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EMPOWERING FEMALE VEGETABLE FARMERS: MOBILE PHONE UTILIZATION, BENEFITS, AND CONSTRAINTS

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Abstract: The study assessed mobile phone usage as an agricultural tool among female vegetable farmers in the Osogbo metropolis, Osun State, Nigeria. Specifically, it described the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents, investigated the extent of mobile phone usage in vegetable farming, identified the benefits of mobile phone usage for vegetable farming and identified the constraints to using mobile phones as an agricultural tool. Using a three-stage sampling procedure, 120 respondents were sampled and interviewed. Data were analyzed using frequency counts, percentages, means, and standard deviation. The results revealed that the mean age of the respondents was 48.98 ± 7.72 years. The majority (84.2%) were married, engaged in vegetable farming for profit (78.3%), and acquired their vegetable production knowledge from their parents (59.2%). The mean farming experience was 9.36 ± 8.23 years. Regarding mobile phone usage indicators, linkage with transportation to the market ranked highest with a mean score of 1.56. Among the benefits of mobile phone usage, improved service delivery ranked first with a mean score of 4.51, while poor network access ranked highest among the constraints to usage of mobile phone, with a mean score of 3.86. In conclusion, there was a medium level of mobile phone usage among the female vegetable farmers in the study area.

The study recommended that service providers should enhance their network infrastructure to facilitate mobile phone usage for vegetable farming activities in the study area.

Key words: *Empowering, female vegetable farmers, benefits, phone usage*

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INTRODUCTION

The rapid proliferation of mobile technology has transformed various sectors worldwide, including agriculture. In developing regions, mobile phones serve as a vital tool for communication, access to information, and resource optimization, especially among smallholder farmers. Despite this potential, the extent of mobile phone adoption and its implications for specific demographic groups, such as female vegetable farmers, remains underexplored.

The role of female farmers in agricultural production has long been recognized as essential to global food security, particularly in developing countries. Despite their significant contributions, female farmers often face numerous socio-economic challenges, including limited access to resources, markets, and technology. Female farmers, particularly in developing countries, including Nigeria, typically belong to marginalized socio-economic groups, often characterized by limited access to education, land ownership, and financial resources. Research shows that these constraints impact their decision-making power and overall productivity in agriculture [7]. Vegetable farming, which requires intensive labor and shorter production cycles, is often a primary livelihood for women in rural areas due to its relatively low entry barriers and potential for quick income generation. However, traditional gender roles and household responsibilities frequently limit their ability to expand their farming activities [6].

The integration of mobile technology into agricultural practices has been transformative in many developing countries. Mobile phones serve as a vital tool for accessing market information, weather forecasts, agricultural inputs, and training opportunities. Studies of [1] indicate that farmers who use mobile phones are better able to communicate with buyers, negotiate fair prices, and coordinate logistics, leading to improved efficiency and profitability. However, gender disparities in access to technology remain a concern.

Female farmers often face barriers such as illiteracy, cost of devices, and limited digital literacy, which hinder their ability to use mobile phones effectively [8]. Mobile phones offer numerous benefits to female farmers, including increased access to agricultural information, improved communication with extension services, and enhanced market linkages. For instance, [12] studies have shown that mobile phones empower women by enabling them to make informed decisions about crop management and marketing strategies. Additionally, mobile-based platforms tailored for women farmers provide access to financial services, such as mobile banking and microloans, which are critical for scaling up their farming operations [5].

Despite the advantages, female farmers face several constraints in adopting mobile technology. Financial barriers, such as the high cost of mobile devices and data plans, are significant impediments. Social and cultural norms often restrict women's access to and control over technology, further limiting their adoption [13].

Furthermore, low levels of digital literacy and a lack of localized, user-friendly content tailored to women's needs exacerbate the digital divide in rural areas. Addressing these constraints requires targeted interventions, including affordable access to technology, training programs, and policies that promote gender equality in technology usage [8].

