Tech4Families
Focus Group Discussion Report
Exploring the Gender Digital in Northern Nigeria
APRIL 2019
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In March 2019, Equal Access International commissioned a qualitative study made up of 8 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) held in Kano state, Northern Nigeria. The purpose of the research was to better understand community norms, including patterns in individual attitudes and beliefs that inform perspectives on women and girls’ access to and use of technology. Conducted as part of the formative research for the Tech4Families project, the study also sought to unearth specific data about what type of technology women and girls have access to, what inhibitors they face, and what were the commonality of those inhibitors across participants. Accompanying the FGDs was a desk review of existing literature on mobile usage among women and girls, together with a separate In-depth Interview study. The desk review and field research will inform the content of the Tech4Families Learning Discussion and Action Group (LDAG) content, radio series and accompanying digital literacy curriculum.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The research identified several key factors, which reinforced the intervention’s perceived barriers to change and represented the core inhibiting factors to women and girls’ access to and use of technology. This report will present those findings and recommendations for their implications related to the Tech4Families pilot as well as other interventions focused on bridging the gender digital divide in Northern Nigeria more broadly.

In summary, the key findings were:

1. **There is limited access to mobile technology & the internet for women and girls in Northern Nigeria**

   Access to mobile phones and the internet is very low among women and girls in Northern Nigeria. Some of the identified factors that contribute to this poor access include cost, literacy, appropriate, and relevant content in Hausa, lack of knowledge of the potential benefits of the internet and cultural and patriarchal gender norms that restrict access.

2. **Women & girls who use technology are frequently viewed in a negative light**

   Despite a general awareness about the importance of mobile phones and the internet, women and girls who openly use this technology are still frequently viewed in negative ways. This can include her upbringing, morality, and general character being brought into question.
3. Parents and spouses are the individuals most likely to restrict women and girls access to technology

Parental and spousal restrictions were one of the main barriers that women face in accessing technology. Reasons for restricting access included lack of relevant content or availability of inappropriate content, fear of privacy violations including sexual harassment and online scams.

4. Morality and fear of moral decline is frequently used as a justification for restricting women and girls access to technology and the internet

Reasons for restricting girls’ and women’s use of mobile technology and the Internet were frequently linked to justifications on moral grounds and the internet particularly was seen as easily corrupting a woman/girl. The areas of particular concern were that being on the internet could lead a woman / girl to use drugs, commit acts of terror, or socialise with men. Overall there was a fear of women/girls being negatively influenced or drawn into a bad crowd via the internet.

5. Violence can be used against women who access the internet / use a smart phone without their husband’s consent.

The internet was blamed for marital disharmony and a cause of gender-based violence (GBV) between couples. Spousal concerns included wives spending too much time on their devices and not enough time focusing on their household duties, or wives talking to other men through social media.

6. Men frequently decide what is acceptable for a woman to view on the internet

Whether content that a woman views on the Internet is deemed acceptable is generally governed by men and is directly linked to a woman’s ability to access the Internet. There was general consensus among research participants that for content to be deemed acceptable it should be related to self-improvement (i.e. educational) it should not be explicit or sexual, it should be suitable for both children and adults and it should also agree with the teachings of Islam.

7. Women have also internalised their own fears about the harmful side of the internet, which affects their desire to use it

Women also shared fears or mistrust of the Internet, citing lack of relevant content, frequency of content believed to be inappropriate, fear of privacy violation, sexual harassment and scammers/fraudsters as the main reasons for not using the internet.

8. Despite negative views of the internet and technology, there is still broad agreement that it can bring many benefits to women and girls, many of whom have restricted mobility beyond their family compound

FGD participants agreed that women who have access to ICT are likely to acquire extra skills compared to the average woman without access. Women with access to technology were also believed to compete favourably with their male counterparts when given similar opportunities.
RECOMMENDATIONS
Based on the key findings from the FGDs, the following recommendations have been made

1. **Programming and training should highlight the availability of educational materials, networking and business opportunities for women and girls on line.** These are the type of content that women and girls currently access most frequently. This content also provides opportunities for many women who are currently unable to access such information offline.

2. **Religious content and religious justifications for using the internet should also be promoted** as this will increase acceptance and buy in from parents, spouses and community leaders.

3. **Fears about the negative impacts of the internet, particularly its role in moral decline, should be countered with stories and examples of positive impacts of mobile phones and the internet in women and girls’ lives.** These positive stories should be emphasized alongside highlighting positive parent and spouse role models who enable this access.

4. **Increased awareness of the benefits of accessing the internet among religious leaders may limit the restrictions placed on women and girls** as currently religious justifications for restricting access to the internet is a major barrier.

5. **Programming should address the fears that many, including women and girls themselves, have about harassment or abuse on the internet** by providing strategies to ensure greater online safety, information on how to protect your own integrity whilst online and story lines that highlight to men the negative impacts of online abuse. Digital literacy courses should also cover how to deal with harassment and abuse online for women and how to take a stand against it for men.

6. **Quantitative studies should be developed from this qualitative research** to quantify access, push backs and reasons for restriction to phone/internet use among a larger population of women in northern Nigeria.
CHAPTER ONE: BACKGROUND

INTRODUCTION: STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Nigeria is home to around 180 million people, and at first glance, mobile and Internet penetration is high, at over 70%. However, on a unique subscriber basis (a better proxy for individual ownership) numbers are much lower at around 30%, with significant variation across the country.

In northern Nigeria, access to mobile phones is much lower than in the south of the country and an estimated 60% of the female population do not have access to the Internet or smartphones. Women’s lack of access is due to multiple obstacles which include cost, literacy, appropriate and relevant content in Hausa, knowledge of the potential benefits of the Internet, and cultural and patriarchal gender norms that restrict access. The pertinent barrier, cultural and gender norms, is critical to the sustainable uptake of technology by women and girls in northern Nigeria.

According to a study conducted by Centre for Information Technology and Development (CITAD), 55% of men do not want their wives to use the Internet, and 61% of fathers discourage their daughters’ usage of phones with internet. Religious Clerics preach against women’s use, and statistics show both sexes have internalized these ideologies.

