lead fulfilling lives, make informed choices that enhance their well-being, and contribute to the advancement of their societies. Considering its transformative potential, it is widely acknowledged as the most valuable investment in a child's future (UNESCO, 2023). Nelson Mandela's statement that education is pivotal to building better lives has been widely quoted, and it continues to be an essential instrument for women's empowerment. Education enhances women's decision-

making abilities and enables them to embrace their full identity by providing them with the knowledge needed to overcome the unique challenges women face in Africa, particularly Nigeria. UNESCO (2023) recognizes education as a fundamental human right that allows individuals to escape poverty, reduce social inequalities, and promote sustainable development. Education is one of the most powerful tools for helping marginalized children and adults break the cycle of poverty and attain other essential human rights.

Nigeria is a country that operates on a patriarchal power hierarchy shaped by tradition and history. This hierarchy is justified as a mark of the country's unique identity and perpetuated, making it difficult for Nigerian women to have their voices heard. Despite an increase in the number of women graduates, they still face numerous challenges. Women graduates in Nigeria are confronted with several obstacles, including unemployment, which heightens their vulnerability to gender inequality, poverty, lack of funds for further education, and inadequate access to healthcare services. Consequently, some women resort to misbehaviour, while others use available resources to empower themselves. This situation is similar to Makama's(2013: 115) argument on womanhood, in which Nigerian women occupy the position of second-class citizens.

Education continues to be a fundamental right that empowers individuals and is a powerful tool for economically and socially marginalized children and adults to lift themselves out of poverty and participate fully in society. As per UNESCO (2023), education is one of the most effective means of empowerment and remains a key factor in the empowerment of women. Parents often go to great lengths to ensure their children receive an education, as education is commonly referred to as the hope of the 'common man,' meant to pave the way for self-emancipation, self-development, and well-being. In other words, education can be likened to a passport to a world of possibilities. It serves as a gateway to numerous opportunities, both personal and professional. The importance of education cannot be overemphasised, as it equips individuals with the skills and knowledge necessary to navigate through life's challenges and seize opportunities.

Sundaram et al. (2014, p. 75) assert that women are often relegated to a secondary position in society, facing discrimination from the womb to the tomb. This is why education must be viewed as a gateway to a better and more prosperous life for women. Education is crucial for women's empowerment, enabling them to change and transform their lives, those of their loved ones, and their communities. In Nigeria, education has transformed women from being passive to taking charge of society, where their voices are heard. This transformation has increased their political and social visibility while equipping them with the necessary skills for economic growth.

Impacts of Social Media on Social and Economic Empowerment

Unemployment is a worldwide issue that every country is proactively tackling. It refers to being without a job or actively looking for work without success. This predicament can lead to decreased economic productivity, impacting individuals who are eligible and capable of working but remain jobless. The unemployed are classified into three categories: those who are jobless, those available for work, and those actively searching for employment. As per the International Labour Organisation's report via Eurostat, individuals aged 15 to 75 are deemed unemployed if they actively seek job opportunities. Conversely, social media serves as a platform for people to enhance their capabilities and skills by marketing and sharing them globally, thus granting them economic empowerment.

Promoting economic empowerment through employment opportunities is crucial to enhancing the financial independence and economic status of individuals and communities. Economic empowerment provides access to resources, training, and opportunities essential for creating sustainable livelihoods, building assets, and improving the overall economic well-being of people (Martinez, 2022). Recently, social media has emerged as a powerful tool for facilitating economic empowerment through digital entrepreneurship and marketing. The platform enables individuals to start and run businesses from the comfort of their homes, offering the necessary means to achieve financial stability and independence. Through this mode, social media has proven to be an effective means of promoting economic development, particularly in developing countries like Nigeria, where traditional employment opportunities are scarce.

Social media platforms are essential for entrepreneurs and marketers to connect with external audiences and customers through various communication channels and methods. Additionally, these platforms support internal communication, decision-making, and organizational growth (Sven-Ove et al., 2019, p. 1). Platforms like Facebook and Instagram provide services for creating online shops, which allow users to showcase, grow, and promote their brands and products. Soltanifar and Smailhodžić (2020, p. 4) highlight that cultivating a digital entrepreneurial mindset is vital for success in today's world. They further suggest that the use of social media has evolved from merely connecting friends and family to creating opportunities for businesses to operate and advertise products through their own social media profiles. Moreover, social media is transforming communication methods that bolster economic empowerment.

