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# Nigerian blogosphere and identity change of women: Analysis of top five female bloggers in Nigeria

*ABSTRACT*

Nigerian women face patriarchal subjugation and intimidation both politically, economically and socially, just like most women in all parts of Africa. But this scenario seems to be different in the social media landscape, where young Nigerian women are not only making waves but are calling the shots as well. This study is aimed at critically assessing the Nigerian blogosphere in order to ascertain how five female bloggers, namely Linda Ikeji, Uche Pedro, Stella Dimoko Korkus, Tosin Ajibade and Judith Emike Audu-Foght, have impacted positively on the lives of women. The study reviewed relevant literature and also analysed what women-related contents each of the five bloggers post in their various blogs. Apart from the study of the contents of the blogs, interviews were employed in collecting relevant data from the bloggers. These two approaches helped in answering the research questions which guided the study. The paper concludes that through blogging, the identities of Nigerian women have been positively impacted on in various ways like in the building of portfolios, sharing of knowledge, self-expression and building of professional networks. The study recommends that since the mainstream media have failed to give voices to African women, it is high time women take it upon themselves and better their identities through the opportunities offered by the internet.

## INTRODUCTION

The present Nigerian society, like most nations in Africa, is highly patriarchal in nature, with attendant unequal gender relations that place women in a subordinate position, because gender equity and equality seems to be a Western conception and tradition (Bent, 2018). Patriarchy is entrenched in the society to the extent that a woman without a man in her life is seen and treated as "a nobody" (Bvukutwa, 2014). To be married is seen as a privilege and honour for Nigerian women. This scenario is reflected in all aspects of the society, especially politics, the economy and the media industry. In some cases, an unmarried woman is denied access to managerial

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positions simply because she is "incomplete" (Dogo, 2014). This situation has been described as a bane to the development and empowerment of African women in general, and some African scholars have attributed it to external factors like religion, colonialism and education, among others (Okunna, 2005; Dogo, 2014; Enwefah, 2016; Ashong & Batta, 2011).

Because the society is patriarchal, all the sectors that make up this whole are also patriarchal. The journalism profession is a typical example. No wonder media professionals are still referred to as "the gentlemen of the press" and why journalism is still a men's world. Globally, media ownership and practice are in the hands of men as reflected in a survey by the International Women's Media Foundation and UNESCO conducted in 2011, which found that women account for one third of practitioners out of 500 media organisations in the entire world (International Women's Media Foundation, 2011).This shows it is a global trend. In Nigeria, it is even more pathetic owing to the high level of economic, political and social power which men control. Greater percentage of both print and electronic media outfits are owned and controlled by male politicians who use these media outfits to project and protect their political interests (Okunna, 2002, Enwefah, 2016). Male dominance is not only reflected in the ownership structure, it equally plays out in the workforce. Majority of journalists in Nigeria are males. The contents of what is being covered also indicate male dominance. These assertions are supported by Enwefah (2016) which empirically showed evidence of this male domination. Similarly, Ashong and Batta (2011) indicate that 67% of males and 33% of females account for the registered number of communication practitioners in Nigeria. Regrettably, this trend still persists in the Nigerian media. A recent survey conducted by the Independent Journalism Center (IJC) in Lagos in conjunction with the Panos Institute of Washington and the Center for War, Peace and the News Media of New York established that 80% of practicing journalists in Nigeria are male (Nieman Reports, 2018).

Domination of the Nigerian mainstream media by men accounts for the nature of coverage given to women and women issues, to the extent that when a woman made news in the early years of media development in the country that was in itself news (Okunna, 2005). For instance, "Man bites dog" and "Woman strips in protest against taxes", could be such unusual cases. It had to be that unusual to attract news coverage. And so, in the early 1960s, women resorted to doing shocking things in order to grab the attention of society. In Aba in Southeastern Nigeria, it took bands of angry women rioting and chasing the colonial government officials there into hiding before society would listen to their issues. Then they made banner headline news in the conservative national dailies.

Mainstream media in Nigeria seem to be dominated by politics. Very little attention is given to real life issues that shape the quality of living, things that dominate the minds and hearts of the people. Professional indoctrination and market realities rule the treatment of information. Women's issues belong to a genre of information considered lightweight news. Therefore, such stories are considered to properly belong to the tabloids dealing in trivia and sex and scandal. In the serious media, they are buried or relegated to the society, art, home and entertainment pages. Only in sport, however, do women speak loudly because of their overwhelming presence and performance (Dogo, 2014).