The perspectives held by many in international development circles is that technology is a silver bullet for solving development issues, however, without applying a gender lens to program design, technology can exacerbate inequality and actually contribute to, not reduce, the gender digital divide. Equal Access International’s (EAI) approach to lessening the gender digital divide is to address the aforementioned normative barriers to women and girl’s access to and use of technology at the family level as a critical first step.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study sought to answer the following questions:

- What are community norms including patterns in individual attitudes and beliefs that inform community members’ perspectives on women and girls' access to technology?
- What inhibitors do females face in accessing the internet and mobile technology, as well as the commonality of those inhibitors, including knowledge, literacy, and cost.
- What type of information are community members interested in?
- What themes and media content are most appropriate and impactful for addressing issues related to women’s use of and access to technology in Northern Nigeria.
SCOPE OF THE STUDY
This study was comprised of eight Focus Group Discussions (FGD) conducted in eight metropolitan local governments within Kano state: Dala, Fagge, Gwale, Kano Municipal, Kumbotso, Nassarawa, Tarauni, and Ungoggo. Kano state is a conservative state with a high proportion of Hausa / Fulani populations. The majority are Muslim. It has an estimated population of close to 12 million, making it the second largest state in Nigeria after Lagos and the largest Muslim state in Nigeria.2

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY
- The scope of the study was small, particularly with reference to the population of Kano. The majority of participants were also urban, which is not representative of a large section of Kano’s population.
- The fact that respondents were selected from those living in Kano may reduce generalization of the data to northern Nigeria. However, respondents were carefully selected to include individuals from all parts of the northern Nigeria to reduce this effect.
CHAPTER TWO: METHODOLOGY

Sample selection
A total of one hundred and thirty-two (132) people were initially recruited as potential voluntary respondents to participate in the eight (8) Focus Group Discussions. Equal number of male and female prospective respondents were obtained by deploying the screener (see annex) onto an ODK (Open Data Kit)³ platform after which the data was downloaded for selecting the eligible respondents.

From the 132 random selected respondents, one hundred and four (104), fifty-three (53) females and fifty-one (51) males, were deemed eligible to participate in the eight (8) categories of focus group discussion. A random selection, using random number generator and selection in excel, was done to arrive at the final number of eighty (80) respondents. These 80 were made up of 10 male and 10 female respondents for each of the four (4) age group categories 13-17 years, 18-25 years, 26-35 years and 36-50 years

Respondents were all volunteers, came from the nineteen (19) states of northern Nigeria and were currently all living in Kano. For each of the FGD clusters, where possible a balanced mix of participants was selected including individuals from different social economic backgrounds, those who were self-employed, civil servants, students etc. The groups were all age matched and sex segregated.

Survey instruments
The interviews were conducted using a questionnaire that covered all the areas of interest to the study. Each of the four age groups selected were asked the same set of questions designed to elicit relevant information. The questionnaires contained key questions along with stem questions and probes. The questionnaire was translated to Hausa by a qualified translator using back translation technique.

Interview procedure
The interview was conducted by trained interviewers in a private and quiet environment to avoid distractions. Eight groups were interviewed (4 male and 4 female groups) each disaggregated by age and the interviews were conducted in the local dialect of Hausa. Prior to the interviews, informed consent and assent (see index) were obtained from the adult participants or from the parent/guardian, in the case of younger participants. Participants were assured of confidentiality of the information they provided and were given equal rights to air their opinions without judgement. They were also assured that there were

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3 Open Data Kit: a free and open source software for collecting, managing, and using data in resource constrained environments. It allows the collection of data offline and submit the data, when internet connectivity is available.
CHAPTER FOUR: DATA ANALYSIS

A. ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES OF WOMEN IN KANO AND NORTHERN NIGERIA

The role that economic activities play in the lives of men and women cannot be overemphasized. In Kano, many still believe that women are dependent on men for the course of their entire life cycle; and this is reflected in the restrictions placed on women’s mobility and work, with many women in Kano engaged in small home-based businesses.

To have a clear view of women’s current economic activities in Kano, questions were asked related to what women do to generate income. The following themes arose from those discussion:

Female-Dominated Vocations: The respondents unanimously agreed that most women were engaged in handicrafts and petty trading. This form of trade does not require much start-up capital and it is usually done from home or close to the family compound. The businesses mentioned included buying and selling kitchen utensils and food, hair and beauty services, weaving and knitting etc. Other female dominated work, particularly for those in the lowest socio-economic status, included domestic workers, harvest workers, babysitting, and cleaner.

Male Dominated Vocations: Skilled professional vocations were seen to be dominated by men and required skills and higher education. Women who enter this kind of work, tend to mainly work as teachers, health workers, NGO workers or in administrative positions.

Constraints to Women’s Economic Empowerment

While analysing the data, the following subthemes emerged as the predominant reasons why women are either deliberately forced to stay out of some economic activities or believe that they cannot participate:

1. Societal discrimination

Many of the respondents related the fact that women are restricted from certain economic activities that are culturally believed to be reserved for men. These include jobs that require going out, mingling with men and may involve staying at work late without a male member or her family present. When deciding what job to do, many respondents subscribed to the belief that women should comply with her husband’s directives even when they go against her own personal wishes or the ethics of her profession. Anything else is considered as going against the normative religious and cultural practices and are seen to undermine a woman’s main role within the home.
“Normally in the northern culture we assume women to be home-makers, they cook and all that stuff. When they say they want to work the society see them as being rebellious.”

“closing hours at place of work. For example; bank work. Married men don’t allow their wives to work in such places because she will not have time for her children”

2. Religious beliefs
All the respondents were keen to mention religion as the main reason why women are not widely engaged in economic activities. Many of them believe that women sacrifice their career out of respect for their religion.

“Yes, take for instance banking job, mostly the dress code are trousers or short skirts, and mostly you are not supposed to dress that way religiously and culturally it is disapproved. The woman is expected to dress that way, even if the woman is interested, (because of religion and culture belief) it will be difficult for her to dress that way.”

“Religion is a factor to consider, for instance like police or army (Force in general), mostly because of our religion, women do not enrol themselves there. Also dress code, and interactions at working place should be considered.”