Social media, as stated earlier, has revolutionised the way people interact with one another by facilitating a wide range of platforms that enable individuals to create, share, and exchange information and ideas virtually. According to Maya Dollarhide (2023), social media encompasses a diverse array of technologies, including Facebook, Instagram, the X platform (formerly Twitter), YouTube, and LinkedIn,

which provide users with the means to disseminate information and ideas to an expansive audience. Despite the negative aspects of social media, this study highlights the positive impacts it has had on Nigerian female graduates. These graduates are using social media platforms to market their skills and enhance their economic stability. By leveraging various social media platforms, individuals can showcase their unique talents and abilities, express their beliefs and values, and build a community of like-minded individuals. Moreover, social media has enabled Nigerian female graduates to collaborate and network with other professionals in their field, providing an avenue for learning and growth. By utilising social media platforms, Nigerian female graduates can connect with potential employers, clients, and collaborators, thereby expanding their professional network and increasing their opportunities for success.

With the aid of social media, individuals can embark on a journey of self-discovery, uncovering their unique abilities and characteristics, ultimately leading to personal evolution, self-awareness, and self-identification (Clearinghouse for Military Family Readiness, 2020). According to Lawrence Erlbaum Associates (2005, p. xiv), online communication can be viewed as a metaphorical journey that employs language and imagery commonly associated with life's journey. Social media users draw on the concepts and experiences derived from physical interactions to better understand and communicate through computer networks. In essence, our physical environment and interactions with others in society serve as the foundation for various forms of social media content creation.

Social media has significantly enhanced the understanding of the world as a global community. Through its transformative impact on how people connect and communicate across geographical boundaries, social media has facilitated the creation of new relationships and the exchange of ideas. According to Ortiz-Ospina (2019), the widespread adoption of social media platforms has altered the way people search for romantic partners, consume news, and mobilise for political change. Social media provides a diverse range of platforms that serve various purposes, including social networking, social bookmarking, social news, media sharing, microblogging, and online forums (Dollarhide 2023). Moreover, social media has been credited with fostering the development of communities around shared interests and values, thereby enhancing individuals' sense of self-worth.

Social media platforms have provided enabling environments that encourage young people to be themselves, create, and share content with their peers around the globe; these have “amplified their voices and their potential to make a difference in their lives and their society” (St. Louis Review 2017). With the help of social media, many people, especially youths, have taken on the task of effecting change in their society by speaking against illegal child labor, human and animal trafficking, environmental pollution, racism, and domestic violence, as well as advocating for

community development, environmental protection, healthy lifestyles, and many other social issues that promote human existence and sustainability. The role social media plays in the lives of youths has been emphasised as crucial and “central to their rise to prominence on a global scale” (UNDESA 2013, p. 2). “It has helped them mobilise, collaborate and given them a voice where there was none before. It has also brought them together in response to social concerns” (UNDESA 2013, p. 2), hence socially empowering them. Social empowerment is defined by Martinez (2022) as the process of building autonomy, power, confidence, and other necessary means to enact change and pave the way for a better future.

Self-empowerment through Social Media by Nigerian Female Graduates in Nigeria

Nigerian female graduates have been equipped with the empowering tool that is education, and many of them are positively transforming their lives by enhancing the opportunities provided by different social media platforms. Social media is an online communication tool that utilises electronic communication technologies. Many Nigerian female graduates are maximizing their social media empowerment potential by creating, reshaping, and transforming their lives. Women's empowerment is essential for the development of every society. In Nigeria, many women still have little influence and control over economic resources (Ojoh, 2012, p. 4); not having control or influence over economic resources denies women the opportunity to utilise their potential and develop economically. Ojoh further argues that:

Women empowerment is an indispensable tool for advancing development and reducing poverty... empowered women contribute to the health and productivity of the whole families, communities, and the nation (p. 4).

Empowering women enhances their ability to develop skills that lead to greater insight and well-being. In Nigeria, female graduates are leveraging social media to uplift themselves both individually and as a group through networking, content creation, and blogging. By establishing microblogs and blogs, they raise awareness about the challenges faced by women and children. They share resources and stories, with many offering free and paid online training in skills that promote financial independence for other women. Kumari (2020, p. 626) states that “social media has become the agent of social change,” fostering women's empowerment across various aspects, enabling them to become their own bosses.