Since the voices of politicians drown out the people, it is those few women linked to the noisy world of politics that are occasionally heard. Wives of public officers enjoy the best press in Nigeria. The public profiles of their husbands rub off and the goodwill plays in their favour. Generally, they are perceived as playing supportive roles to their husbands. Women in government also make news but this is because they speak on the portfolios they control, and those usually include women and children's affairs, health and aviation. Unlike their male colleagues, rarely do they venture out to comment on issues of national importance unrelated to their portfolios.

The women journalists in the Nigerian mainstream media have made little or no impact in the male-dominated media landscape in terms of media ownership or establishment (Amobi, 2013; Sanusi & Adelabu, 2015). In other words, the news and media sphere seems to be dominated by men. But the reverse seems the case with the Nigerian women bloggers in the blogosphere. Although there are male bloggers, there are five women bloggers in Nigeria who have distinguished themselves in the business of blogging. They are more popular and successful than Nigerian men who have ventured into blogging (Onwuka, 2014).They have changed the identities of women by the contents they upload on their various blogs and by the successes they have recorded through blogging. This study is an evaluation of the five most famous women bloggers in Nigeria, namely Linda Ikeji, Uche Pedro, Stella Dimoko Korkus, Tosin Ajibade and Judith Emike Audu-Foght.

There is yet no study on how these female bloggers have impacted on the identity of an average Nigerian woman. This study is therefore aimed at qualitatively assessing how these bloggers have affected the lives of Nigerian women, using interviews and content analysis as research tools. These bloggers were chosen, firstly because of the international attention they have drawn to the Nigerian blogosphere, as captured by Hayes and Amah (2018) in a recent coverage by CNN. Secondly, they were studied based on the fact that they give priority attention to issues involving women like sexual harassment, intimidation, motherhood tips, entertainment gossip, and food recipes. Thirdly, these bloggers were considered for having received awards either locally or internationally on their chosen careers.

Against this background, this article investigates ways in which female bloggers in Nigeria engage with womanhood.

## 1. BLOGGING

A blog is a discussion informational website published on the World Wide Web consisting of discrete, often informal diary style text entries ("posts") (Mutun & Wang, 2010). Posts are typically displayed in reverse chronological order, so that the most recent post appears first, at the top of the web page. Until 2009, blogs were usually the work of a single individual, or occasionally of a small group, and often covered a single subject or topic. In the 2010s, "multi-author blogs" (MABs) have developed, with posts written by large numbers of authors and sometimes professionally edited. MABs from newspapers other media outlets, universities, think tanks, advocacy groups and similar institutions account for an increasing quantity of blog traffic. The rise of Twitter and other "micro blogging" systems help integrate MABs and single-author blogs into the news media.

"Blog" can also be used as a verb, meaning to maintain or add content to a blog (Gaudeul & Peroni, 2010).

The emergence and growth of blogs in the late 1990s coincided with the advent of web publishing tools that facilitated the posting of content by non-technical users who did not have much experience with HTML or computer programming (Merholz, 1999). Previously, knowledge of such technologies as HTML and File Transfer Protocol had been required to publish content on the Web, and as such, early web users tended to be hackers and computer enthusiasts. In the 2010s, most sites are interactive Web 2.0 websites, allowing visitors to leave online comments, and it is this interactivity that distinguishes them from other static websites. In that sense, blogging can be seen as a form of social networking service. Indeed, bloggers do not only produce content to post on their blogs, but also often build social relations with their readers and other bloggers. However, there are also high-readership blogs which do not allow comments.

Many blogs provide commentary on a particular subject or topic, ranging from politics to sport. Others function as more personal online diaries and others function more as online brand advertising of a particular individual or company. A typical blog combines text, digital images, and links to other blogs, web pages and other media related to its topic. The ability of readers to leave publicly viewable comments, and interact with others, is an important contribution to the popularity of many blogs. However, blog owners or authors often moderate and filter online comments to remove hate speech or other offensive content. Most blogs are primarily textual, although some focus on art (art blogs), photographs (photoblogs), videos (video blogs or "vlogs"), music (MP3 bogs), and audio (podcasts). In education, blogs can be used as instructional resources. These blogs are referred to as edublogs.  Microblogging is another type of blogging, featuring very short posts (Harmanci, 2005).

As noted by Festa (2003), as at 16 February 2011, there were over 156 million public blogs in existence. On 20 February 2014, there were around 172 million Tumblr and 75.8 million Word press blogs in existence worldwide. Technorati lists 1.3 million blogs as of February 22, 2014.