3. Education and Awareness
Many of the respondents highlighted that women are generally not educated or skilled enough to compete with their male counterparts in the labour market. Technology was viewed as a way for women to upskill, but their limited access to the internet was cited as a barrier.

“I read (that) 80% of women in the north don’t have access to the internet/technology. You know you can have a phone and make calls, but there is also having access to the internet. Therefore, those that don’t have access to internet cannot get jobs that are advertised on the internet”

“Having knowledge of technology is an easy way for (women) to get jobs instead of going around distributing CVs. Such job opportunities are also posted in group chats. But many women are not allowed access (to the internet) or are not aware of the means through which they can get to (job adverts)”
B. GENDER INEQUALITY

To understand the wider social content, aspects of gender inequality were observed and enquired about through questions on the sources of inequality and the common beliefs and practices of gender inequality in Kano and northern Nigeria.

Sources of gender inequality and common practices

When asked about the root causes of gender inequality in Northern Nigeria, a series of responses were given, however, religion or tradition appeared in 53 places and in all the interviews. Often linked to religion or culture more broadly, all the male groups and a number of female participants mentioned the belief that women and girls were a weaker species compared to men and that men were superior and more reliable than women when it comes to certain roles or tasks. These gendered beliefs affect many aspects of women and girls’ lives including her mobility, ability to socialise and her access to technology as highlighted by the finding that male members of a household, irrespective of age, are afforded greater access to technology than female members. The main reason stated for this was the belief that the morality of women can be more easily and more quickly destroyed than that of a man.

“If we take religion aside, women are not courageous like men. They are soft”

“Religion has made distinctions in so many aspects. One is because of the vulnerability of women. For example, why does God promise the paradise to a father who marries three women? This is because the slightest mistake will destroy a woman’s morality/upbringing and will in turn affect the community as a whole. For a man, it is a bit less catastrophic. Even for adultery, the effect or consequence is felt more on a woman than on a man. This is why religion made these distinctions.”

“According to Islam, men are more evolved than women. Men think better than women even at a small age. A male will think of what is to come, while a female just lives in the present.

“If a friend visits her, she will be asked “Who is she, who is her father, which household does she belong to?” But for a man, this is not the case”

“...the process of raising women well is harder than raising a man well. You will see that an eye is kept more on women than on men.”
C. GENERAL VIEWS ON MOBILE PHONE/ INTERNET USE

Overall, the respondents expressed more negative than positive views regarding the use of mobile phones and the internet. Most of the positive views were expressed by male teenagers aged 13-17, while negative views were most predominant among men aged 26-35 years. Overall the males in the groups expressed more consistently negative views about technology than the females.

Positive Views

The use of mobile technology was frequently regarded to be a symbol of affluence, civilization, and education and girls and women who use smartphones and the Internet were viewed as rich and civilized by some of the respondents. A girl in the FGD for 13-17-year olds mentioned that when a woman uses mobile technology or internet, *it means she is rich*. Another woman in the age group 18-25 years opined that such a girl/woman will be viewed as *financially stable*. A respondent in the same FGD group corroborated this view, adding that *her male friends will be impressed and term her as classy while some of them will feel intimidated and thinks she is beyond their economic class*. Similar opinions were expressed by all the women in the 26-35 years group who said that *her male friends will say she is civilized now, and they will feel intimidated while her female friends will see her as big and classy*. A man in the 18-25 years group mentioned that a woman or girl who used smartphone will look more civilized than those who do not use smartphones. Women in the age group 26-35 years regarded girls with technology as *educated and exposed, independent, bold, and confident*.

Though deductive, the data collected is enough to prove that the bondages of culture and religion on women and girls' chances of having equal access to men in all spheres of life are far weaker with technology than without it. Equality in opportunity, especially education and employment, and equality in economy and awareness were part of those elements derived from the data analysis as being positively impacted by technology.

1. Economic equality

Other studies have highlighted that women, both literate and illiterate, who don’t have access to the technology and the Internet have reported that they can’t secure a good job or can’t make the best out of the very vocation they engage themselves in. Similarly, in this study, respondents highlighted that women and girls’ who have access to technology and the Internet are likely to acquire extra skills more than the average woman without any form of access. When asked whether men earn more than women even when they have the same computer qualification or skills, about 9 in every group of 10 respondents believe they earn the same, i.e. that their input and not their skills and qualifications not their gender determines their earning:
“Those who are not digitally literate cannot make money the same way as those who are. For example, if someone knows how to sew clothes, they can easily upload it, tag on the price of the brand, and many people will get to know their products.

“... if she posts on Instagram, her products will be seen online worldwide, even in England. Well-off customers that see her posts will be ready to pay big amounts. Sometimes, she may even offer home deliveries, making even more in the process.

“There is a woman that is into tailoring and has employed workers for herself. She posts her design samples online and is able to attract customers.”

When asked whether employers consider gender in jobs that require computer knowledge, about 9 respondents in every group of 10 believe that the women who have some computer knowledge have an upper hand in selling their goods or being employed than those who don’t have:

“Yes, it is all about knowledge. A woman can even get more knowledge than a man.”

“Yes, there is. For the woman at home using the Internet, she can reach out to people in Kaduna and other states who can buy from her, while the woman at home who does not use the Internet is restricted to only those who know here in the community to sell her products.

“The woman who is digitally literate earns more.

Negative Views

Whilst the connection between technology and wealth and class was generally positive, less positive views of women and girls who use mobile phones and the Internet were also widely cited – linking technology to women with lower moral standards and those with more chance of being lazy. For example, a woman in the age group 36-50 years opined that if a girl/woman uses mobile technology or accesses the Internet, some family members will question her morals. A male teenager also complained that a girl/woman who uses mobile technology/Internet is always carried away (pre-occupied by using the gadget) and when she is asked to perform household chores she finds it hard to do so. Other male teenagers opined that mobile technology/Internet draws their [girls/women] attentions from studies, makes them lazy, and distorts their memory.
D. CONTENT ACCESSED BY WOMEN AND GIRLS VIA MOBILE PHONES AND THE INTERNET

The most commonly reported content consumed by women and girls was linked to businesses (for example trading sites or sites with tips to improve businesses), education, and socialization/communication in that order. Other content identified was news, religion, makeup tips, health tips, and marital and parenting tips. The appropriateness of content consumed by women and girls was frequently mentioned, with acceptable content described as material that leads to development (self or community), is not sexual, is suitable for both children and adults and/or includes teachings or reference to Islam. While in the minority in this study, one respondent said anything that was not connected to Islam should not be accessed.

