Smartphone Communication and Gender Roles in Tanzania: A Case Study of Smartphone Use in the College of Business Education Dodoma

Conference Paper - August 2017

1 author:

Josephine Churk
University of Melbourne

Some of the authors of this publication are also working on these related projects:

- Project: Globalization and Digitization in Tanzania View project
Abstract

Currently, there is increased use of smartphone communication as a source of information for various practices, however, the role of smartphone communication as a source of information for practicing gender roles in Tanzanian marriage is less known. This study examined the role of smartphone communication in practicing gender roles in Tanzania using a case study of smartphone use in the College of Business Education, Dodoma. Qualitative methods such as interview and focus group discussion were employed in understanding the way men and women utilise smartphone communication as a source of gender role information and whether information obtained through smartphone communication strengthens or weakens gender roles among married couples in the study area. The content analysis was used in analysing data gathered from respondents on the role of smartphone communication in practising gender role. The findings revealed that, smartphone communication enabled married individuals to acquire information that helps to strengthen their Tanzanian traditional gender roles. It further revealed that both men and women use smartphone communication to learn their gender roles, however, women appear to involve more in smartphone communication in learning new practices for improving their gender roles in their families. Also, it revealed that, men use smartphone communication for social interaction and discussion forum more than learning gender roles for strengthen their marriage. Moreover, smartphone communication enable individual’s connection to social media which provides platform for discussion about various practices of gender roles in the society and helps to reveal some bad traditional gender roles practices which are less potential to the society development. The study concludes that, there is variation in the smartphone use as a source of gender role information among men and women. The existing variation helps to strengthen the practices of gender roles in the study area. The study suggests a need for the framework that enable follow up of the current practices of the traditional gender roles in order to improve gender policy and therefore enable a country to achieve gender and development goals. This will further enable Tanzania to attain the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (2030).

Key words: Smartphone Communication, Gender roles, Gender practices in Tanzania.

1.0 Introduction

Recent statistical data shows that, global digital penetration has grown to 47.1% in 2016 (ITU 2017). While Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa stands at 25.1% and 20% internet penetration respectively (ITU 2017), this reflects the improvement in digital penetration in Africa and increase in the number of smartphone users in the continent. For example, across the East Africa region Rwanda stands for 18% while Tanzania stands for 5.36% in internet penetration in 2015 from 4.9% in 2014 (ITU 2015). This shows the increased internet connection and therefore implies increased smartphones users in the region. Smartphone device is argued to be a more advanced version of a mobile phone (Kennedy-eden, 2014) thus provides an opportunity to connect into the internet more easier. Recently, there is a rapid shift from the use of mobile phone device into smartphone device for communication which can be linked with the increased use of smartphones. A smartphone is an advanced mobile phone which comprise of hardware that is more or less similar to personal computers (Kennedy-eden 2014).

Bradley & Li (2014:1) “differentiate smartphone from cell phone with features such as a processor, memory, storage, and operating system that process and execute all the functions of the mobile phone”. The available data indicate that the average penetration of smartphones in Tanzania is 11% in 2016 (Poushter, 2016) whereby much of users concentration is in big cities, towns and urban
areas. The increase in smartphone use implicate easy access and sharing of information which have potential to contribute into people’s economy, politics and social changes. In this way, smartphone is increasingly playing multiple functions which implicate the current people’s practices. For example, Drago (2015) and Bailard (2012) argued that, apart from the primary role of receiving and making calls, smartphone can also be used for watching television, listen to radio, paying bills, watching video from youtube, bank account, video charting, making and sharing photos, online charting or playing games. All these countless activities reflect the power of smartphone in people’s lives. For example, smartphone communication is increasingly being important in promoting political and civic participation such as voting (Merwe & Bohler-Muller, 2013). This reflects the role of smartphone in political changes such as achieving good governance and accountability. In terms of economy, Cowell (2007) assert that, smartphone is increasingly being important for those who are looking for the job since it provides easy access to information about job advertisements.

