

FEMINISATION OF LIBRARY AND INFORMATION RESOURCES UTILIZATION IN NIGERIA

By

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Abstract

This paper explores the feminisation of library and information resources utilization in Nigeria, highlighting how socio-economic, cultural, and institutional dynamics disproportionately affect women's access to and use of digital information technologies. Drawing on a critical review of recent literature and policy documents, the study adopts a qualitative analytical approach to examine how factors such as digital literacy, income inequality, traditional gender norms, and infrastructural deficits create barriers for women in accessing information resources. The study reveals that, despite various national and global initiatives aimed at promoting digital inclusion, Nigerian women especially those in rural and low-income settings continue to face systemic limitations that hinder their participation in the digital information ecosystem. The findings underscore the potential of digital access to enhance gender equality, economic empowerment, health outcomes, and educational opportunities for women. However, persistent challenges such as affordability, limited digital skills, cultural resistance, and underdeveloped infrastructure remain significant obstacles. The paper concludes with policy-driven recommendations to bridge the digital gender divide and foster a more inclusive and equitable information society in Nigeria.

Keywords: Feminisation, digital inclusion, library and information resources, gender inequality, Nigeria, ICT access, women empowerment

Introduction

In the digital era, access to and utilization of information resources such as digital libraries, online databases, open educational resources, and mobile applications play a pivotal role in driving socio-economic development, educational progress, and civic engagement. However, significant gender disparities persist in Nigeria, where women are often marginalized in terms of access to and meaningful use of these digital tools and platforms. This reality reflects the broader phenomenon known as the *feminisation of information resources utilization*, which describes the complex social, economic, and cultural barriers that disproportionately hinder women's engagement with information and communication technologies (ICTs).

Feminisation, in this context, refers not just to the increasing presence or focus on women in a particular domain, but to the ways in which gendered inequalities make women more vulnerable to exclusion from resource access. This is closely tied to the *feminisation of poverty*; a term describing how women, especially in developing countries, constitute a disproportionate share of those living in poverty due to systemic disadvantages in employment, education, health, and political representation (UN Women, 2022; World Bank, 2021). In Nigeria, limited digital infrastructure, affordability gaps, and gendered social norms continue to restrict women's ability to access and benefit from information resources (International Telecommunication Union [ITU], 2023; GSMA, 2022).

Recent studies highlight the digital gender divide as a persistent issue, with Nigerian women significantly lagging behind men in digital literacy, mobile internet use, and participation

in technology-driven initiatives (GSMA, 2023; Akinwale & Adebayo, 2021). Cultural expectations often place domestic responsibilities on women, limiting their time and opportunity for digital engagement, while societal norms in some regions actively discourage women from acquiring digital skills or using public ICT services (Ezeani & Igwesi, 2020; Olanrewaju et al., 2022). Although various national and non-governmental initiatives have aimed at promoting digital inclusion such as the National Digital Economy Policy and Strategy (2020–2030). Gaps remain in gender-responsive implementation (Federal Ministry of Communications and Digital Economy, 2021). Programs often fail to address the underlying structural issues such as gender-based income disparities, unequal access to education, and patriarchal norms that limit women's ability to fully engage with and benefit from information ecosystems.

This paper seeks to explore the social, economic, and cultural factors contributing to the feminisation of information resource utilization in Nigeria. It also investigates the impact of gendered access to information on women's empowerment, development, and digital participation. By drawing on current literature and policy analyses, the paper offers strategic recommendations to bridge the digital gender divide and create inclusive information systems that empower Nigerian women and foster equitable development.

Factors Influencing the Feminisation of Information Resources Utilization

Several interrelated factors; social, economic, and cultural shape women's capacity to access and utilize information resources in Nigeria. These factors often intersect, reinforcing a

cycle of exclusion that disproportionately affects women, particularly in rural and low-income communities.

Social Factors: Education and Digital Literacy: Education plays a foundational role in determining access to and proficiency in using information resources. Women with higher levels of formal education are more likely to use digital tools effectively, participate in online learning, and benefit from digital government or health services (UNESCO, 2023). However, gender disparities in access to education remain significant, particularly in the northern regions of Nigeria. Several key barriers include: Cultural norms that prioritize male education, especially in rural or conservative communities (UNICEF, 2021). Economic constraints, where limited household resources often favor investment in boys' education (UNESCO, 2023). Limited access to digital literacy programs tailored specifically for women and girls, further impedes their ability to participate in the digital ecosystem (Akinwale & Adebayo, 2021). Moreover, the absence of gender-sensitive ICT curricula and support services in schools and public libraries further limits girls' exposure to digital tools at an early age (Olanrewaju et al., 2022).