1. Business Related Content

Respondents indicated that the majority of women aged 18-25 use the Internet for business purposes, highlighting that they used it both to learn new business skills and to market their products. Quotes related to business content stated that *most artisans of today use the Internet to improve their products and they try to advertise their businesses [using the internet].* It was also widely recognised through the FGDs that women in Kano use the Internet *for skills acquisition.* This view was shared by some female teenagers who opined that *there are features on the phones [mobile apps] that help you advertise your business. This is done through the Internet. It is good that women use the internet because by seeing your competitor’s products, you will be able to create your own*. Another female teenaged respondent added that, *if a woman is into business, it is a means of advertising for her. If she advertises her products on social media that is how people will get to see them and know that she is selling them.* A male teenager mentioned that *women and girls don’t have to stress themselves calling all their contacts telling them what they sell. If it is uploaded online if someone sees it, they can tag/ send to others.* Men in the age bracket 26-35 years, explained more about their own internet use for business stating that *sometimes I have to be online all the time. And I am on all the social media platforms LinkedIn, IMO and the rest.*

2. Education related content

Education related content was the second most reported content accessed by women and girls. Accessing educational content on the internet was widely seen as positive and it was acknowledged that *you can learn something you don’t know before through the internet and it helps them [girls and women] to study easily and conveniently.* One of the women in the age group 18-25 years reported that *you can get information with it [internet]. Even if you did not attend catering school, you can use it to learn the making of cake.* Another one corroborated this view by saying that internet can be used for *seeking help for their assignments.* Again, men in the 18-26 age group focused more on the requirement for men to access the internet highlighting, *its [internet] most important use [for men] is knowledge/education.*
3. Socialization/communication

After business and educational contents, the next most common use of Internet and mobile technology mentioned by the respondents was for socialization and communication. This was seen as particularly useful to women and girls who are largely confined to the family home due to mobility restrictions imposed by the patriarchal culture and norms in Northern Nigeria. A woman aged 18-25 years said that the Internet/mobile technology is used for easier communications. This view was corroborated by other women in the same group as well as some men who said that if you marry a girl that has so many relatives you need to make it [phone/internet] available to her.

Similar views were expressed by a woman in the age group 26-35 years who said that technology is used for communications and for moving with the trend. A teenage male explained that women/girls use internet for them to know of the trends happening. He added that most of the northern girls are left at home, so they have their own networks online with whom they can gossip. Others in the same group mentioned that women use the internet for strengthening family ties, chatting and entertainment news. A man in the age group 18-26 mentioned that the way they [women/girls] use the internet is different from the men. You always find them online reading love books, or how to apply makeup, or something that has to do with women. I have friends who open novel group, they ask for novels or start chatting on cooking.

4. News content

Alongside communication, information and news was cited as another kind of content accessed by girls/women online. A teenage female said that women use the internet so that they will know what is happening while another corroborated by saying that it is a means for them to have information on what is happening and trending. Another respondent in the same group added that for women, it is to get information on new things or post things online. A teenage male expressed that women use the internet so that they get to know of the latest happenings, knowledge or innovation around the world.

5. Religious Content

Only 8 respondents in 5 different FGDs cited religion as key content that women accessed currently. For example, a man in the age group 26-35 years mentioned that there are religious pages where scholars preach and post things on daily on religious/moral contents. There are daily postings and women follow them too. A teenage female highlighted that women use internet to access contents on peaceful co-existence between men and women. However, religion is certainly deemed as very appropriate content and other research has highlighted how the more religious leaders are able to access religious content online, the more supportive of it they are. Other content mentioned included marital and parenting tips (mentioned by 6 respondents in 5 FGDs) and healthcare tips (mentioned by 4 respondents in 3 FGDs).
E. BARRIERS TO ACCESS

1. Low Education and Literacy

The ability to operate the devices and be able to read and comprehend content is a barrier to many women. Respondents highlighted that even those women and girls that can operate the devices often are not be able to access or use any form of knowledge shared in text format:

“Only 20% of them (who can’t operate or read) in the urban area. In the rural it is 80%. They only use it for watching films.”

“There are some that their phones can do everything, but they don’t do it because they lack the knowledge of operating it.”

“I have a cousin in ADAMAWA (North-eastern part Nigeria) she is illiterate and so she prefers to send voice messages.

A few of the respondents argued that education is not a factor with regards to the use of mobile technology. They hold the opinion that one doesn’t need to be in school in order learn the basics of using the devices. To them, all that matters is how frequent women and girls have access to the technology.

“The phones of nowadays are very easy to operate. You see, the android operating system is very easy to use such that even if you are not learned/literate, you can use it because of its icons. If you can’t read, when you see the icon, you know what it stands for.”

“In my opinion, as far as one starts using it, then he/she has knowledge on it...The moment you start using something, then you gain knowledge about it. We know that people in villages are not wealthy, but they can afford it if they wish to.”

2. Lack of relevant content and/or inappropriateness of content

All the respondents, particularly the teenagers, believe a barrier to access is the lack of relevant content that suits their needs. Once certain content is not available, there is a tendency to stop using the technology altogether:

“it happens, like when you are trying to get vital information online and you don’t, it is better for you to go the library.”
“Some girls only use certain applications and games. So, when such applications are not there, they will stop using it.”

“The reason why am doing it is to see designs and send to customers. Since they are not available anymore, I will not do it again”.

Some of the respondents argued that everything as far as content is concern, is available for one’s consumption, but the embarrassment they face in terms of some content may be a possible push back to accessing the internet.

“Coming across a content that is not in line with her culture. In essence, irrelevant content”

“It is in two folds. There is the good side and there is the negative side. The negative side is when a woman watches bad/pornographic content .... On the positive side, it is such that a woman does this but is no more doing it again. There are many pages online that preach/broadcast religious content. The main reason that prevents them is pornography and harassment like this person said.”