The term "weblog" was coined by Jorn Barger on 17 December 1997. The short form, "blog", was coined by Peter Merholz, who jokingly broke the word *weblog* into the phrase we blog in the sidebar of his blog Peterme.com in April or May 1999. Shortly thereafter, Evan Williams at Pyra Labs used "blog" as both a noun and verb ("to blog", meaning "to edit one's weblog or to post to one's weblog") and devised the term "blogger" in connection with Pyra Labs' Blogger product, leading to the popularisation of the terms (Merholz, 1999).

Before blogging became popular, digital communities took many forms, including Usenet, commercial online services such as GEnje Byte Information Exchange (BIX) and the early CompuServe, e-mail lists and Bulletin Board Systems (BBS) (Gallagher, 2002). In the 1990s, Internet Forum software, created running conversations with "threads". Threads are topical connections between messages on a virtual "corkboard". From 14 June 1993, Mosaic Communications Corporation maintained their "What's New" list of new websites, updated daily

and archived monthly. The page was accessible by a special "What's New" button in the Mosaic web browser.

The modern blog evolved from the online diary, where people would keep a running account of the events in their personal lives. Most such writers called themselves diarists, journalists, or journalers. Justin Hall, who began personal blogging in 1994 while a student at Swarthmore College, is generally recognised as one of the earlier bloggers, as is Jerry Pournelle. Dave Winer's Scripting News is also credited with being one of the older and longer running weblogs. The Australian Netguide magazine maintained the Daily Net News on their web site from 1996. Daily Net News ran links and daily reviews of new websites, mostly in Australia.

Another early blog was Wearable Wireless Webcam, an online shared diary of a person's personal life combining text, digital video, and digital pictures transmitted live from a wearable computer and Eye Tap device to a web site in 1994. This practice of semi-automated blogging with live video together with text was referred to as sousveillance, and such journals were also used as evidence in legal matters. Early blogs were simply manually updated components of common websites. However, the evolution of electronic and software tools to facilitate the production and maintenance of web articles posted in reverse chronological order made the publishing process feasible to a much larger, less technical, population. Ultimately, this resulted in the distinct class of online publishing that produces blogs we recognise today. For instance, the use of some sort of browser-based software is now a typical aspect of "blogging". Blogs can be hosted by dedicated blog hosting services, or they can be run using blog software, or on regular web hosting services. Some early bloggers, such as The Misanthropic Bitch who began in 1997, actually referred to their online presence as a zine, before the term blog entered common usage.

## 2.  BLOGGING AND WOMEN'S IDENTITY

Gender identity is one of the most complex constructs as different approaches led to multiplication of its meanings rendering the concept difficult to grasp (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000). However, as Hall (1996:2) stated, identity is "an idea … without which certain key questions cannot be thought at all". Many scholars argue that identity is a fluid construct that is constantly shaped and reshaped by our experiences and interactions as well as social context (Giddens, 1991; Hall, 1996; Stern, 2008). Goffman (1959) introduced the idea of identity as performance. He argued that in social interactions we present ourselves to others in a way that conveys the way we want them to define us. In other words, we perform our identities through interactions that are context and audience bound.  Identity, as Hall (1996) argues, is "a narrative of self", and accordingly, constantly negotiated through one's everyday life and experience.  Simone de Beauvoir introduced the concept of the socially constructed gendered identity. She argued that "One is not born but becomes a woman" (cited in Butler, 1988:519). Building on de Beauvoir's argument, Judith Butler (1988, 1990) argued that "becoming a woman" involves constant negotiation and performance of identity. She further argued that gender identity, "is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time – an identity instituted through a stylised repetition of acts (Butler, 1988:519).  Gender identity is

a performative construct. Females, and males for that matter, learn to perform their gendered identity in accordance with cultural and societal expectations of the roles and identities associated with each gender. This study is therefore a reflection of how the identities of women in Nigeria have been influenced through blogging.

New technologies and new media have brought new realities to women's lives, especially in patriarchal societies. Considering the realities of Nigerian women, the internet provides a space where women can express their voices on many issues. This is what the mainstream media have denied them. They are only seen and not heard. But the internet provides access to information that might be obstructed by cultural and political and local barriers. It can offer opportunities of networking that cannot be viable otherwise (Wheeler, 2004). Moreover, the cyberspace provides spaces of identity articulation and negotiation that were not available before through traditional or mainstream media. Therefore, the representation of "self" in society is mostly constructed by one's appearances; through observing a person's outlook, people are able to define his or her identity such as their gender, age or even the social standard of the person (KiYanC, 2010). With the absence of the body in the performative construction of identity, the internet can be thought of as sites of "disembodiment or dislocation of the self" (Gomez, 2010; Stern, 2008). In societies were women's identities are still defined "so closely in terms of the home and the family", by using the internet to express themselves women do not need to "step outside into the social settings in which the only available identities [are] those offered by male stereotypes" (Giddens, 1991:216).