Economic Factors: Income, Employment, and Access to Credit: Economic power significantly shapes the ability to afford digital devices, mobile data, and learning opportunities. In Nigeria, women are more likely to occupy low-income or informal employment sectors, which limits their access to digital technologies (World Bank, 2021; GSMA, 2023). Women who are formally employed may have access to digital tools through their workplaces, but those in informal or unpaid labor such as agriculture or domestic work are often digitally excluded.

Key challenges include the cost of digital access, including mobile phones, internet services, and ICT tools. Lack of digital financial literacy, making it difficult for women to engage with online banking or digital entrepreneurship (ITU, 2023). Restricted access to credit due to systemic financial barriers such as collateral requirements, legal constraints, and gender bias in financial institutions (OECD, 2021; Ezeani & Igwesi, 2020). Access to microfinance, digital savings groups, and targeted financial training have shown promise in promoting digital inclusion among women entrepreneurs (GSMA, 2022).

Cultural Factors: Traditional Gender Roles and Social Norms: Deeply entrenched gender norms in Nigerian society often dictate women's roles as caregivers and homemakers, limiting their time and perceived need for digital engagement. In some regions, cultural and religious expectations restrict women from attending ICT training centers or owning personal devices (Olanrewaju et al., 2022). Additional constraints include: Male-dominated household decision-making, which can limit women's ability to purchase or use ICT devices (Ezeani & Igwesi, 2020). Stigmatization of tech-savvy women, where women's digital participation is sometimes linked to moral suspicion or non-conformity (Buskens & Webb, 2021). Language barriers, where many digital platforms are accessible primarily in English, excluding literate women only in indigenous languages (UNESCO, 2023).

Despite these obstacles, community-based interventions and inclusive policy advocacy have demonstrated the potential to shift societal attitudes, particularly when local leaders and

women's organizations are engaged in promoting digital rights and awareness (UN Women, 2022).

Benefits of Feminisation of Information Resources Utilization

The feminisation of information resource utilization enhances women's capacity to participate in socio-economic and knowledge-driven processes. Access to library and digital information systems significantly advances equity, economic resilience, and societal well-being, particularly in contexts where gender disparities are historically entrenched.

Gender Equality and Empowerment: The inclusion of women in digital and information ecosystems contributes meaningfully to dismantling patriarchal norms and enhancing agency. ICT access allows women to engage with critical legal, political, and health-related content, thereby enabling more informed decision-making (UN Women, 2022). Nigerian women increasingly leverage digital platforms to participate in civic movements such as; #ArewaMeToo and #EndSARS challenging systems of gender-based oppression (Buskens & Webb, 2021). Moreover, digital engagement fosters leadership, self-expression, and participation in governance, particularly for younger, urban, and educated women (GSMA, 2023).

Economic Inclusion and Productivity: Digital access enhances women's participation in the formal and informal economy. Women entrepreneurs utilize platforms like WhatsApp Business, Facebook Marketplace, and e-commerce tools to scale micro and small businesses, improving market reach and profitability (Akinwale & Adebayo, 2021). Mobile money innovations such as Paga and OPay enable unbanked women to engage in financial transactions, save securely, and

access micro-credit, thus mitigating financial exclusion (OECD, 2021). Additionally, remote work and the gig economy offer flexible income-generating options that accommodate care responsibilities, empowering women to balance productivity with domestic obligations (World Bank, 2022).

Educational and Health Advancements: Information access expands educational opportunities, especially for women excluded from formal schooling due to conflict, early marriage, or poverty. Digital learning platforms like Roducate and uLesson bridge these gaps by providing mobile-based curricula in English and local languages (UNESCO, 2023). In health, platforms such as mDoc and AskNuma facilitate access to maternal health information, mental health counseling, and reproductive health education. These resources promote health-seeking behavior and reduce dependence on traditional, and often limited, healthcare networks (WHO, 2022). For many women, digital access constitutes their only lifeline to accurate and timely health and educational information.

Challenges to Feminisation of Information Resources Utilization

While feminisation of information access offers transformative benefits, Nigerian women face enduring and multi-layered challenges that limit their full participation in the digital knowledge economy.

Infrastructure and Connectivity Gaps: Nigeria's infrastructural deficits disproportionately affect women, particularly in rural and peri-urban regions. Inadequate broadband penetration, erratic electricity supply, and limited access to public internet facilities reduce women's ability to

benefit from digital services (NCC, 2023). Investment in digital infrastructure often targets urban business hubs, overlooking community libraries, market centers, and health facilities spaces central to women's daily lives (World Bank, 2022). Without equitable infrastructure expansion, digital inclusion remains aspirational rather than transformational.

Economic Constraints and Affordability: Cost is a critical barrier to digital engagement. For many women in low-income households, the combined cost of smartphones, data, and maintenance is prohibitively high often exceeding 30% of monthly income (GSMA, 2022). Women's economic marginalization is compounded by their overrepresentation in informal and low-paying jobs, leaving little disposable income for digital investment (UN Women, 2022). Additionally, financial illiteracy and lack of access to collateral constrain women's ability to obtain loans for ICT acquisition or digital skill development (OECD, 2021).