The transformative potential of mobile technology for empowering female vegetable farmers, particularly in developing regions is underscored. While the socio-economic characteristics of these farmers pose significant challenges, mobile phones offer a pathway to overcoming some of these barriers. However, the benefits of mobile technology cannot

be fully realized without addressing the systemic constraints that limit its adoption. Bridging the gender digital divide in agriculture is essential for enhancing productivity, promoting economic empowerment, and ensuring equitable growth in rural communities. Female farmers play a critical role in agricultural production and food security, yet they often face unique socio-economic challenges that hinder their productivity and technological adoption. This study seeks to address these gaps by describing the socio-economic characteristics of female vegetable farmers, examining their level of mobile phone usage, identifying the benefits they derive from this technology. Additionally, the study identified the constraints limiting their effective use of mobile phones. The findings aim to provide insights into how digital tools can better support female farmers, contributing to enhanced agricultural productivity and socio-economic empowerment.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The study was conducted in Osogbo metropolis, Osun State, Nigeria. Osun State is an inland state in southwestern Nigeria, with Osogbo as its capital. The state is bordered to the north by Kwara State, to the east by Ekiti and Ondo States, to the south by Ogun State, and to the west by Oyo State. Osogbo, the capital of Osun State, is located at coordinates 7°46'N 4°34'E and covers an area of 47 km². According to [14], estimated 2024 population of the city is 795,808. Osogbo shares boundaries with Ikirun, Ilesa, Ede, Egbedore, and Iragbiji. Due to its central location, it is easily accessible from all parts of the state. The city is approximately 48 km from Ife, 32 km from Ilesa, 46 km from Iwo, 48 km from Ikire, and 46 km from Ila-Orangun.

The population for the study consisted of all female vegetable farmers engaged in vegetable production in Osogbo metropolis, Osun State. A two-stage sampling procedure was employed. In the first stage, four (4) communities where vegetable farming is predominantly carried out by female farmers were purposively selected: Coker, Oke-Ayepe, Oke-Ijetu, and Gbonmi. In the second stage, snowball sampling was used to select 30 female vegetable farmers from each of the four communities, resulting in a total of 120 respondents who constituted the sample size for the study. Data were collected through the use of a well-structured interview and were analyzed using percentage, mean scores and standard deviation.

Measurement of variables

Usage of mobile phone was assessed using fourteen (14) indicators of mobile phone usage measured on a 3-point Likert scale scored 2, 1 or 0 based on the responses of the respondents. The response options were “frequently” (2), “rarely” (1) and “never” (0). Mean was obtained for each of the indicators of mobile phone usage and used to rank the indicators of mobile phone usage in descending order. From measurement scales of 2, 1 and 0 for frequently”, “rarely” and “never” respectively, any indicator whose weighted mean score was up to 1.0 (that is $2+1+0/3$) was used as benchmark for the extent of respondents’ usage of mobile phone. Composite score of all the indicators of usage of mobile phone was obtained, the mean ($\bar{X}$) and standard deviation (σ) were also calculated and these were used to calculate the high, medium and low levels usage of mobile phone.

High level $\geq (\bar{X} + \sigma)$,
 medium level = between $(\bar{X} + \sigma)$ and $(\bar{X} - \sigma)$ and
 low level $\leq (\bar{X} - \sigma)$.

In addition, benefits of mobile phone usage was assessed using fifteen (15) indicators measured on a 5-point Likert scale scored 5, 4, 3, 2 or 1 based on the responses of the respondents. The response options were “strongly agree” (5), “agree” (4), “undecided” (3), “disagree” (2), and “strongly disagree” (1). Mean was obtained for each of the indicators of benefits and used to rank the benefits in descending order. From measurement scales of 5, 4, 3, 2 and 1 for “strongly agree” (5), “agree” (4), “undecided” (3), “disagree” (2), and “strongly disagree”, any benefit whose weighted mean score was up to 3.0 (that is $5+4+3+2+1+0/5$) was used as benchmark for the benefits of usage of mobile phone.

Furthermore, constraints to mobile phone usage was assessed using thirteen (13) indicators of constraints measured on a 5-point Likert scale scored 5, 4, 3, 2 or 1 based on the responses of the respondents. The response options were “strongly agree” (5), “agree” (4), “undecided” (3), “disagree” (2), and “strongly disagree” (1). Mean was obtained for each of the constraints and used to rank the constraints in descending order. From measurement scales of 5, 4, 3, 2 and 1 for “strongly agree” (5), “agree” (4), “undecided” (3), “disagree” (2), and “strongly disagree”, any constraint whose weighted mean score was up to 3.0 (that is $5+4+3+2+1+0/5$) was used as benchmark for the constraints to usage of mobile phone.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Socio economic characteristics

Results in Table 1 reveal that the mean age of the respondents was 48.98 ± 7.72 years. This implies that female vegetable farmers were young and in their productive years and would therefore, may be willing to welcome any slight attempt to improve their standard of living. Hence, proper usage and increased benefit of mobile phone is projected. This finding agrees with [2] that most of the sampled respondents were middle-aged.