In her groundbreaking work *Life on the screen: Identity in the age of the internet*, Turkle asserted that "computer-mediated communication can serve as a place for construction or reconstruction of identity" (1995: 342). Moreover, she concluded that people adopt "multiple identities", as "many more people experience identity as a set of roles that can be mixed and matched, whose diverse demands need to be negotiated" (Turkle, 1995:180). The internet offers users the possibility to forge completely new online identities, which can be multiple, or to reshape their offline identity, carefully choosing "what information to put forward, thereby eliminating visceral reactions that might have seeped out in everyday communication" (Boyd, 2007:12). Indeed, altering elements that may cause rejection in the online community or simply presenting an online "better" version of oneself are common practices. On the other hand, online identities are often fragmented, which means that they are spread over various social media networking sites. Consequently, the internet "has contributed to thinking about identity as multiplicity" (Turkle, 1995:178). Thanks to this "disembodiment or dislocation of the self, the multiplicity of identities can be easily practiced online. Turkle, for example, researched the world of Multiple-User-Domains (MUD) where players create their own imaginary characters or avatars. Her study revealed that many MUD players find creating an online identity a way to escape problems they encountered in real lives. On the other hand, users of blogs "may even change their nationalities and genders to gain respect from other web users", or swap gender or race of online identities "to get experience that they are not able to have in real world" (KiYanC, 2010). In addition, blogs allow people with stigmatised real life identities to disclose online embarrassing aspects of their life, which would jeopardise their relations with other people in real life (McKenna & Bargh, 1998). All in all, thanks to the Internet "mixed and matched" identities can be lived and performed in real and online lives.

### 3. FIVE NIGERIAN FEMALE BLOGGERS

When blogging started, the first blogs in Nigeria were really glorified online gossip journals, and in all likelihood, becoming a professional blogger and making money online was not the goal (Yahaya, 2018). Since then, the blogosphere has evolved, and now people blog for many different reasons. There are even distinctions among types of blogs – business, lifestyle, fashion, food, and entertainment blogs, among others. Unemployment is a social menace not only in Nigeria, but in most African nations. With mass unemployment reaching a peak of 18.8% in the third quarter of 2017, tech savvy and increasingly well connected young people have embraced the social media. In the process, a new generation of high profile and highly paid personalities has emerged (Hayes & Amah, 2018). These personalities, mostly young women, own well established and popular blogs through which they cater to the teeming population of online content consumers who visit these blogs in search of news and entertainment.

The popularity of blogging in Nigeria could be traced to 2003 after Google bought Blogger.com and acquired AdSense from Oingo Inc. (Onwuka, 2018). This move made it possible for bloggers without huge platforms to maximise profit immediately at the onset of blogging. Many Nigerians followed suit and established blogs that dealt on entertainment, style and fashion. Blogging in Nigeria took a new dimension after the introduction of Wordpress on May 27, 2003. In 2005, Seun Osewa created the Nairaland forum and by 2006, many blogs were created in Nigeria after the monetisation of the blogger blog content by Google (Onwuka, 2018). Below is an overview of the five female bloggers discussed in this article.

**Linda IfeomaIkeji** (https://www.lindaikejisblog.com)

Linda Ikeji was a one-time model, born on 19 September 1980. She created her blog in 2006 upon graduation from the University of Lagos, Nigeria, where she studied English language (Anusiem, 2017). Her blog, which is known as lindaikejisblog, deals with news, entertainment, fashion, lifestyle, sport, religion, gossips and general stories that might interest her audience. Linda's blog can be accessed on https://www.lindaikejisblog.com and boasts about 2,000 profile views daily (Anusiem, 2017). Linda was among the 20 most prominent African women profiled in 2012 by *Forbes* as a way of celebrating women in that month's (September) special edition (Adeniyi, 2015). Also, on 25 November 2012, the BBC aired an interview in which Linda was featured on *BBC Focus on Africa* programme (BBC, 2012). Linda's blog won the Nigerian Blog Award for 2013 (Olorisupergal.com, 2013), and on 8 August 8 2018, Trinity International University conferred Linda, along with other prominent persons, with an Honorary Doctorate Degree for her outstanding contribution to Business and Media Practice in Africa ( Goldmyne.tv, 2018; Bellanaija.com, 2018). Although her site was shut down by Google on 8 October 2014 due to what was inexplicitly tagged infringement of intellectual property, it bounced back stronger after its restoration two days later (Muoma, 2014). In 2016, Linda Ikeji launched "Linda Ikeji Social" (LIS), and Linda Ikeji TV, which is now streaming online. The LIS interactive site is booming due to its ability to reward users from the profit garnered through advertisements (Kazeem, 2016). Linda's venture into blogging has given voices to women and increased their ability to comment

