

Chapter 10

Changing Formal and Informal Learning Practices Using Smartphones: The Case of Market Women of Ghana

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ABSTRACT

Smartphones have afforded women opportunities to overcome some of the constraints they face in the informal sector. The culture of traditional learning for women in the marketplace refers to sharing common standardized practices of learning from each other, conducting business, communicating, and making money. Sharing information, knowledge, and experiences is already embedded in the culture of the informal sector therefore a network connection through smartphones will bring a new light of opportunities to the learning environment. Using a case study of market women in Ghana, the authors of this chapter focus on these women's experiences learning with video animation in smartphones and predict how they will envision a new way of learning that combines the formal and informal learning with easy capabilities such as visualization, simulation, technical proficiency, and accessibility to information.

INTRODUCTION

This case study explored a process of informal learning by 59 Ghanaian market women using animated videos on mobile information communication technology (ICT) as a curriculum; that is, the authors formally designate both the animated video and the video-enabled smartphones used to deliver the video content as the curriculum, as content, rather than a technology independent of content that delivers a curriculum. This is not only because a part of the process of learning by animated video for the participants also involved learning the use of video technology on smartphones but also because the

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appeal of this educational delivery approach was enhanced by an interest in the smartphones themselves. Specifically, the ICT-enabled video-animation curriculum focused on reducing postharvest bean losses for market women.

African Market Women

Dry beans represent the most important food legume in the world (Chalwe, 2011). Ferris and Kaganzi (2008) noted the expansion of bean production in line with population growth in developing countries. Beans, like many other agricultural products, are subject to postharvest losses due to various gaps in the value chain, including mold and insect predation. While the demand for local food represents opportunities for small-scale producers and market women, intermediaries in the market chain can increase efficiency (Chalwe, 2011). To take advantage of these, however, retailers must understand more about packing, storage, and handling beans in the marketplace. While a still wider range of factors and individuals (retailers, distributors, transporters, storage facilities, and suppliers that sell the product to consumers) comprise and influence significant parts of a supply chain (Chalwe, 2011), having intact product to sell is most crucial. And while postharvest losses at every stage are important, Rembold et al. (2011) estimated 6% of those losses as produced during storage, this case study's participants indicated losses as high as 50%.

Small-scale market merchandising of dry beans has historically been done by women in Africa (CGIAR, 2012). While the history of commerce by African market women pre-dates colonial times, the particular visibility of market women in urban market spaces during the colonial era was prompted largely by excluding women from skilled, salaried jobs in the formal sector (Horn, 1994). Post-colonial neoliberalism, structural adjustment programs, and long-entrenched patterns of patriarchy in the present era continue this trend (Horn, 1994).

In general, displaced female migrants from rural areas comprise the bulk of market women, even as they maintain culturally ascribed gender roles around providing for their families in terms of food and income. Their survival in the city is determined by their ability to acquire business acumen and to operate within a patriarchal system that makes high-risk demands. When they operate as vendors, for instance, they face increased harassment from the city police. An initial lack of knowledge about changes in the business market and capital, the required long hours of self-employed work, competition, and a general lack of transportation all place market women at a disadvantage entrepreneurially (Horn, 1994).

One finds market women wherever opportunities afford and permit: in the central markets of cities, on the outskirts where the rural and the urban intersect, or hawking their goods on roads, along highways, in neighborhoods. While typically small-scale, they nonetheless represent the both international/national economy and the locally implicit and explicit business norms. They exhibit a fluid identity and subculture and have strong ties both among themselves and the various communities they rely on for their products.

In general, market women are perceived as hardworking, political, and hyper-visible. Their hyper-visibility, due to the public nature of their work, is often misread for prostitution in patriarchal societies, which control women's movement by tying it to availability and sexual activities. Because market women involved in trading activities must often travel long distances away from spouses and children and be exposed to strangers, this provides fertile ground for patriarchal anxiety about women's sexual activity. Orubuloye et al. (1993) could observe that female women who sold a wide variety of goods at truck shops were about twenty years old and sometimes supplemented their income from hawking goods by exchanging sex for money, pointing to this reality being fostered more by patriarchy than a confirmation of its anxieties.

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