3. Financial constraints

The respondents mentioned financial constraints as a key barrier to access among people in Northern Nigeria. This was brought up in 73 different places and was perceived to impact women more than men. When asked of who access could have more among the members of the different social classes, they all agreed that the high-income earners have more chance of access than the people from poor homes:

“...whoever has to be on the internet must have data, and it is the high-income earners that will have much data on their devices. Maybe the low-income earners will not always have money to have data on their phones.”

“Low income earners do not have the gadgets as such they must go to internet cafes and they cannot afford same gadgets as the rich can”

There is difference between...If a girl comes from an affluent family, she is taken to a computer learning centre to learn computer from when she is little up to her adulthood and she started working. And there are those that are poor, they cannot afford to learn computers due to the cost involved.”

4. Time Constraints

Lack of time was also cited as a common factor preventing women and girls from accessing the Internet, those that reported time as a leading factor were mostly from the older male and female groups
“Time factor. She may have the phone and everything, but she may not have the time. For example, a nurse. She may roam about from here to there and may not have time for the internet.”

“Some even if they don’t have time they are lying down they will still have the time to check online. They take it as if it is their religion.”

R5: Some don’t have time because they are always busy going to school and Islamic school, so what time does she have to own a phone?”

The younger groups did not, except in few occasions, mention time as a factor that restricted women and girl’s access to the internet. They mostly argue that they have enough time and that the girls have more time than the boys.

Time is not a factor because they have all the time in the world... They do nothing at home.

Gender

Access to mobile phones and technology was clearly divided along gender lines and the majority of respondents concurred that parents don’t care much about whether male adolescents use a phone, because he is male and therefore lives by different rules, has more mobility and freedom outside the home and is believed to be generally more exposed to technology. In general boys have access to smart phones, whereas girls are given, at most, basic non-smart phones.

R8: “In a typical Kano household, most females do not go to school; talk less of having access to the internet. The parents think they cannot access it.” “But most of the Males have phones…”

“Males can get phones for themselves and be using it, the household will never know. But for a female she is always at home, and she cannot have access to a phone to use without her parents knowing.”

“it is believed that the kind of upbringing he has, he will use it well.”

“In a co-ed school, the boys are given assignments they can take home and solve using the Internet. But because girls are not given the chance to use the Internet they through struggle looking for answers in textbooks. But if girls are using the Internet they will become equal in terms of good scores and grades with the boys.”

F. ACCESS AND RESTRICTIONS: Who has control?

There is no doubt that women and girls in Northern Nigeria have many restrictions placed on them when it comes to accessing mobile phones and the Internet. In the course of the interview, the respondents
mentioned various people who exercise control over a women and girls access to and use of technology either allowing or denying access.

**Access through parents**

Two-third of the respondents mentioned that affluent and well-informed parents enabled their secondary school and older children (both male and female) to access mobile technology and the internet. Sometimes this was through allowing them to have their own devices, but more commonly it was through the children using the mother’s device:

“For example, there are some who grow up; they have computers in their houses if they are affluent. Even children of 5 years old start playing with computer which makes them develop the habit of using computer at early age. Those, you will find out they don’t want to do anything that kind of job that does not involve the use of computer."

*There are some parents who would make their children access it because they know the importance of it. They know the positive and the negative parts of it.*

“They don’t have phones. It is their mother’s phone they use. They have all their friends’ numbers in their mother’s phone. If they want to call them, they call through this phone.*

Respondents also argued that some parent are lenient because they don’t care what their kids do with the gadgets. While most of the younger female respondents believed that fathers are more careless about who uses the phone, their male counterparts maintained the opposite view. Above all, access to the internet and technology was very much down to the individual parenting styles and choices.

“Fathers allow access more because mothers are more conservative, and fathers do not pay much attention to what children do online.”

“Mothers are more lenient and spend longer time with the children; she will give them her phone to use for games.”

“The father doesn’t pay much attention to it, but the mother tells her daughter when and what time to use the phone. The mother always wants to know who you are communicating with.”

“Depends on the relationship between the family members. Some civilized parents chat with their children. You will find family sitting together and all of them are on social media.”

**2. Parental restrictions**
Although some parents allowed their girl children to use a smart phone, in general parents were the ones restricting phone usage among their daughters particularly. Reasons for the restricted access included concerns that she would not focus on her studies or household chores or that she would be negatively influenced by the content. Respondents unanimously agreed that male children have more chance of having access than female, even when the parents are rich enough to buy for both; yet they argued that no parent would allow their children (male or female) access to the internet if they felt that the content was not suitable for them: “Parents allow use of these gadgets for relevant content, but if the contents are not good they will not allow the use of it. There is kindles for kids and there are parental restrictions from parents so that their children will not access bad content.”

“For some, even though they can afford it, they are restricted because their parents are strict.”

“maybe she is at school, her parents will not let her have a phone in case she deviates from her studies”

“Yes, because it drives away their attention from their studies”

“parents do not like them to be exposed to certain content on the internet.”

The older groups argued that it is a duty of all parent to restrict their daughter’s access to mobile technology and the internet. In a number of instances men and women were described as being inherently different, with women and girls being weaker and more easily corrupted than men and boys. Therefore, restricting girls was seen as protecting them from negative external influences:

“Any sensible father that knows what he is doing will not buy a smart phone for his adolescent daughter…”

“you will see that for men and women’s morality... that of the women gets destroyed more easily than that of the man. This is because you can influence a woman in a few minutes.”

They further argue that in the case where the female child is allowed to use that of the parent or other relatives, it has to be under the vigorous supervision of the parent: “They use their phone in their mother’s presence and when they are done, she has to check it. So, you have to seek permission to gain access. This is the principle of the household.”

**Access through spouses and boyfriends**

All the respondents agreed to the fact that young adults and teenage girls can often have access to smartphones and the internet through their boyfriends who buy the phones for them in a bid to win their hearts during courtship. In other cases, it is the husbands who provide access to technology.
“If you see a woman with a smart phone... in this part of the country, it is not frequent that parents buy them for their daughters. Perhaps it is boyfriend or a husband.”

“...If you don’t get it from parents, nowadays, there are so many illegal ways that adolescents get access... Like through their boyfriends. You will see that they don’t have smartphones, but they will ask their boyfriends to get it for them because they see other girls on social media.”