Blogging has emerged as a platform for advocating against the mistreatment of Nigerian women, contributing to reduced discrimination, social inequality, and

injustice. Manosevitch and Tzuk (2017, p. 3), referencing Droge, Stanko, & Pollitte (2010), describe blogs as a blend of the blogger's content and comments from followers. This interaction helps form a virtual community centred around specific ideas, products, hobbies, or other topics. A notable example is Nigerian graduate blogger Linda Ikeji, known as “lindaikejibloofficial” on Instagram. She utilises her platform to share articles and stories that highlight the concerning issues in Nigerian society, particularly regarding gender-based violence and the challenges faced by Nigerian women abroad. Through her blogging, Linda fosters an engaged online community eager to absorb her narratives. Another example is the City Farmer, a Facebook page managed by Ahaoma Mbadiwe-Maduforo from Enugu State. She offers advice and inspiration on how women, regardless of age, can cultivate their own fresh produce. Ahaoma motivates urban women to maximise their available space and resources, using items like bags to grow various crops, including yam, cocoyam, and potatoes, along with different vegetables, and provides guidance on starting and maintaining snail farming.

Many young people are currently following her style of farming initiatives. “Motherhood In Style Magazine” is a Facebook page that encourages women to share their problems anonymously and seek advice from other users and experts who are always on standby to render their services. Manosevitch and Tzuk (2017, p. 1) also state that women have been seizing social media opportunities as a means of social and economic empowerment. Blogging, according to them, has opened up a world of opportunities for women to connect and grow personally and economically. Another Nigerian female graduate is Uzochi Onwudinjo, a Master's degree holder from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. She is self-employed and has a social media presence on both Facebook and Instagram. She uses these platforms to market her crafts and creativity while building her image globally. Manosevitch and Tzuk further emphasised that “blogging may serve as a means of psychological empowerment, and consequently enhance economic opportunities and growth” (p. 4).

Social media creates enabling environments that foster talent and creativity. It allows users to generate their own content and influence their followers. Social media plays a significant role in achieving various aspects of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted by 193 United Nations Member States to eradicate poverty, ensure prosperity, and protect the planet (www.fao.org). Facilitating content creation through social media enhances individual talents and “promotes inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment, and decent work for all” (SDG 8). The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) agenda encompasses ending poverty in

all dimensions and constructing a fair, just, and secure world for people, the planet, and prosperity (SDGS 2015). Content creation is referred to as:

The process of generating topic ideas that appeal to your buyer persona, creating written or visual content around those ideas, and making that information accessible to your audience as a blog, video, infographic, or other content formats (Perricone 2023).

Skits creation has helped many Nigerian female graduates perfect their acting skills. Numerous popular Nigerian content creators began using skits to satirize the moral, social, and political state of Nigeria and its citizens. Some of these individuals have transformed into full employers and trainers who utilise their talents and social media platforms to nurture other content creators and performers. One content creator who effectively uses social media to positively influence Nigerians, particularly in grooming youths for acting careers, is "Emma Chinedu Comedy" (Mr. Aloy Comedian). Several female Nigerian graduates who started their acting careers with "Emma Chinedu Comedy" have now established their platforms to showcase their talents, entertaining and captivating followers globally. This demonstrates their impressive abilities and highlights their potential as entertainers and content creators.

Among those inspired by "Emma Chinedu Comedy" are: "Bertha Onyekachi TV," "GraceAdebayoent," "Marychukwu TV," and many others. Taking on leading roles has helped these women to develop self-confidence, unique personalities, popularity, and their own audience/followers. The owner of the "Bertha Onyekachi TV" page is a young mother of one, who performs alongside her child; she has amassed over 234,000 followers. "Emma Chinedu Comedy" focuses on themes related to domestic violence and the perseverance of kind yet marginalised housewives. By featuring women as main characters in his videos, he underscores the reality and impact of domestic violence against women.