Smartphone communication has also enabled sharing of information for achieving social changes through social interaction. For example, Rautenbach & Black-Hughes (2012) argue that, online platform such as Facebook, group email and skype created through smartphones provide excellent service in the learning environment by enabling students to interact more smoothly with lecturers and fellow students regarding academic matters. This relates to the improvement of education and better service that results into positive social changes. Network connectivity through smartphone has enabled access to health information in Tanzania (Genuchten, Haring, Kassel, & Yakubi, 2012), although connectivity differs among regions due to difference in network accessibility. Other scholars have explored the role of smartphone in the context of gender relations both in the developing countries and elsewhere in the world. For example, Borrelli (2015) and Kennedy-eden, (2014) argued that, smartphone is increasingly used by the married couples to strengthen their relationship by keeping couples more in touch and bringing family members more closely through creating stronger bonds. However, these roles of smartphone in the context of gender relations had been revealed more in the developed countries and some few developing countries like Kenya, India and Brunei (Cowell 2007; Anshari et al. 2016). Studies in Tanzania revealed that information and communication technology like digital communication has reduced gender inequality by giving voice to women (Cummings & O’Neil 2015). A special application from smartphone is further argued to secure land rights among Tanzanian women especially the marginalised rural women (Makoye, 2015) which also relates to the promotion of gender equality. However, the role of smartphone communication as a source of gender role information in Tanzanian marriage is less known. Understanding the role of smartphone communication in gender roles will help the country to improve the practice of gender for social changes and therefore helps achieve the UNSDG’s (2030) in the aspect of gender equality. Thus, it is against this background that, this study examined the role of smartphone communication in practicing gender roles in Tanzania using a case study of smartphone use in the College of Business Education. Specifically, the study responded to two main questions: i) How do men and women utilise smartphone communication as a source of gender role information? ii) How information obtained through smartphone communication strengthens or weakens practices of gender roles among married couples?

2.0 Literature Review
2.1 Gender roles in the Tanzanian Tradition
Gender roles are based on the ‘cues regarding what sort of behaviour is appropriate for what sex which result from the interactions between individuals and their environment’ (Blackstone 2003:335). However, gender roles differ regarding society’s values and belief. For example, the division of gender
roles in Tanzania is still done in a traditional way (Feinstein et al. 2011). Despite that Tanzania has more than 25 tribes which implies different traditions, however these tribes have more or less similar traditions which makes small distinctions among the Tanzanian society. In most Tanzanian tradition, men are regarded as superior and stronger than women, therefore their role involves earning of the family income and ensure the family survival and protection (Mbilinyi 2013). This includes doing farm works, business and community leadership. Boys are traditionally oriented into men’s roles at their early ages and prohibited from performing kitchen works which therefore remains to be women and girl’s activity. Women’s roles in Tanzania are primarily household responsibility such as family care, food preparation, giving birth, cleaning house, wash cloth, as well as sick and old people care. As part of gender norms for Africans, women and girls are expected to respect and serve for men and even small boys (Feinstein et al. 2011) which also applies to some Tanzanian tribes.

On the other side scholars such as Mbilinyi (2013) assert that Tanzanian tradition require boy children to take care of their parents at their old ages. Since women are responsible for all domestic activities, female parents and relatives are responsible to pass traditional knowledge and skills to young girls and ensure their traditional roles performance and the similar practice applies to male parents. Nevertheless, apart from housework, Tanzanian women also play roles such as production, reproduction and community managing roles. This makes Tanzanian women to perform multiple roles where more roles are added especially when a woman is employed. Since Tanzanian women plays production role which is traditionally men’s role, Feinstein et al., (2011) noted that Tanzanian women work harder and in long hours than men. However, I argue that this situation challenge men’s role in a Tanzanian society. Studies show that Tanzanian men embrace the traditional gender roles since it favours male position and therefore gives no or less consideration about how women feel in performance of multiple tasks (Mbilinyi 2013), although, this is not the case to some educated families where Feinstein et al. (2011) argue that men also assist women in doing house works.