on areas previously seen as men's domain in Nigeria. This assertion is supported by Anusiem's 2017 study, which found that Linda Ikeji's blog contributed to political news journaling during the 2015 general elections in Nigeria and has raised the consciousness of Nigerian women regarding politics (Anusiem, 2017).

**Uche Pedro** (https://www.bellanaija.com)

Uche Jennifer Pedro, formerly known as Uche Eze, was born on 26 July 1984, and is the brain behind Bellanaija.com which is a lifestyle, entertainment and fashion blog created in 2006 after she graduated with a Bachelor's degree in Business Administration from the Richard Ivey School of Business, University of Western Ontario, Canada (Nigerianbiography.com, 2015). She started blogging as a time-filling hobby due to boredom experienced upon graduation, and at that time was only blogging about women and fashion. Ever since then, Uche has been successful in her career and has been recognised by various bodies. For instance, in 2008, she was rated by Punch as the 22nd person among 100 people said to have contributed in shaping the year 2008 (Dailymail.com, 2015). In 2010, she won an award for most Outstanding Contribution to Fashion Communication during the Fashion Week held in South Africa. Also in 2010, Uche was nominated for the "Best Use of Technology" award and was featured by Oprah Winfrey in her show tagged "Beauty Around the World" (Bellanaija.com, 2010; Nigerianbiography.com, 2015). In 2013, she won the "Young Media Entrepreneur Award" (Arinze, 2013), and was decorated with the "Creative Industries Award for Bloggers" and "Best African Blogger Award" in 2015 and 2016 respectively (Adiele, 2015; Bellanaija.com, 2018). Bellanaija.com publishes innovative contents on topical issues in Nigeria, ranging from fashion to entertainment, economy and politics. This is why it boasts about one million viewers every month (Nsehe, 2014; Woculus.com, 2015).

**Stella Dimoko Korkus** (https://www.stelladimokokorkus.com/)

Stella Dimoko Korkus founded stelladimokokorkus.com and was born in Lagos on 22 August (Soriola, 2018). She keeps her age and other family information secret from the public for reasons best known to her. She graduated with a third class degree in linguistics, with English as a reference from the University of Benin, Nigeria (Iheoma, 2018). Stella had the intention of becoming a bank employee upon graduation but this did not happen. Out of frustration, she jumped into news writing for hints and encomiums magazines in Nigeria before beginning her blog. So Stella was a practicing journalist who later turned to a professional blogger. She moved to live with her husband Germany in 2004 after getting married in 2003, and operates her blog from there. Stella, like other female bloggers, has been recognised as a successful blogger having received the Nigerian Entrepreneurs' Award for Best Blog of the year in 2017 (Iheoma, 2018). Her blog is said to be visited by over 30 000 readers a day (Soriola, 2018). Her blog, like others, deals with news, entertainment, gossip, and women's issues. Having experienced sexual violence as a young girl, Stella uses her blog to fight gender-related anomalies like violence and molestation of women (Iheoma, 2018).

**Oluwatosin Ajibade** (https://olorisupergal.com)

Oluwatosin Ajibade is the founder of Olorisupergal.com blog, was born in 1987 and graduated from the Lagos State University, Accounting Department, and the Pan-Atlantic University's School of Media and Communications, both in Nigeria (Oyindamola, 2016). Oluwatosin Ajibade is the Organiser of the New Media Conference, a conference that focuses on opportunities offered by the new media, held in Lagos annually (Woman.ng.com, 2016; Lawson, 2016). She created Olorisupergal.com in 2010, but before that worked with media organisations in Nigeria like Netng, LaffMattaz, and Acada Magazine, and was later employed as a web manager by BlackHouse Company in 2011, a job she left in 2012 to focus fully on her blog (Oyindamola, 2016; Techpointng.com, 2017). In 2015, she was listed among 100 Most Influential Women by Y'Naija, and uses her blog to raise awareness of challenges facing girls and women in Nigeria (Belo-Osagie, 2016). The most popular of such cases is the sexual assault case of an under-aged girl by her teacher at Queens College Lagos which caught the attention of Government authorities after being published in her blog in 2016 (Belo-Osagie, 2016). Her blog deals with topical issues on Nigerian politics, entertainment, fashion and lifestyle.

