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assignment 1 (Internet Use Barriers and User Strategies)

ICT In africa

**1. CITATION/REFERENCE:**

C. Chair, “Internet Use Barriers and User Strategies: Perspectives from Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa and Rwanda”, Research ICT Africa, Cape Town, South Africa, 2017

**2. AUTHORS:**

The author is Chenai Chair.

Chenai Chair is an Africa digital policy expert with about a decade of experience. She has worked for organisations like the Mozilla Foundation, the World Wide Web Foundation, and Research ICT Africa.

**3. FUNDING AND CONFLICTS OF INTEREST:**

The study was commissioned by the Mozilla Foundation.

A conflict of interest in this research is that one of the goals of the commissioner of the research is to improve internet access around the world. This may bias the findings of the research in favour of intuitive, but not necessarily effective, solutions to low internet access like subsidised data.

**4. PUBLISHER:**

The publisher of this research is Research ICT Africa. It is a peer-reviewed article.

**5. PURPOSE:**

The main objective of the research was to understand how continuing Internet users and new Internet users, across genders and located in urban and rural areas, use the Internet, specifically when data is subsidized or not subsidized.

The hypotheses being tested were:

* “The use of subsidized services only forms part of data use”
* “People do not move beyond the use of subsidized services”
* “Using the Internet first through subsidized services leaves people with a lesser understanding of the Internet”

**6. RESEARCH METHODS:**

The research method was focus groups since “focus groups are able to provide a more nuanced qualitative understanding of” the issue at hand. 41 focus groups were conducted, with 409 participants in total. Each country—Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa and Rwanda—had 9 to 12 focus groups divided almost evenly between urban, peri-urban, rural and deep rural locations. There were also 11 female-only focus groups and 9 male-only focus groups.

**7. MOST IMPORTANT FINDINGS:**

Describe the most important findings of the paper (maximum of three) as presented in the research paper you have read (with examples where applicable).

The most important findings of this research are as follows.

**There are many data cost management strategies used besides subsidised data**

Confirming the first hypothesis (that “the use of subsidized services only forms part of data use”) it was found that there are many data cost management strategies used besides subsidized data in the countries studied. The strategies identified were:

* zero-rated services like Facebook’s Free Basics which are free for users,
* a preference for monthly, weekly or daily prepaid data packages, which result in reduced expense
* mobile data alternatives like Internet cafes, free Wi-Fi in commercial spots like shopping malls and Free Wi-Fi through government-supported initiatives.

**Subsidized data does not constrain Internet use behaviour, instead, people’s contexts are a stronger determining factor of Internet use behaviour**

The research found that subsidized data does not affect Internet use behaviour, but instead, people’s contexts have a greater effect on Internet use behaviour. For example, in rural areas, network providers that offer subsidized content are not used because of unavailability or poor quality of their network. This abates the fear that subsidized data negatively affects internet use behaviour by, for example, tying users down to limited Internet content and suggests to policymakers that subsidized data should remain a policy for improving internet use and access where affordability is a challenge.

**There are multiple barriers to Internet access – both supplier-side and demand-side barriers**

The research found that besides low affordability, there are several other barriers to internet access. These barriers are on the side of Internet suppliers (supplier-side barriers) and Internet users (demand-side barriers)

The supplier-side barriers found were:

* Affordability of data and smartphone
* Electricity shortages
* Limited coverage and poor quality of service

The demand-side barriers identified were:

* Illiteracy
* Lack of digital skills
* Content concerns
* Fear for privacy and security

**8. WEAKNESSES:**

A shortcoming of the paper is that the result of the third hypothesis—“using the internet first through subsidised services leaves people with less of an understanding of the internet”—was not adequately presented in the paper.

**9. BROADER IMPLICATIONS:**

The implications of this research are as follows.

Subsidised data is a good measure for increasing Internet access in places like Africa where low affordability is a barrier to Internet access.

But subsidised data by itself is not enough. Besides, subsidised data, other measures need to be taken to improve Internet access in Africa since affordability is only one among several barriers to Internet access. These measures include improving network quality and extending reach to rural areas, introducing free public Wi-Fi spots such as in schools and libraries, improving the electricity utility service, especially in rural areas and training people on digital skills and the use of the internet.