2.2 Smartphone Communication and the Protection of Traditional Social Values

Since smartphone is increasingly playing multiple functions, it is argued to provide new communication spaces among communicative parties. This new communication space strengthens social interaction among community members because it provides easy choice of individual or group of interest for communication purposes. Thus, opens new communication platforms with individuals who share common interest, traditions and values and therefore preserves cultural values of traditional societies. It also provides opportunity to share, learn and challenge social norms which can be viewed in the social media platforms. For example Owiny, Mehta, & Maretzki (2014:234) describe the potential of smartphone communication as ‘important in creating, managing, preserving, and sharing of traditional knowledge and skills in order to preserve traditional African values’. However, it can be argued that, this opportunity is limited to the internet connected communities mostly urban community. Since urban society seem to be detached more with traditions and values as they animate in the modernised towns or cities, then smartphone communication is regarded as a tool to share these traditional values and skills to the urban community. Other scholars argue that family groups stay connected through smartphone technology because it combine social media, internet, texting and mobile application into one device and therefore offers flexibility in communication in everyday life of the family members (Kennedy-eden 2014). Thus, it is considered that smartphone communication helps to bind family members together and assure information sharing more smoothly. On the other hand, there is a proclaim that digital communication such as smartphone communication has reduced face to face
interaction as Drago (2015:13) argued that ‘technology has become an integral part of the way that people communicate with one another and has increasingly taken the place of face-to-face communication’. Alder Iris (2013) suggest that, people who communicate through devices such as smartphones represent the same information that they would have communicated physically. I argue that digital communication has reduced the space and time for communication and help people to connect more easily. As noted by Vallentine (2016:370) ‘internet expands the opportunities for daily meaningful contact between family members locked in different time-space routines at work, school, traveling, and so’. Thus, internet connection through smartphone enable communicative parties to build a strong social connection and maintain traditional values despite of the existing physical boundary.

In Tanzania, smartphone communication continues to be crucial for creating family bonding especially when members of a family are living scattered due to various reasons. Smartphones provides easy access to information among men and women and allow them to engage more with the society as Cowell (2007) argued that it expand social network and allow individuals to stay tuned. Since smartphone communication provides a more democratic way of sharing information with individual or group of interest, it gives a communication space through platforms in social media. For example, social media such as WhatsApp enables group communication with friends, women or men groups, school mates, work mates, organisational groups or political affiliation groups to share various information. This helps to provide easy access and sharing of information among people who share common values. Other social media such as Facebook is further argued to connect old and new friends which can be viewed as a way for maintaining friendship and social interaction. Smartphone communication enable socialisation among community members as Kibona & Rugina (2015) assert that in Tanzania students tend to use smartphone more for social purposes such as maintaining friendship among themselves and engaging with their family members and others. Thus, using smartphone communication for maintaining family relationship implies easy sharing and protection of traditional values. Since smartphone communication provides opportunity to give and seek advice (Cowell 2007), it can therefore be argued that, smartphone use among students for engage with their family will further helps to maintain their traditional social values and norms. With this understanding, it can be argued that smartphone communication unites friends and families who shares common interest and therefore helps to build, share and maintain a society that respects the traditional values and norms.

3.0 Methodology
The study was carried out in the College of Business Education (CBE) in Dodoma municipality. The area was considered for this study based on the familiarity of the researcher and the institutional engagement in gender training and implementation of gender policy to its staff. Thus, provides an important site to examine the practice of gender roles among CBE staff. Data was collected from 20 staff both married men and women who were selected purposeful for interview, and other 10 married staff participated in two Focus Group Discussion (FGDs) where each group entail 5men and 5women. The information obtained from two methods helped in understanding the way men and women utilise smartphone communication as a source of gender role information and how the information obtained through smartphone communication strengthens or weakens gender roles among married couples in the study area. Content analysis was used to analyse all qualitative data obtained from FGDs and interview where data were categorised into two themes related to the focus of the study.
4.0 Results and Discussion