The results further show that most (84.2%) of the respondents were married. This implies that vegetable production in the study area is highly practiced by married people who have responsibilities to attend to. This finding agrees with [9] that majority of the sampled respondents were married.

The results further show that some (34.2%) of the respondents had secondary education, few, 27.5% had tertiary education, few, 25.8% had primary education, few, 11.7% had no formal education and very few (0.8%) had other forms of education. This shows that majority of the female vegetable farmers had at least secondary education which may enable them to be able to embrace innovations and improve their standard of living. This position goes in line with the findings of [3] that most of the sampled respondents have one form of formal education or the other.

In addition, majority (59.2%) of the respondents acquired their vegetable production knowledge from their parents. Few (11.7%) acquired their knowledge from their friends and school while very few (7.5%, and 2.5%) acquired their knowledge from their neighbors and from their brothers, respectively. This inferred that vegetable production is a household production in the study area, since the majority of the parents socialize their children into the profession.

The results also, indicate that the mean farming experience among female vegetable farmers was 9.36 ± 8.23 years. This suggests that the majority of these farmers have been actively engaged in vegetable production for a significant period, thereby possessing substantial experience in the field.

The results further, show that majority (78.3%) of the female vegetable farmers engaged in vegetable farming for profit, 11.7 percent engaged in vegetable farming for leisure, 6.7 percent had no choice but to engage in vegetable farming while just 3.3 percent engage in vegetable farming for household consumption. This implies that most of the female vegetable farmers were focused on acquiring money from their vegetable production.

Majority (57.5%) of the female vegetable farmers were members of vegetable farmers association while 42.5% were non-members of vegetable farmers association. This implies that most of the farmers are actively involved in vegetable farmers association and as such may derive benefits from their association.

Table 1. Distribution of the female vegetable farmers according to their socio-economic characteristics (n=120)

Variables	Frequency	Percentage	Mean $\pm$ S
Age (years)			48.98 $\pm$ 7.72
30-40	22	18.3	
41-50	42	35.0	
51-60	51	42.5	
Above 60	5	4.2	
Marital status			
Single	00	0.0	
Married	101	84.2	
Separated	06	5.0	
Divorced	01	0.8	
Widowed	12	10.0	
Educational qualification			
No formal education	14	11.7	
Primary education	31	25.8	
Secondary education	41	34.2	
Tertiary education	33	27.5	
Others	01	0.8	
Knowledge acquisition			
Parents	71	59.2	
Friends	14	11.7	
School	14	11.7	
Neighbors	09	7.5	
Others	12	10.0	
Vegetable farming experience (years)			9.36 $\pm$ 8.23
1-5	55	45.8	
6-10	27	22.5	
11-15	18	15.0	
Above 15	20	16.7	
Reason for vegetable farming			
Profit	94	78.3	
Leisure	14	11.7	

Contin. Table 1.			
No choice	8	6.7	
Household consumption	4	3.3	
Membership in vegetable farmers association			
Yes	69	57.5	
No	51	42.5	

Source: Field survey, 2021.

Mobile phone usage

The findings in Table 2 reveal that the primary mobile phone activities in the study area included access to social activities (WMS = 1.56), linkage with transportation to markets (WMS = 1.53), listening to agricultural programs on the radio (WMS = 1.43), using phones for calendar updates on agricultural meeting days (WMS = 1.10), linkage for seed procurement (WMS = 1.05), and access to agricultural activity information (WMS = 1.03). These results indicate minimal mobile phone usage in the study area. This finding aligns with the study by [11], which reported that respondents primarily used mobile phones for accessing more profitable markets and procuring agricultural inputs.