**Judith Emike Audu-Foght** (www.judithaudu.blogspot.com and www.playingwithrecipes. blogspot.com)

Judith Audu-Foght got a BA in French in 2005 and a Masters of Public and International Affairs in 2010, both from University of Lagos, Nigeria (Thenationonlineng.net, 2013). She created judithaudu.blogspot.com and playingwithrecipes.blogspot.com, which she uses for entertainment and celebrity news and sharing of food recipes respectively (Thenationonlineng.net, 2014). Apart from being recognised as an avid blogger, Judith is also making waves in the Nigerian movie industry-Nollywood. She was nominated for the Best Female Actor Award of 2013 and in 2014 won the Best Actress in *Alpha Mom*, during the In-short International Film Festival (Vanguardngr.com, 2014; ngrguardiannews.com, 2014). In 2015, she produced and featured in *Not Right* which was nominated at the 2015 Africa Magic Viewers' Choice Awards and at the Nollywood Movie Awards during the International Film Festival at Abuja, Nigeria. In 2016, she won the Best Actress for the movie *Just Not Married* (Pulse.ng, 2016; thenationonlineng.net, 2016).

## 4. METHODOLOGY

To address the research questions, the blogs of the Nigerian female bloggers under study were analysed qualitatively to ascertain the nature of issues on womanhood being discussed in the month of October 2018. The month of October was chosen to reflect the period of this study in order to gather fresh posts on the selected blogs. Purposively, only write-ups on women during the period were chosen as points of reference during the interview sessions. Also, email interviews were used in collecting data from the female bloggers in order to ascertain how they are impacting on the lives of women in Nigeria. Interviews helped the researchers in getting data that complemented the content analysis. The study incorporated a summative approach to qualitative content analysis developed by Hsieh and Shannon (2005) which explains it as an act

of identifying and interpreting certain words or content in text with the purpose of understanding the contextual use of the words or content. This analysis of the appearance of a particular word or content in textual material is referred to as manifest content analysis (Potter & Levine-Donnerstein, 1999). If the analysis stopped at this point, the analysis would be quantitative, focusing on counting the frequency of specific words or content (Kondracki and Wellman, 2002). A summative approach to qualitative content analysis goes beyond mere word counts to include interpretation and discovering of underlying meanings of the words or the content (Babbie, 1992; Catanzaro, 1988; Morse & Field, 1995). The use of this approach enabled the researchers to select those posts that centered on women and their lifestyles but fashion tips and gossips were purposively eliminated from issues looked into.

## 5. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### 5.1 The blogs engage with issues about women

The findings of this study indicated that the selected blogs are engaging Nigerian women to discuss issues that centre on womanhood in general. An overview of the contents of the blogs indicated that issues of women's empowerment, sexual assaults and violence against women, women's education, and entrepreneurial opportunities for women were treated in the blogs. For instance, LindaIkeji's blog posted a story on 28 October 2018 with the headline "6-year-old girl sexually assaulted by two 7-year-old boys after watching porn on phones", and there was another story posted on 27 October 2018 titled "Leah Sharibu's abductors demand 100 bn for her release". These two stories had the highest number of comments for the entire period of study. On 27 October 2018, Uche Pedro posted a story on her Bellanaija. com titled "Justice for Ochanya: Nigerians to protest rape and death of 13-year-old girl", while Stella Dimoko Korkus reported: "Woman who was mocked for 40 years finally gives birth to a baby boy at 66 years via VVF". In Olorisupergal.com, Oluwatosin Ajibade posted a story titled "FG working to place limit on number of children women can have in Nigeria", while Judith Audu-Foght carried a story of "Fifteen child actors in Nigeria mostly girls below 12 years of age". This shows that Nigerian Female Bloggers treat topics and report stories that are not only topical but centre on issues about women. Some of the responses given when asked whether they think their blogs are engaging with issues about women are:

> **Linda Ikeji:** I can say that I give priority attention to issues about women in Nigeria knowing fully well the type of society in which we are. I have suffered so much as a woman and this is why I use my blog to effect little change by creating awareness to issues that bring women down. When people comment on these stories, others learn. So women learn about their problems and how to handle them. You can see the number of readers on daily basis. This shows that people like our topics because they are significant, real and center on the lives of women and other minority groups. I don't joke with women, children and issues of the disadvantaged people like the physically challenged. I give priority to such stories in my blogs.

