Chapter 59
Mobile Technologies and Gender Rituals

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explores the implications of mobile technologies on gender through the lens of gender rituals. While maintaining social order and social roles, rituals also legitimate key category differences, ideologies, and inequalities. The increasing convergence of media and content in mobile devices, and the blurring of the spaces for work, family, and leisure amidst the landscape of globalization and mobility have important implications for the enactment of rituals, and in the performance of gender. The chapter discusses this mutual shaping of gender rituals and mobile technologies through a case study of the Philippines, with some broad implications for other contexts. The study finds that the personalization, mobility, and multitude of applications afforded by mobile devices offer many opportunities for the exploration of new possibilities for subjectivity that challenge particular gender stereotypes and restrictions while simultaneously affirming particular gender rituals. While exploring the implications of the mobile device on gender in a developing society, the chapter in turn highlights the importance of culturally embedded rituals in shaping and understanding the mobile device's place in society.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores the implications of mobile communication on gender and culture through the lens of rituals. Although a global technology, the mobile device has been shaped by local socio-cultural adaptations and its pervasive adoption has been accompanied with risk, opportunity, and adaptation. Moreover, with the increasing convergence of media and content facilitated by smartphones, the blurring of the spaces for work, family, and leisure has important implications on gender roles. The analysis of the implication of mobile media on the "maintenance of gender restrictions" or in the "liberation" of people from gender norms, can be understood with reference to specific gender expectations embodied in "rituals". While maintaining social order, rituals also legitimate certain key category differences and inequalities (Couldry, 2003; Ling, 2007). The social implications of mobile technology on gender can

be observed in multiple sites and across varied social spaces, and can be interpreted as affirming, challenging, or reconstructing *gender rituals*.

The present study builds on existing works that have investigated the relationship between mobile phones and rituals (Ling, 2007, 2008; Hoflich & Linke 2011; Doron, 2012; Soriano, Lim, & Rivera, forthcoming). The study focuses on the Philippine context as a case study, although the social, political and economic implications will find resonances in other contexts. While exploring the implications of the mobile phone on gendering in a developing society, the paper in turn highlights the importance of culturally-embedded rituals and relationships in shaping the mobile phone's place in society.

Mobile technology has experienced an explosive growth globally, illustrated by its emergence as a primary form of telecommunication. The number of mobile subscriptions globally has increased steadily over the years, from 2.7 billion in 2006, to approximately 6.8 billion in 2013 (ITU, 2013). This rise is sharpest in developing countries, where mobile cellular subscription increased from 1.6 billion in 2006 to 5.2 billion in 2013 (ITU, 2013). In the Philippines, where mobile subscription has reached almost 90% of the population, the local adoption of mobile technology has been profound, as mobile phones evolved from a lifestyle gadget for the rich into a technology that has important social, developmental, political and spiritual roles woven into the daily lives of the citizens. This broad reach is driven by the availability of low-cost phones, as well as prepaid, "sachet" (purchase of mobile credit at very small denominations) and "unlimited" promotions from telecommunication companies and Internet service providers. The labeling of the Philippines as the "sms capital of the world" (Mendes, Alampay, Soriano et al., 2007; Nagasaka, 2007) amidst a state of relative poverty and economic development makes it a compelling case for the analysis of mobile technology and societal interactions. Moreover, although gender divide (as with the digital divide), has been found to be especially large in low income countries, a Lirneasia study found that this was hardly evident in the Philippines, with the ratio of mobile access between men and women at 1:1 (Zainudeen, Iqbal, & Samarajiva, 2010). However, the differences in uses of the mobile phone between males and females was statistically significant, prompting the question of how gender rituals influence the differential use of mobile devices, and in turn, how the continued prominence of mobile media in this locale has implications on gender rituals. The availability of cheap, locally assembled android phones such as *Cherry Mobile* and *MyPhone* offered from US $40 per unit, as well as other low-cost tablets from China and Malaysia allowed the reach of smart devices with Internet and social networking capability to a broader segment of the population, reaching various economic classes and genders. While exploring the implications of the mobile device on gendering in a developing society, the paper in turn highlights the importance of culturally-embedded rituals and relationships in shaping the mobile phone's place in society.

GENDER RITUALS

Ritual

The term ritual refers to a type of symbolic expressive activity constructed of multiple behaviors that occur in a fixed, episodic sequence and that tend to be repeated over time (Rook, 1985, p. 252; Salamone, 2010). Previous analyses of rituals restricted ritual experience to religious and mystical contexts, thereby focusing on special ritual events that marked a person's significant life passages, such as baptism, circumcision, coming out parties, graduation, marriage, or death. And yet, in everyday life, people also

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