: “It is through their boyfriends, for those that were not given by their parents.”

In the case where the families are poor, 7 in 10 of them get Smartphones from their boyfriends.

*Spousal restriction*

Whilst spouses are mentioned as the ones who give access, more frequently spousal restriction was highlighted as having a negative impact on women’s ability to access and use technology. Where wives were allowed to access smart phones and similar devices, respondents commented that her access to the internet was also a source of contention and argument in the household.

Mostly, for married women, when they are on the internet, it gives them a lot of problems. You will see that they are completely carried away by the phone. They forget the things they are supposed to do. They focus their attention entirely on the phone. It consumes a lot of their time on social media. This results in marital conflicts”

(The marital conflicts reported to escalate up to violent stage of beating and snatching the phones in this study).

“If you are asked to do some chores, it takes away your attention. This results in domestic problems”

The female teenagers also reported that married women are restricted by their spouses as a result of the belief that married women are a sacred entity reserved for their spouses only and that this is brought into question if she can access other men through the internet.

“The disadvantage is; some married women snap and upload their pictures on social media and other men may see it and develop interest in them while they are married women. There are those that go ahead and chat with such men and all this is as a result of the internet. Sometimes, there are group chats consisting of married men and women which is not proper even according to religion.”

“Insecurity on the part of the men prevents them from allowing females access to internet they think women would use it as a yardstick in communicating with men.”
The male adolescents mostly reported the behaviours of the girls and women to have gone against the provisions of religions thereby making the male spouses justified in their restrictions against them using the internet, particularly social media.

“You will see that maybe when some girls are chatting they will be showing their nudity to the world. And whatever you are chatting on, people see it. You see.”

“The husband may buy a small handset (an ordinary cell phone that will not connect to the internet) for her because he is jealous.” (Jealousy of her mingling with other men)

The older adult groups further added that it is a common practice for the men to restrict their spouses from using the internet.

“It has been happening. Spouses can stop them from using it.

The elderly men, when asked of the rate at which they restrict their wives from using the smart devices and the internet, 6 of them reported they can’t allow their spouses access while 3 were positive about allowing them access.

“In a typical Hausa man’s house 6% (6 out of 10) of them (wives) are being restricted from using the social media.... While the other 4% uses it with their husband’s phone.”

7 of the 10 respondents further stated that they would be glad to restrict new wives from using the ICT.

“...When I married my wife, I restricted her from having access. If you can restrict access and it is not adhered to, then there is a problem in the marriage.”

“...We had discussions on the main cause of divorce and the answer we got was smart phone.”

Religious restrictions

Both male and female respondents stated that adherence to religious belief is a considerable factor influencing both parental restrictions as well as self-censorship. Many participants reported that a fear of God coupled with a fear of possible stigma have made some women stay away from using technology and the internet.

Though they mentioned even when they were not asked of religious factor, most of the respondents believe that religion is a key justification when it comes to policing people’s use of the internet, especially women and girls in Northern Nigeria:
“There are people with low level of exposure that would have certain beliefs. This prevents people from using it. Religiously clerics say putting a picture on phone is not good.”

I once heard one scholar saying that it deviates people’s attention and concentration from religious activities like Dhikr (supplications) and recitation of the holy Qur’an, etc. because people are being carried away (by technology).”

“Religion restricts women from going against the rules laid down by the religion. For example, women interacting with men in chat groups. She will be chatting with different people. If she would definitely chat with people, her husband must’ve given her the permission to do so.”

“Maybe it is because of what she does before which is not suitable religiously, the guilt of the past can make her ... decide not to use the internet again.”

If someone uses the social media, be it Facebook or Instagram, they may see some content that is against their religion and say “This is not a blessing to me. I will not use it again”

G. FEAR FACTOR - FEARS AND MYTHS ABOUT THE INTERNET

The FGDs highlighted that in many cases there was a certain level of fear and mistrust associated with the internet. These concerns about the dangers of the internet were held by male and female participants alike and were largely grounded in a fear of harassment.

Harassment (sexual and emotional)
The level, real or perceived, of sexual harassment and threats that a woman could be exposed to online was a genuine contributing factor both to restrictions from parents and spouses, as well as a reason for women to restrict their own usage of the internet.

“There are those who will send me messages and I will not reply them back, because of sexual harassment”

if a comment is posted and a girl replies, she will get multiple comments that will come back from men stating that she shouldn’t comment but to go back to the kitchen.

“There are some men who use social media with different intentions. A sort of social harassment from the men. And she has to give up on using the platform.”
“... let’s assume a girl is on Facebook. ... He can disturb her. He will keep following her. If she changes to another platform, he will still follow her and try to find information from her. She may tell him to let her be, but that isn’t in most cases enough.”

Though many shared how women are scared off social media by harassment from men. Some male respondents claimed that women like this sort of attention

“Let me tell you the truth. This will not make women stop using the internet when such things are told to them. Women like such things.”

“What about sexual harassment? It will not stop her. If she uploads her picture...”

**Fear of publicity/privacy violation**

In 34 different events the respondents, mostly the young female adults and the female teenagers, mentioned fear of their information becoming public and violation of their privacy to be factors that prevent them from using social media platforms. They believe that their information is not safe if men can access their pictures without their consent or knowing. When asked what they feared the most when it came to posting on social media, they responded in different ways as follows:

- “Getting their privacy shared around.”
  “Nowadays, when you post something, men are fond of taking screen shots, cropping it and posting it. Some even lie and claim you are their relative.”
- “Privacy violation; a man once sent me my picture claiming that the picture was his sister. And when I talked to him about it he abused me.”
- “Someone told me that he would buy every part of my body for $300. He even came to our house. He said someone gave him my number.”
- “The fear of being seen or identified by people who know them.”
- “Fear of being seen as an immoral person if she dresses badly or does immoral things.”
- “Some fear their pictures to be shared online or become viral; and people will talk about them.”
- “women who post their pictures and are married... it can cause problems in the marriage.

**Fear of scammers and fraud**

About four of the respondents in the teenage group reported experiences with online scammers as a reason not to use the internet

“Fear of getting scammed. Some messages will just pop-up requesting that you should send one million naira. For example, it is done with the bank, where they said you have an issue with your
BVN they urged you to send them your bank details and when you do your account balance will be emptied.”