"Ekwutuosi Philo Comedy" is a dynamic young female graduate and content creator with over 968,000 followers. Her content centres on modern relationships, parenting, and the everyday challenges faced by typical Nigerian girls. According to Perricone (2023), content creation aids in the discovery of businesses, brands, and products. While some individuals are content creators, others are influencers. One such influencer is "Mayyuledochie," who has endeared herself to many Nigerians with her engaging personality and effective communication skills. She recently launched her own line of perfumes and hair products, gaining considerable support from her followers who see her as one of their own. Social media facilitates the formation of online communities, enabling individuals to forge connections even without physical interaction.

Conclusion

Ensuring equal opportunities for women and men in education, employment, healthcare, and other fields is essential. Moreover, transforming societal attitudes towards women is vital to rectify misconceptions and biases that sustain gender inequality in Nigeria. Education serves as a significant instrument for individual empowerment and societal upliftment. It is a basic right that should be universally accessible, and its capacity for transformation must be utilised to foster equality and empower everyone, particularly women. Overall, social media has proven to be a powerful medium that significantly transforms the lives of Nigerian female graduates. By utilising social media platforms, these graduates can effectively showcase their skills, improve their economic security, collaborate with others, and contribute to the positive development of society. Ultimately, social media is profoundly influencing how individuals connect, access information, and engage in social and political processes.

References:

1. Makama, G. A. (2013). "Patriarchy and Gender Inequality in Nigeria: The Way Forward." *European Scientific Journal*, vol.9, No.17 ISSN: 1857 – 7881 (Print) e - ISSN 1857- 7431
2. Nyambil, O. (2014). "Cultured to Fail? Representations of Gender-Entangled Urban Women in Two Short Stories by Valerie Tagwira" SAGE.
3. UNESCO (2023). "What you need to know about the right to education" www.unesco.org Last update: 27 April 202. Accessed 10/13/2023.
4. Sadan, E. (1997). *Empowerment and Community Planning: Theory and Practice of People-Focused Social Solutions*. Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad. Translated from Hebrew by Richard Flantz.
5. Hayes, A. (2023). "What Is Unemployment?" accessed October 16, 2023 www.investopedia.com.
6. Eurostat (2023). "Glossary: Unemployment" ec.europa.eu. Last edited on 19 May 2023, accessed October 16, 2023
7. Jaysawal, N.& Saha, S. (2023). "Role of education in women empowerment" *International Journal of Applied Research.IJAR* 2023; 9(4): 08-13 www.allresearchjournal.com.
8. The Economic Times (2023). "What is 'Unemployment'" economictimes.indiatimes.com Published on 17 October, 2023, Retrieved October 17, 2023
9. Dollarhide, M. (2023). "Social Media: Definition, Importance, Top Websites & Apps."
10. Reviewed by Amy Drury, Updated August 31, 2023 Retrieved October 17, 2023 www.investopedia.com.

11. Clearinghouse for Military Family Readiness (2020). "Social Media and Self-Esteem" thrive.psu.edu.
12. Ortiz-Ospina, E. (2019). "The rise of social media". Published online at OurWorldInData.org. Retrieved from: ourworldindata.org.
13. St. Louis Review (2017). "Coming of Age: Technology and social media empower youth." www.archstl.org.
14. Martinez, H. (2022). "What Is Social Empowerment? Empowerment Definition & Theory | United Way Nca." unitedwaynca.org.
15. Soltanifar, M. & Smailhodžić, E. (2020). "Developing a Digital Entrepreneurial Mindset for Data-Driven, Cloud-Enabled, and Platform-Centric Business Activities: Practical Implications and the Impact on Society." *Digital Entrepreneurship: Impact on Business and Society*. Editors Mariusz Soltanifar, Mathew Hughes, Lutz Göcke. Springer: Switzerland
16. Perkins, D.D. (2010). "Empowerment." In R.A. Couto (Ed.), *Political and Civic Leadership: A Reference Handbook* (Pp. 207-218). Thousand Oaks, Ca: Sage.
17. Kumari, M. (2020). "Social Media And Women Empowerment." *International journal of scientific & technology research* volume 9, Issue 03, March 2020 ISSN 2277-8616. www.ijstr.org.
18. "Sustainable Development Goals: 17 goals to transform our world" www.fao.org.
19. Perricone, Christina (2023). "The Ultimate Guide to Content Creation" blog.hubspot.com. . Accessed on 22 October, 2023.