

## Digital Media Use and Access among Rural Youth in South Africa: The Prospects for Female Empowerment

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**Abstract :** Digital technologies have played a significant role in bridging the information gap between the haves and the have nots in society. In developing countries such as South Africa, historically marginalised groups such as women in rural communities have an opportunity to use digital technologies to network among themselves as well as interact with their government, thereby enhancing prospects for poverty eradication, political participation, community development and democracy. However, the extent to which these goals can be achieved in a developing context through harnessing digital technologies is not quite clear, particularly given the fact that access to these technologies is not evenly distributed and the fact that women's access to digital technologies is hampered by factors that go beyond the question of infrastructure. Informed by the technological dependency theory, this paper is about how female youth in rural South Africa are deploying digital media tools for socio-economic empowerment. In particular, the study investigated the extent to which female youth in Limpopo province, South Africa access and use digital media platforms and gadgets and the extent to which those technologies are breaking down barriers that stand in the way of female youth empowerment. Data were gathered using a self-administered questionnaire disseminated to selected 100 female youth in Limpopo Province, South Africa. The data were analysed using SPSS version 9, and the results were analysed using descriptive statistics. The paper argues that wider and constant access to digital media by female youth in rural areas is indicative of the great potential for empowering female youth in rural areas through harnessing digital media. The study established that the majority of female youth had access to digital media technologies and used them to share valuable information among themselves. The study further established that female youth are active users of digital media in South Africa, which is the significant driver for socio-economic empowerment.

**Keywords :** digital technologies, empowerment, female youth, South Africa, survey, technological dependency

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