“There are fraudsters and scammers all in it. Therefore, one has to have a sense of reasoning not to involve himself in it…”

**Fear of ‘Moral Decadence’**

Morality and a fear of moral decadence were the most commonly mentioned reasons or justification for restricting women and girl’s access to the internet and mobile phones by respondents across all age and gender groups. In many cases, phones and the Internet were seen as leading to moral decline in the society. Indeed, the word **pornography** was mentioned 21 times throughout the interview while the term **nude** was mentioned 6 times. Girls in the teenage age group mentioned that:

- This is the medium through which they (girls) get spoiled; They meet with peer groups that spoil them, it destroys their morality;
- Getting access to inappropriate content like pornography is so bad now: girls snap pictures and post them online so that men will comment. In essence, this is the medium in which they lose their entire morality;
- Similar fears were expressed by women in the 18-25 age groups. Some of these women mentioned that:
  - Sometimes girls send nude pictures of themselves;
  - When chatting, they send messages that are inappropriate;
  - When given a phone there is problem; some girls use it to get boys while others use it to meet their boyfriends.

**Moral decadence is widespread in Nigeria when you open WhatsApp that is what they use it for**

Moral reasons for restrictions given by male teenagers included:

- Some parents think their children will be exposed to bad things.
- The Internet will destroy their good upbringing/morality.

**The reason why parents restrict girls on social media is because they easily get carried away with shiny things, and when they want something, nothing can stop them from doing it. It becomes very difficult to bring their attention back**
Reasons for restrictions given by men aged 18-25 years included:

There are some rules that are laid down for women before they start using technological devices in Northern Nigeria especially in Hausa households. You will find out that they will hardly allow a woman to use a smartphone. In fact, even small basic/feature phones. They see it as a platform that will be harmful to them because the easiest person to influence is a woman. According to Hausa culture, we (Hausas) feel that the phone is a simple way to destroy a woman’s morality/upbringing and alter her thoughts. Even for parents who raise their children well, in a short period of time, the moment a girl starts using a smartphone, you will see that her sense of morality will start changing.

Through social media they can get exposed to pornographic content and, sexual harassment. It makes parents fear their children will lose focus, some parents believe that when a girl starts using social media or the Internet she will become morally corrupt.

It can lead to stealing, or promiscuous activities, drug abuse, rudeness/stubbornness, lies.

90% of the causes of immorality/bad behaviour/attitudes of urban women are related to the Internet.

There is something that is created which is called ‘the cloud’ where they hide their (pornographic content) under the platform.

It leads to them dropping the main goal of their life and mingling with bad friends…. It leads to them copying bad behaviours

**H. PENALTIES FOR THE USE OF PHONES/ INTERNET BY WOMEN**

The most common reported penalty for the use of phones without parental or spousal consent was confiscation of the phone. This was reported across all of the age groups interviewed. A man in the age group 18-25 said that the penalty of using a phone without consent is that the phone will be seized by the parents if she is not married. Another man in the same group added that it will be seized, and further investigation taken to find out how she got it [the phone]. If she has strict brothers, they will investigate deep into the matter and find out who gave her the phone.

Beating was cited as another common punishment against using the phone without parental consent mentioned by some of the respondents. A respondent also opined that early marriage may also serve as a punishment when a girl is found to be using a phone without parental approval. In some circumstances, girls are not allowed to use phones even after engagement. A respondent mentioned that sometimes she [the girl using phone without parental approval] is not beaten, but they [parents] will only try to know the source she gets the phone from. If it is from her boyfriend [fiancé], someone that is likely to marry her, he
will be called and be advised not to buy her such a gadget. A man in the age group 36-50 years mentioned that a father reacts to his daughter’s use of smartphones by threatening her. Punishments for using smartphones is not restricted to parents as a teacher also reported that in his school, if a girl is caught using a smartphone, her parents are informed, and the phone is sold, and books are bought for her with the money.

There are also punishments that are said to be carried out on wives who use phones without their spousal approval and knowledge. Across all age groups, the common punishments mentioned was confiscation of the phone and divorce. A man in the age group 26-35 opined that use of a phone without the husband’s approval may lead to divorce because he would have warned her. Another one added that the husband will change the phone to a smaller phone for her, while someone else added that some [husbands] will divorce the woman, ...., while some will report her to her family.

Although the beating of wives as punishment was mentioned across all age groups, it was mentioned the most by the women in the 18-25 years age group. One of them shared the anecdote of a man asking his wife why she used the phone he perceived her answer as talking back to him and he slapped her in the presence of his mother. Another woman added that the consequences of using phones without the husband’s approval mostly results in domestic violence and marital misunderstandings. Despite this widespread negative reaction to the use of phones without spousal approval, men in the age group 18-25 years believe that men should allow their wives to use phones especially when they have been using them before marriage. One of them mentioned that one cannot take a girl from her parent’s house and then deny her access to a smartphone having married her while she was using one. He was supported by another respondent who mentioned that it is not easy for one to just be restricted from using a smartphone after being used to using it.

I. BENEFITS OF THE INTERNET
Although women who frequently use mobile technology in public places might be seen as too exposed and might consequently risk the chance of being disrespected by the members of the community, about 8 in every 10 respondents of the 8 FGDs had the opinion that women and girls who have access to and know how to use the computer and Internet are more informed and independent than those without. Participants from the teen group particularly argued that freedom can be achieved using the medium through which it is denied.

- “Yes, because they will be able to protect themselves from the men. Sometimes, posts are made for women on social media. If the women have access to it, they will be able to protect themselves and people will know everyone is equal.”
- “Yes, it will because the Internet has answers and solutions for everything.”
- “I have a friend who was given a Smartphone after her secondary school and she always told me things, it showed me that she knew more than me.
- “In terms of education (both religious and western education) they will be more enlightened.”
“Exposure: because they will feel they are at the same level. My wife always get knowledge about religious education, she always reads ‘RAHIBATHUL SHAMILA’”

The members of the male and female adult groups of 36-50 years of the FGDs further argued that women and girls should have freedom of association and break away from the clutches of tradition.