Educational and Digital Literacy Deficits: Educational inequalities, particularly in northern Nigeria, where early marriage and security challenges persist, deprive many girls of foundational digital literacy (UNESCO, 2023). Furthermore, existing ICT training programs are often generic, urban-focused, and male-oriented, failing to meet the unique needs of women. There is a scarcity of women-only digital learning environments, mentorship schemes, or community-based digital training initiatives that integrate local language support, flexible scheduling, and child care provision (Ezeani & Igwesi, 2020; Olanrewaju et al., 2022). Without targeted interventions, digital illiteracy among women will continue to widen the gender divide.

Socio-Cultural and Linguistic Barriers: Deep-rooted socio-cultural norms play a decisive role in shaping women's access to and use of digital technologies. In many households, male relatives exercise control over digital devices and internet use, limiting women's autonomy (Buskens & Webb, 2021). Cultural stigmas around female technology use persist, with women sometimes accused of moral impropriety for owning smartphones or engaging on social media. Religious interpretations in conservative regions further constrain digital engagement, framing technology as a threat to traditional gender roles (Olanrewaju et al., 2022). Moreover, the dominance of English-language platforms restricts access for women who are more proficient in indigenous languages, highlighting the need for inclusive and linguistically diverse content (UNESCO, 2023).

Conclusion

This study critically examined the feminisation of information resources utilization in Nigeria, with a focus on the interplay of social, economic, and cultural factors that shape women's access to and engagement with library and digital information services. The rationale for the study stemmed from the persistent gender disparities in the use of information resources—a challenge that has significant implications for achieving gender equity, digital inclusion, and national development.

The paper identified that despite notable efforts at expanding access to ICT and library services, Nigerian women especially those in rural and underserved communities remain systematically marginalized due to infrastructural deficits, socio-cultural barriers, economic

limitations, and low digital literacy. However, when women do gain access to information resources, the outcomes are transformative. Improved educational attainment, economic empowerment, better health decisions, and enhanced civic participation are among the key benefits highlighted.

By bringing current literature into dialogue with Nigerian realities, this paper contributes to the LIS field by offering a gender-sensitive lens through which information access and utilization can be understood. The paper fills a critical gap in LIS research, which has historically underexplored the gendered dimensions of information access in low- and middle-income countries. It also broadens the conceptual understanding of “feminisation” beyond workforce representation to include information behavior, access patterns, and systemic exclusion.

Importantly, this study underscores the need for gender-responsive LIS policies, inclusive digital literacy programs, and culturally grounded outreach strategies that empower women as both users and producers of knowledge. Future research may build on this foundation by exploring intersectional factors such as disability, age, or ethnicity that compound gender disparities in information access. In doing so, the LIS discipline will be better positioned to contribute to equitable and inclusive knowledge societies.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to promote inclusive and equitable access to information resources among Nigerian women:

Strengthen Gender-Responsive LIS Policies: Library and information science institutions at national and sub-national levels should develop and implement policies that actively promote women's participation in information ecosystems. This includes prioritizing gender equity in library program design, staffing, outreach, and infrastructure development, especially in underserved regions.

Expand Community-Based Digital Literacy Initiatives: Governments, NGOs, and library agencies should collaborate to launch community-driven digital literacy programs targeted at women and girls. These programs should be flexible, context-sensitive, and available in indigenous languages, with particular attention to women in rural areas, IDP camps, and informal settlements.

Integrate Gender Equity into ICT Infrastructure Planning: ICT development policies should prioritize inclusive access by ensuring that broadband expansion, library digitization, and public internet centers reach women-centric spaces such as markets, health centers, and community libraries. Investments in solar-powered digital hubs can also address electricity constraints in off-grid communities.

Promote Financial Inclusion for Digital Access: Microfinance institutions, fintech firms, and government agencies should create credit facilities and subsidy programs that support women in acquiring smartphones, internet subscriptions, and digital tools. Linking access to digital skills training with affordable device financing could empower women economically while fostering digital inclusion.

Challenge Cultural and Structural Barriers: Stakeholders must engage religious, traditional, and community leaders to challenge gender stereotypes that restrict women's digital access. Advocacy campaigns should emphasize the societal benefits of women's digital empowerment and promote inclusive attitudes in schools, families, and the media.

Foster Women-Led Innovation and Content Creation: Encouraging women to not only consume but also create and manage digital content is critical. Libraries and LIS institutions should support women-led knowledge production by providing training in content creation, data curation, and digital storytelling particularly in culturally relevant formats and languages.

Strengthen Research and Data Collection: There is a need for robust, gender-disaggregated data on information access and utilization. Academic and LIS researchers should prioritize longitudinal and intersectional studies that explore how gender intersects with age, location, disability, and income to shape information behavior.

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