4.1 The Use of Smartphone Communication Among Men and Women

Study results revealed that, both men and women utilise smartphone communication as a source of information relating to their gender roles. However, information accessed through smartphone communication varies among men and women in CBE staff. For example, 6 out of 10 men in the interview had similar view about the use of smartphone in access to information such as house design and search for the modern items like materials for building a house which reflect views of majority respondents as shown in the statement below;

“....like three years ago, my friend shared an album for the beautiful house designs in the Facebook and I became so interested with one design. So, I downloaded, saved, and later showed to the construction engineer using my smartphone. I can say that smartphone gave me an idea to design a modern house which I could not have such an idea if it could not be my smartphone” (Men respondents No. 4).

On the other hand, 7 out of 10 women in the interview which represent the majority of participants had similar view in terms of smartphone use in access to information relating to house decorations such as furniture, house painting colours, curtain designs, kitchen wear, flowers and other house accessories as stated below;

“….Currently, my house looks very modern because I choose curtains designs and colours from the internet then I bought the available similar designs in the nearby stores” (Women respondents No. 9).

This implies variation in the kind of information accessed by CBE married men and women staff using smartphone communication. The women’s approach to technology is argued to be more practical in terms of gender since Bulik (2011) observed that, women use smartphone to extend their carrier as wife, mother, girlfriend, grandmother or sister. However, this variation in the search of information using smartphone among CBE staff reflects the difference in gender role among men and women. This translate the Tanzanian tradition where men have to provide for a family shelter while women have to maintain cleanliness and take care of the houses.

The findings showed that, CBE men use smartphone to access and share information related with improving their income such as business ideas or job opportunities as indicated in the statement below during the interview;

“...I use my smartphone to access part time job information from my friends and every time I got a part time job I used smartphone to share my time table to arrange for convenient working hours which helped to avoid collision” (Men respondents No. 1).

However, findings from the FGD with women reveal that some women also use smartphone communication to access and share information related to business opportunities and to advertise their product in the social media such as Facebook and WhatsApp for the purpose of improving the family income. For example, one woman in a FGD described that;

“...I use the WhatsApp forum for women in CBE to advertise women products such as handbags and sandals in order to boost my little income” (FGD’s No. 1).

With regard to many Tanzanian tradition, the role for earning a family income was primarily aimed for men. Clofford (2014) noted that, men use smartphone communication for business reasons more than women. Thus, CBE women’s use of smartphone in products advertisement translates the women’s effort in improvement of family income. This implies sharing of some gender roles
among men and women such as earning family income which currently can be viewed as a transformation of gender roles in the Tanzanian society. Nyoni & Kahyarara (2016:2) also noted this transformation among the Tanzanian society when argue that, “women have a double burden of household employment and employment outside the household in improving the family income”.

While men use smartphone to search information related to education for kids such the best schools, kid’s books or pay for school fees and uniform, women use smartphone mostly to search information relating to kid’s entertainment and search answers for kid’s home works. For example, during interview, one man respondent describes this;

“...I am always busy with office work but my smartphone makes me feel relaxed to fulfil my role as a father. I can pay for my kid’s school fees through mobile banking at anytime and anywhere I want” (Men respondents No. 5).

This implies the use of smartphone in the fulfilment of men’s roles. On the other hand, the FGD with women revealed that, women google answers for kid’s homework through their smartphones. Similarly, Cowell (2007:5) noted that “women use smartphone in searching for answers to specific questions”. This reflects smartphone use for practicing gender role among CBE women. Also, Ofcom (2014) noted that, parents use smartphone platforms in shaping kids by sharing kid’s games. Nevertheless, some women have argued to have used their smartphone to search for the kid’s books and pay for the tuition fees too. This can also be viewed as sharing of some roles between men and women where women are currently transforming to perform men’s gender roles regarding education for kids although it can be argued that gender roles transformation within Tanzanian tradition vary among families. Nyoni & Kahyarara (2016) also noted that, women are currently transforming their roles and play multiple roles. However, I argue that this transformation may questions a gender role of a man in the family in the context of education for kids.