**Uche Pedro:** Oh yes, I report serious issues about women that are real. That's why people comment on them. Apart from politics and celebrity gossips, there are reasonable stories that touch the heart. This Leah Sharibu case and the issue of assault you mentioned are topical issues on my blog which caught the attention of many people.

**Stella Dimoko Korkus:** As a woman, I look into women cases in order to show what women in Nigeria are passing through. I experienced sexual assault as a young woman. This is not what I wish an average Nigerian girl. I make sure we report such cases and bring the perpetrators to public criticism through our blog. The stories on our platform are highly educative and interesting.

**Tosin Ajibade:** It is not just reporting on women but on what type of stories. We look into any story that will uplift women in Nigeria and encourage them to keep on pushing in the face of numerous obstacles. Go through our blog, you can see the nature of stories we post.

**Judith Audu-Foght:** I use my blogs for two main reasons. You know I operate two blogs. The one on food recipes is meant to help women cook good foods in their homes. The best way to get our men is through good foods. So I empower women with cooking skills through this blog. The other blog is where I try to showcase emerging Nigerian stars and encourage them. We look out for women who have excelled in various fields and give them coverage. That's how I try to engage my readers in my two blogs. I go for topics that will interest them.

These findings are in consonance with the assertion of KiYanC (2010) that blogs serve as platforms for women to voice their ideas, thoughts, and feelings. Whether their passion is business, personal finance, cooking, politics, photography, or marketing, blogging gives them the opportunity to connect and network with likeminded individuals who share the same passions. Online platforms enable users to have access to information which would have been prevented by cultural , political or local factors (Wheeler, 2004).

### 5.2 Ways in which female bloggers in Nigeria seeks to influence the identity of women

Data generated through the blogs and the interviews helped in answering this question. The blogs of Linda Ikeji, Judith Audu-Foght and Uche Pedro contained some comments that thanked and reflected appreciation for the stories they posted. Judith's blog on food recipes contained more of such comments in which many women appreciated the food recipes posted in the blog. These contents show that the bloggers are really being appreciated by Nigerian women for what they post on their blogs. The results of the interviews with the bloggers yielded the following responses:

**Creating opportunities for making a difference:** Some people's passions lean toward supporting a cause. Whether it's a political, environmental or social cause, a blog is a great

way to build awareness and garner support. Nigerian female bloggers have successfully championed the cause of the Nigerian girl-child. When asked how they create opportunities for making a difference in the lives of women in Nigeria, the responses from the bloggers affirmed they are actually working towards this purpose. Their comments are shown below:

**Linda Ikeji:** I try to change the status of women from what it used to be to what is obtainable in the developed nations by posting stories that will encourage them to stand up for themselves . My blog has encouraged women and young girls to believe that women can make it in all spheres of life despite odds. At times, we organise and support campaigns for the liberation of women. For instance, we have not relented in the Leah Sharibu case. We were also very active during the #Bringbackourgirls campaign. So we are using our blog for making a difference.

**Uche Pedro:** Making a difference? Oh yes we are trying. We have changed impacted positively in the lives of women. Women now speak and make comments online the way they want. In fact, we have made an average woman in Nigeria bold and creative through our blogs.

**Judith Audu-Foght:** By bringing upcoming stars to [the] limelight and by equipping women with cooking skills through our blog, we are making a difference.

These responses are supported by the findings of Lepkowsa-White and Kortright (2018) that female bloggers do create personas on their blogs which emphasise specific meanings and motivate their audiences in intentional patterns. They do this by employing many business strategies which make the personas not only credible and professional, but trustworthy as well. This is the reason why female bloggers tend to be intermingled in the lifestyles and beliefs of their audiences, who are mostly women (Philip, 2016).

**Providing platforms for sharing of knowledge:** Nigerian female bloggers have provided the opportunities needed to educate women and youths interested in various fields of expertise. The best part is that, as they build resources on their blogs to teach others, they equally make money by creating educational products or services online. The contents of these blogs clearly support this assertion. These blogs, especially that of Linda Ikeji, Uche Pedro and Judith Audu-Foght, contain video clips on how to do make-up, Nigerian gele or headtie, and other ideas that can help women gain knowledge and be economically empowered as well. Oluwatosin Ajibade, who uses her blog, olorisupergal.com mostly for women's empowerment, has this to say:

Apart from what I post online, I organise an annual conference, the New Media Conference, which is a conference that focuses on opportunities offered by the new media in Lagos, Nigeria. This conference helps both professionals and academics to come together and brainstorm on how to maximise the potentials inherent in the social media. The key events and papers presented are equally made public in my

blog and in other mainstream and online platforms for people to learn from. In this way, we participate in knowledge sharing.