Table 2. Distribution of female vegetable farmers according to mobile phone activities usage (n=120)

Activities	Mean	SD	Rank
Linkage with transportation to market	1.56	0.707	1 st
Access to social activities information	1.53	0.560	2 nd
Listening to agricultural programs on radio	1.43	0.750	3 rd
The use of calendar (Alarms) for updates of agricultural meeting days	1.10	0.810	4 th
Linkage for procurement of seeds	1.05	0.681	5 th
Access to agricultural activities information	1.03	0.785	6 th
Linkage for procurement of fertilizer	0.99	0.832	7 th
Linkage and negotiation on labor	0.99	0.677	8 th
Linkage with extension officers	0.88	0.759	9 th
Surfing the internet for agricultural information's	0.78	0.744	10 th
Sending SMS on agricultural activities	0.54	0.752	11 th
Watching videos of agricultural training programs	0.53	0.695	12 th
Recording of agricultural training programs and activities	0.43	0.716	13 th
Taking pictures of agricultural activities	0.43	0.704	14 th

Source: Field survey, 2021.

Level of usage of mobile phone

Results in Table 3 show that majority (69.1%) of the respondents were at medium level of usage of mobile phone, some (16.6%) were at high level of usage while some (14.2%) were at low level of usage. The result implies that mobile phone usage by female vegetable farmers in the study has not reached its optimal level of usage of mobile phone and can still be maximized.

Table 3. Level of mobile phone usage (n=120)

Level of usage	Values	Frequency	Percentage
High	≥ 18.08	20	16.7
Medium	Btw 7.8 - 18.08	83	69.1
Low	≤ 7.8	17	14.2

Source: Field Survey, 2021.

Benefits of using mobile phone

Table 4 reveals the mean distribution of the benefits of using mobile phone in descending order. Improves service delivery (WMS = 4.51), easy life (WMS = 3.98), save money, energy and time (WMS = 3.97), entertainment (WMS = 3.92), increases income and or profit (WMS = 3.78), gives real-time-feedback of agricultural activities (WMS = 3.69), improved marketing (WMS = 3.68), gives adequate information through mobile phone to improve farm productivity (WMS = 3.63), gives access to updated information (price) (WMS = 3.61), reduces transportation costs in seeking for agricultural information (WMS = 3.60), easy linkage and procurement of agricultural inputs (WMS = 3.60), Gives information about new farming techniques (WMS = 3.57), Improves management of agricultural resources (WMS = 3.57), Improves supply management (WMS = 3.55) and gives access to weather forecast (WMS = 3.22).

The result shows that the female vegetable farmers derive one or more benefit from the usage of mobile phones. However, major benefits of using mobile phone by female vegetable farmers are to improve service delivery, easy life and saves money, energy and time. This result is in line with the study of [10] which reported reduction in transaction and transportation costs as one of the perceived benefits of mobile phone usage among the respondents.

Table 4. Distribution of female vegetable farmers according to the benefits derived from using mobile phone (n=120)

Benefits	Mean	SD	Rank
Improves service delivery	4.51	0.592	1 st
Easy life	3.98	1.169	2 nd
Save money, energy and time	3.97	1.132	3 rd
Entertainment	3.92	1.208	4 th
Increases income/profit	3.78	1.156	5 th
Gives real-time-feedback of agricultural activities	3.69	1.303	6 th
Improve marketing	3.68	1.310	7 th
Gives adequate information through mobile phone to improve farm productivity	3.63	1.024	8 th
Gives access to updated information on pricing	3.61	1.043	9 th
Reduce transportation costs in seeking for agricultural information	3.60	1.248	10 th
Contin. Table 4.			
Easy linkage and procurement of agricultural input	3.60	1.114	11 th
Gives information about new farming techniques	3.60	0.907	12 th
Improves management of agricultural resources	3.57	0.972	13 th
Improves supply management	3.55	0.902	14 th
Gives access to weather forecast	3.22	1.002	15 th

Source: Field survey, 2021.

Constraint to mobile phone usage

Table 5 reveals the mean distribution of constraints to mobile phone usage in descending order: Poor network access (WMS=3.86), erratic electricity supply for charging of phone (WMS=3.81), high charges on services (WMS=3.73), inadequate resources and money to purchase airtime (WMS=3.58), poor internet access (WMS=3.38), non-availability of helpline and or customer line (WMS=3.34), high cost of repair of faulty phone (WMS=3.13), non-availability of phone repairer in the study area (WMS=3.13), complicated phone features (WMS=2.93), inaccessibility to recharge voucher (WMS=2.87), limited skill to the use of phone (WMS=2.83), unavailability of phone accessories (WMS=2.76) and inability to read and write (illiteracy) (WMS=2.66).