The study revealed that, while men use smartphone communication to access and share information relating to planning and decision making for their families, on the other hand, women use smartphone communication to access information relates to raising of the kids such as child moral and ethics as stated below;

“…I use my smartphone as a platform to discuss with my friends about better ways of raising my kids and build my kids good moral such as to respect God, to behave well, to dress ethically and to respect and help others” (Women respondent No. 3).

This view represents the majority view of 7 out of 10 women participants in the interview. Also, the FGD with women revealed that women use smartphone to engage in social media such as Facebook and WhatsApp to reveal some bad cultural practices in the society in relation to gender roles and advice on improving such practices. For example, women advice on raising a boy and a girl kids equally with shared home responsibilities, nevertheless, this depend on parents understanding on the division of labour in their family. Similarly, Freier (2016) noted the importance of smartphone for mothers when argued that women spend more time using smartphone communication mainly for doing family and parenting responsibilities. Although CBE women seem to engage more in accessing and share information related with child moral behaviour and ethics, however, the FGD with men revealed that men also use smartphone communication to share information such as child disciplines. With regard to the Tanzanian tradition, this reflects the men’s
role in terms of disciplining the family while the women’s role is to impart the good moral behaviour in the family.

The results showed that, while men use smartphone communication more on social interaction, access to news and political matters, on the other side, women use smartphone communication to access and share information relating to family planning education as well as how to care a husband in terms of sexual education as reflected in the statements during interview with men and women in the study area;

“...I read news online through my smartphone in every day before I got out of my bed, this makes me feel good and be update with the ongoing political issues” (Men respondent No 2).

“...I am interested to participate in the social media forums which are related with sexual education and husband caring since I always learn a new thing that adds value into my marriage. I credit my smartphone because it enables my fully engagement in the social media discussion” (Women respondent No 7).

The results from FGD with women also revealed that, women use smartphone as a forum to discuss sexual health and share sexual education experiences. Weiser (2000) noted that men use smartphone mainly for purposes related to entertainment and leisure whereas women use it primarily for educational assistance. Although CBE men seem to use smartphone to discuss more issues related with politics and news, they also use smartphone to discuss about their reproductive health, psychology for women and how to care a woman through social media platforms. This implies that, both men and women in CBE are concerned about sexual education for enabling their performance of reproductive gender roles in marriages. Likewise, McCormack (2015) noted the same while giving the value of smartphone in sex when argued that, smartphone gives different perspectives of sex and enable individuals to see what they are doing in a different way.

Moreover, the findings showed that, 8 out of 10 women in the interview appear to use smartphone communication in learning new styles for food preparations, family balanced diet and nutrition as described in the statement below;

“...I happen to use social media to learn ingredients and recipe for preparing pizza which I have never prepared before using my smartphone” (Women respondent No 8)

This implies that, the tradition and culture may influence and shape a kind of information an individual can access through smartphone communication. Similarly, Freier (2016) noted that, women use smartphone communication more for adopting new lifestyle such as food. Men rarely use smartphone to search information relating to family food preparations, however, the FGD with men revealed that, men use smartphone to access information relating to their individual diet and physical exercises as stated below;

“...I don’t cook at home but my wife does. So, I use my smartphone to access information related to my physical fitness and diet especially how to reduce my weight” (FGD’s No. 2)

This reflects similar view of men participants in the FGD. While women occur to use smartphone to access more information relating to family meals than men, it reflects the women’s role in the Tanzanian tradition where household responsibilities are directed to women. However, the results showed that CBE women claimed to be overworked by household responsibilities. Feinstein et al.,
(2011) also noted the similar situation that, women are conscious that they do more work than men, however, they have no power to change such a situation. Nevertheless, results from the FGD revealed that CBE men also help in doing house works at some points although this differ among families.