**Helping women build professional networks:** Blogging is a community-based endeavour, and networking is one reason people engage in it. These blogs offer women side benefits, such as gaining access to valuable software and tools, seminars, workshops, product unveilings, and other events. They help business executives to expand their online presence, connect with potential customers, promote their brand in a positive conversation, and even generate online revenue. An ideal blog is a forum for improvisation and creativity (Lee, Samdanis & Gkiousou, 2014). Judith Audu-Foght, speaking about her blog, judithaudu.blogspot.com, asserts thus:

> My blog sells artists and upcoming stars to potential buyers in the profession here in Nigeria and even internationally. People connect easily through information made available in blogs because we verify the authenticity of such messages before posting them.

**Helping young women to build online portfolios:** Blogging is a great way for aspiring authors and freelance writers to build up an online portfolio (KiYanC, 2010). By showcasing their writing skills on large platforms with expansive reach, most Nigerian youths have become freelancers who now grow their exposure and sign on new clients. A typical example of this in the Nigerian blogosphere is Judith Audu-Foght's blog. The contents of her blog indicates she is mostly focused on showcasing Nigerian artists, actors, musicians and other talented individuals who are to be classified as budding or emerging talents. This may have to do with the fact that Judith is also a Nollywood actress and writer (Pulse.ng, 2016).

**Opportunity to market businesses:** For companies and entrepreneurs, gaining online visibility is one of the best ways to grow subscribers, leads and ultimately revenue.  When asked how they impact on the Nigerian business sector, all the bloggers agreed they are making positive impacts in this sector. See the comments below:

> **Uche Pedro:** This is one of the areas in which we have made the most impact, not only to women business executives but to men also. They market various products and services through our blogs. We also make money from the adverts. So it is a give and take thing.

> **Linda Ikeji:** We market ourselves and others in our blogs. Even network operators, government agencies and private business executives advertise their goods and services in our blog. Go through the blog and see for yourself.

The Nigerian bloggers all have corporate and functional websites. This makes it easier for them to create contents that are valuable, helpful, and entertaining. This is the method through which they achieved effective ways to grow their websites' authority, online rankings,

and traffic. As emphasised by BlogHer (2012), personal bloggers have the ability to invite product placement. They can equally make profits through their products and through the services they render to others (Boepple & Thompson, 2014). Due to the fact that bloggers are often seen as credible professionals, they make profits by selling advert spaces or text links on their blogs, and by writing product reviews and commercial articles for their audiences (Bruce & Solomon, 2013; Lu & Lee, 2012).

## 6. CONCLUSION

Nigerian female bloggers have successfully launched women into the Nigerian online media industry. They have really changed the identities of Nigerian women. They have shown that young women in Nigeria can actually be successful in the media industry just as men are in the mainstream media. Through these blogs, young women identify with successful women and get encouraged to venture into meaningful social activities that will impact positively on their lives. As the internet and technology become more ingrained in our day-to-day lives, the benefits of blogging or building a website become impossible to ignore. The internet, with its protection of individual privacy, provides a space to negotiate the boundaries imposed on women by cultural and societal rules. It is apparent that social media have contributed to granting women their voices and destabilised the portrayals of them as victims of longstanding patriarchal oppressive practices.

The five Nigerian female bloggers selected in this study offer users , especially women and youth, the possibility to negotiate their identities or to reshape their offline identity, by choosing  the type of information to upload and in the process, eliminating unnecessary messages which may be applicable in day-to-day interactions (Boyd, 2007:12). All in all, thanks to the Internet "mixed and matched" identities can be lived and performed in real and online lives.

In conclusion, we argue that identities are constructed within, not outside of discourse; hence we need to understand them as "produced in specific historical and institutional sites within specific discursive formations and practices" (Hall, 1996:4). In the context of the Nigerian society, the blogosphere, in the absence of the physical body and without gatekeepers, has brought new ways of self-expression and identification among Nigerian females. They are now able to articulate themselves for whom they think they really are, not whom the society wants them to be. It is therefore recommended based on the foregoing that since men have dominated the mainstream media and have failed to give voices to the teeming population of African women, it is time for women to take the bull by the horns by utilising the opportunities offered by the internet. Women can be their own image makers through the social media, project the identities they want to and not what society wants, build partnerships and networks and live meaningfully in this 21st century by encouraging one another through social media platforms.

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