This implies that poor network access, erratic electricity supply for charging of phone, high charges on services, inadequate resources and money to purchase airtime, poor internet access, non-availability of helpline and or customer line, high cost of repair of faulty phone, non-availability of phone repairer in the study area, complicated phone features, inaccessibility to recharge voucher, limited skill to the use of phone, unavailability of phone accessories, and inability to read and write (illiteracy) are the major constraints to the usage of mobile phone by the female vegetable farmers in the study area. This is in line with [4] that high tariff and poor network were major constraint to usage of mobile phones.

Table 5. Mean distribution of constraints to mobile phone usage

Constraints	Mean	SD	Rank
Poor network access	3.86	1.247	1 st
Erratic electricity supply for charging of phone	3.81	1.171	2 nd
High charges on services	3.73	1.378	3 rd
Inadequate resources and money to purchase airtime	3.58	1.275	4 th
Poor internet access	3.38	1.343	5 th
Non availability of helpline and or customer line	3.34	1.158	6 th
High cost of repairing of faulty phone	3.13	1.249	7 th
Non availability of phone repairer in the study area	3.13	1.229	8 th
Complicated phone features	2.93	1.149	9 th
Inaccessibility to recharge voucher	2.87	1.322	10 th
Limited skill to the use of phone	2.83	1.090	11 th
Unavailability of phone accessories	2.76	1.140	12 th
Inability to read and write (illiteracy)	2.66	1.369	13 th

Source: Field survey, 2021.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study concluded that there was medium level of usage of mobile phone among the respondents in the study area and mobile phone was mainly used to link, arrange and negotiate for transportation of vegetable to the market, to access social activities and to listen to agricultural programs on radio. The benefit associated with the usage of mobile phone in the study area was an improvement of service delivery. However, poor network access, inadequate electricity and high charges on services were the major constraints to the usage of mobile phone in the study area.

The study recommended that service providers should enhance their network infrastructure to facilitate mobile phone usage for vegetable farming activities in the study area.

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OBUKA ŽENSKE POPULACIJE ZA POVRTARSKU POLJOPRIVREDU: KORIŠĆENJE MOBILNIH TELEFONA, PREDNOSTI I OGRANIČENJA

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Apstrakt: Studija je procenila upotrebu mobilnih telefona kao poljoprivrednog alata kod populaciji žena koje uzgajaju povrće u metropoli Osogbo, država Osun, Nigerija. Konkretno, opisane su socio-demografske karakteristike ispitanika, istražen stepen upotrebe mobilnih telefona u gajenju povrća, identifikovane prednosti korišćenja mobilnih telefona za gajenje povrća i identifikovana ograničenja u korišćenju mobilnih telefona kao poljoprivrednog alata. Upotrebom trostepene procedure uzorkovanja, obuhvaćeno je i intervjuisano 120 žena.

Dobijeni podaci su analizirani korišćenjem određivanjem učestalosti, procenata, srednjih vrednosti i standardne devijacije.

Rezultati su pokazali da je srednja starost žena od $48,98 \pm 7,72$ godine. Većina (84,2%) je bila u braku, bavile se povrtarstvom zbog profita (78,3%). Znanje o povrtarskoj proizvodnji ispitivana populacija, naučila je od roditelja (59,2%).

Prosečno iskustvo u poljoprivredi je bilo $9,36 \pm 8,23$ godine.

Pokazatelj korišćenja mobilnih telefona, ima najvišu rangiranu povezanost sa prevozom do tržišta sa srednjom ocenom 1,56.

U pogledu prednosti korišćenja mobilnog telefona, poboljšano pružanje usluga je rangirano na prvom mestu sa prosečnom ocenom od 4,51. Slab pristup mobilnoj mreži bio je najviši među preprekama za korišćenje mobilnog telefona, sa prosečnom ocenom od 3,86.

U zaključku, postojao je srednji nivo korišćenja mobilnih telefona kod ženske populacije uzgajivača povrća u ovoj oblasti istraživanja.

Studija je preporučila da provajderi (davaoci) usluga mobilne telefonije treba da unaprede svoju mrežnu infrastrukturu kako bi se olakšalo korišćenje upotrebe mobilnih telefona za aktivnosti posmatrane populacije kod uzgoja povrća u ovoj oblasti istraživanja.

Ključne reči: Obuka, žene uzgajivači povrća, beneficije, korišćenje mobilnih telefona

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