4.2 Smartphone Communication and the Strengthening of Gender Roles Practices

The study findings revealed that, smartphone communication strengthens the practices of gender roles among married couples in CBE. Information obtained through smartphone communication enabled both men and women to learn and improve the skills for performing their roles by reflecting the Tanzanian division of gender roles as described in the statement below;

"...I use my smartphone to access information from Facebook groups such as ‘Mapishi rahisi na fasta fasta’ where every day I learn new styles for preparing different food tastes shared by group members in the Facebook platform. I am so happy for my smartphone because through it I improve my skills for food preparation and my family enjoys eating my meals” (Women respondent No 4)

This reflects the role of smartphone communication in improving the practice of food preparation for the families as one among women gender roles. Smartphone communication has further improved the women’s practice of raising kids in terms of kids moral and ethical behaviour. The focus group discussion with women revealed that, CBE women use smartphone to learn skills for raising kids and children psychology through social media platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp. This enable women to share information, events, experiences and testimonies relating with raising of kids which therefore improves women’s practice of raising kids as one of their gender roles. Similarly, Cowell (2007) noted the women’s significant impact for using a smartphone when argued that, the women’s use of smartphone appears to reflect improving their families and community life.

On the other side, the study revealed that, smartphone communication played a greater role to strengthen men’s gender role such as improving the family income among CBE staff as stated below;

"...I use smartphone to advertise my products in all the WhatsApp groups I belong, and I regard this as an easy way to reach customers. Having smartphone is an advantage for me because it contributes to boosts my income and I can easily provide for my family” (Men respondent No 3)

This implies that smartphone communication open chances for business opportunities and practices among CBE men staff through information sharing which therefore increase the user’s income. Other scholars observed the significant contribution of smartphone in men’s life since Cowell (2007) argued that, smartphones have more potential to improve men’s business opportunities and increase their income. Thus, can be linked with strengthen of men’s practice of gender roles in terms of fulfilling a role of providing for the family. Further, the results from FGD showed that, smartphone communication provides access of information relating to job opportunities, something which have implications to CBE men’s income and the performance of their roles in the family as income earners.

However, for all the mentioned benefits of smartphone in strengthening the practice of gender roles among CBE men and women, smartphone communication is mentioned to have weakness in marriages. The study revealed that, smartphone communication is acting as a tool for destroying
gender roles in marriages. Married couples spend more time in charting through smartphone than the time required to practice gender roles as father or mother in the family. For example, Ericsson ConsumerLab (2011) has shown that 35% of smartphone users revealed to use their smartphone each morning before getting out of their bed. This implies the decline in the time spending with a partner. Other scholars revealed the negative side of smartphone use among partners when noted that, some partners have prioritised and valued smartphones for charting above the home communication (Bulik 2011). However, married couples among CBE staff are advised to have self-discipline in managing their time for using smartphone communication.

5.0 Conclusion and Recommendation
The study concluded that, both CBE married men and women staff use smartphone communication as a source of gender roles information. Men use smartphone for accessing information such as house designs, building materials, improve family income and kid’s education, while women use smartphone for access to information such as family health and care, house decorations, food preparation, and or sexual education. Information obtained through smartphone communication strengthen the practices of gender roles among CBE men and women through improvement and learning of the new skills for practising their traditional gender roles. The paper suggests that, it is essential to establish an institutional framework that will enable a direct connection between smartphone users and policy makers in terms of gender related issues. A digital institutional framework that is linked with online forums will enhance easy information sharing between CBE staff and the government policy makers. This will help to understand the current transformations in the practices of the traditional gender roles for improving gender policy in Tanzania. It will further enable the country to achieve the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (2030) in the context of gender.

Reference


ITU, 2017. ICT Facts and figures 2016,


