

Females' Usage Patterns of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in the Vhembe District, South Africa

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Abstract : The main purpose of this paper is to explore and provide substantiated evidence based on the usage patterns of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) by females in the Vhembe District in Limpopo-Province, South Africa. The study presents a broader picture and understanding about the usage of ICTs from female's perspective. The significance of this study stems from the need to discover the role, relevance and usage patterns of ICTs such as smartphones, computers, laptops, and iPods, internet and social networking sites among females following the trends of new media technologies in the society. The main objective of the study was to investigate the usability and accessibility of ICTs to empower the Vhembe District females in South Africa. The study used quantitative research method together with elements of qualitative research to determine the major ideas, perceptions and usage patterns of ICTs by females in the District. Data collection involved structured and self-administered questionnaire with both closed-ended and open-ended questions. Two groups of respondents participated in this study. Media Studies female students (n=50) at the University of Venda provided their ideas and perceptions about the usefulness and usage patterns of ICTs such as smartphones, internet and computers at the university level, while the second group were (n=50) Makhado comprehensive school learners who also provided their perceptions and ideas about the use of ICTs at the high school level. Also, the study provides a more balanced, accurate and rational results on the pertinent issues that concern the use of ICTs by females in the Vhembe District. The researcher also believes that the findings of the study are useful as a guideline and model for ICT intervention that work as an empowerment to women in South Africa. The study showed that the main purpose of using ICTs by females was to search information for writing assignments, conducting research, dating, exchanging ideas and networking with friends and relatives that are also members of social networking sites and maintaining existing friends in real life. The study further revealed that most females were using ICTs for social purposes and accessing the internet than entertaining themselves. The finding also indicated a high number of females that used ICTs for e-learning (62%) and social purposes (85%). Moreover, the study centred on providing strong insightful information on the females' usage patterns and their perceptions of ICTs in the Vhembe district of Limpopo province.

Keywords : female users, information and communication technologies, internet, usage patterns

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