“Women associate with it. Because I work in the library, we are told to always be online because we are always needed. My wife uses social media because she is a teacher. Sometimes, when I don’t know something she is the one that teaches me when I come back from work. My siblings don’t use it because they are young. My female colleagues use it just the way I do it because we are the ones who have to give out information.”

“My wife and female colleagues use the internet more than me. I use it for news, information and other relevant things but I notice that women use it for chatting, business and other things. My wife and female colleagues don’t use the Internet for news/information.”

When asked if they think access to ICT may empower the women, the male parent group believes that women and girls can grow higher than men if provided with the same access to technology.

If they are given this access, they will even surpass men. They already have their own capabilities and now you have given them something that will build their capacity, definitely, they will surpass you.

Just as they say, anything a man can do, a woman can do better!

CONCLUSION
With the advent of mobile technology, many societies have adjusted in the way they conduct their professional and informal lives to suit the global trend of advanced technologies. In northern Nigeria, there is a struggle to keep up because of a variety of factors among which gender inequality features prominently.

Feeding gender inequality is a combination of patriarchal norms and Islamic teachings that together role regulate women and girls’ access to phones and the Internet in northern Nigeria, resulting in boys given greater access than girls. The key reason for the difference is attributed to the desire to maintain socio-cultural norms and morality by preventing women and girls from accessing obscene content through their phone and the Internet.
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APPENDIX

Appendix i: Interview Guide

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Introduction

Set up the ground rules by explaining the following:

- There are no right or wrong answers – This is only a Research and we would appreciate unbiased input
- Please Switch phones to flight mode or silent if you are expecting a serious call
- Explain neutrality of EAI – not affected by positive or negative responses – please be honest
- Importance and value of participants’ contribution
- Explanation of audio and recording
- CONFIDENTIALITY IS GUARANTEED

- Brief introduction of participant/Ice breaker
  - Name / age / occupation
  - Daily activities
  - Hobbies / interests

Q1. What does the average woman do e.g. what type of employment formal or informal is common for women in the Kano area?
   i. What do women in Northern Nigeria commonly do to earn a living? (jot down the professions)
   ii. Which industries are the major employers of women in northern Nigeria?
   iii. What are the basic skills required for her to be employed?
   iv. What are the basic skills required for men to be employed?
   v. Is a woman’s knowledge of technology specifically, Internet capabilities, criteria for employment? If yes, why? In what fields?
   vi. What other factors could be constraints to a woman’s chances of being employed?
   vii. Are there religious/cultural restrictions with regards to women’s chance of:
Q2. What is the average income for women and men?

i. How much are women paid per day/week/month?

ii. What is the minimum payment for a day’s/week’s/month’s job?

iii. Is the salary scale of men different from that of the women working in the professions you mentioned in Q1 (I) above? Why? (refer to, and probe for at least 5 of the professions mentioned in Q1(I) above)

iv. Is there an advantage for women who are digitally literate in terms of their earnings? How?

v. What is the difference between the high and low-income earners’ in terms of access to information technology?

vi. How do adolescents, between the ages of 13-17, access technology e.g. smart phones, computers, iPad?

vii. Which parent(s) enable Internet access? (ask for each of the male and female adolescents)

Q3. How often a week do you use the Internet this includes phones, café computers, home computers, iPad or other connected devices? And for what purpose?

i. How often does your wife, sisters or female friends use smart phones or the Internet? (applicable to male group)

ii. How many times in a day? Why?

iii. In a typical Kano household who has access to the Internet and/or smart phones and why e.g. mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters?

iv. Why do some household members have access and others do not?

v. Do girls have their own smart phones?

vi. Do girls use their family’s phone? If they don’t use their family’s smart phone how do they access smart phones or the Internet?

vii. What are the important reasons why women and girls need access to the Internet and technology in northern Nigeria? (Probe for age, profession, economic status, location, education, social etc.)

viii. Why is the Internet important for men and boys?

ix. How do men and women use the Internet/smart phones differently? (probe fully for the peculiar purposes)

x. What prevents men/women (boys/girls) from accessing the Internet?

xi. What fears do parents have about girls using social media and the Internet?

xii. Describe the type of girl or woman who uses a smart phone?

Q4. What pushback for Internet/technology use do women and girls experience? From whom? (probe for religious, cultural, harassment (e.g. sexual), violation of one’s privacy, lack of relevant content in local language, parental/spousal restrictions, literacy and cost)
i. Are Internet, smart phones and digital devices available to women and girls in the community? If yes, why? How? (If no, why? How?)

ii. What might the consequences be for a girl or woman if caught using a smart phone or computer if she was told not to?

iii. What common factors prevent women and girls from having access to technology and Internet? (check for access to internet as different from having the devices)

Prompt for:
- Parental restriction
- Spousal restriction
- Marital status
- Economy
- Cost of gadgets
- Cost of internet access (data)
- Literacy
- Time factor
- Content relevance/inappropriateness
- Cultural
- Religious
- Harassment (sexual and emotional)
- Language of operation (for ICT gadgets)

iv. What other factors, mythical if there are, do you think exist?

Q5. What are the root causes of gender inequality in our community?

i. What comes to mind when you hear gender inequality? Why?

ii. Is gender inequality common practice in this part of the country?

iii. What causes inequality?

iv. In what ways does gender inequality affect women and girls access to the Internet and digital education?

v. In your view what would help the community be more open to women and girls access to and use of technology?

vi. What concerns do fathers, religious leaders, and brothers have in terms of women and girls use of social media?

vii. What fears and concerns do women and girls have in terms of posting on social media?

viii. What type of interaction do boys have with girls via social media?

Q6. Would access to and the use of Internet/technology help women and girls achieve more equality in our community? How?
### Q7. Does Internet/ICT make women more empowered or create problems for women? If both, explain.

- **i.** What type of content would empower women and girl?
- **ii.** Is this content available on the Internet now?
- **iii.** What are the challenges the Internet or smart phones could create for women and/ girls?
- **iv.** If a girl was seen using a smart phone what would the reaction of her female peers / male peers / female family members / male family members be?
- **v.** What social sanctions or punishments might a man face if his daughter was openly using technology such as smart phone?

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**Appendix ii: Photographs of FGDs**