

## Mobile phones and entrepreneurial identity negotiation by urban female street traders in Uganda

### Abstract

*Mobile phones have been posited as enhancing women's entrepreneurship and gender equality in developing countries, yet empowerment outcomes are unclear. This article considers how women in the gender-segregated informal economy construct their entrepreneurial identity in relation to mobile phones and the discursive repertoires that marginalize and empower. Using data from interviews with six urban female street traders in Kampala, Uganda, it explores how these repertoires illustrate their sense of self, positioning and belonging to the business community. Normative representations and positioning of female traders can sideline entrepreneurial identity and over-validate gender identity. But, participants also negotiate entrepreneurial identity construction in response to these marginalizing influences. Although the data demonstrate that participants are equivocal about their entrepreneurial identity or fit in business, some representations are more validating and offer a sense of belonging. The article concludes by highlighting the nuanced opportunities for social change their discursive repertoires may present.*

**Keywords:** entrepreneurial identity, female entrepreneurs, positioning, ideologies and scripts

### Introduction

The urban informal economy in sub-Saharan Africa is estimated to account for as much as 60% of urban employment (Skinner, 2008) and is regarded as a female dominated occupation insofar as women are estimated to have a higher share of the informal economy than men (Charmes, 2012). However, little is known about how women in the gender-segregated occupation of informal enterprise construct their entrepreneurial identity, sense of self as entrepreneurs and how it might be gendered. As one particular type of micro and small enterprise (MSE), street trading is an important source of employment and income for the urban poor. More generally, MSEs have been regarded as a strategy for overcoming poverty and promoting gender equality (Strier, 2010) and mobile phones are considered an important part of this strategy (UNCTAD, 2014), benefitting MSEs in terms of reduced costs, enhanced productivity and increased trust (Donner and Escobari, 2010). Yet, barriers remain to women's effective and productive use of mobile phones and gender-specific usage patterns and perceptions of mobile phones prevail (Murphy and Priebe, 2011; Wallis, 2011).

In Uganda, MSEs are significant as they account for the largest share of employment and economic activity. According to the 2012 Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) data, Uganda was ranked the world's third highest entrepreneurial nation with four Ugandans out of every ten starting a business (GEM Consortium/IDRC, 2012). While the GEM data suggests that women are almost as likely in Uganda to be involved in early stage entrepreneurship as men (Herrington and Kelley, 2013, p. 32), the type of businesses they engage in and the opportunities for growth are different (Lange, 2003). It is noteworthy though that in comparison to other African countries, Uganda was found to be the only country with more necessity-driven entrepreneurship than opportunity-driven (Herrington and Kelley, 2013). Over 50% of informal sector entrepreneurs are market and street traders (Stevenson and St-Onge, 2005, p. xviii). Urban street traders in Kampala provide a rich study context of entrepreneurial identity construction linked to mobile phones as they were early adopters of mobile phones providing a reasonable time lag to establish outcomes.

Despite a vast literature on entrepreneurship in Uganda, women's constructions of entrepreneurial identities in the informal sector have been largely ignored (Karakire Guma, 2015; Kikooma, 2012). Studies have largely focussed on barriers and support to women's entrepreneurship, particularly in relation to accessing finance and training (Campos et al., 2013; Foy, 2013; Karakire Guma, 2015; Namatovu et al., 2012). These tend to reflect micro-finance providers' strategies that typically overlook how entrepreneurial identities sustain inequalities. While there has been increasing attention paid to women's entrepreneurship in relation to mobile phones, such studies on Uganda are still limited (Komunte, 2015) and do not address entrepreneurial identity and mobile phone relations linked to inequalities. Internationally, gender and mobile phone studies have illustrated how gender relations shape and are shaped by mobile phone practices (Shade, 2007; Wajcman et al., 2008), through representations and positioning that render gender an accomplishment (West and Zimmerman, 2009). Such practices can shed light on how women's entrepreneurship is constructed vis-a vis mobile phones. While on the one hand representations and positioning can maintain inequality (Ridgeway and Correll, 2004; West and Zimmerman, 2009), on the other repositioning through socio-technological practices can create fissures in inequalities that permeate the gender-segregated informal economy.

This article therefore aims to contribute to the sociological field of gender, mobile phones and enterprise by illustrating the entrepreneurial identity construction of street traders in Kampala through socio-technological practices. Using data from interviews with six female traders, insights are offered into how these micro-entrepreneurs construct and negotiate their entrepreneurial identities through positioning and representations which marginalize or legitimate their entrepreneurial identity. Their discursive repertoires which include scripts, codes, ideologies, values, beliefs and cultural prescriptions within observable practices in representations and positioning provide insights into how they operate to sustain or disrupt gender inequality. As some representations and positioning in relation to mobile phones validate entrepreneurial identities, the article also considers how these strategies can contribute to social change. The article begins by discussing the literature on entrepreneurial identity, linking it to positioning and belonging in the business community. The relationship between mobile phones, entrepreneurship and gender representations is then outlined. Next the context, participants and methods of data collection and analysis are explained then the findings related to marginalising influences and legitimating representations and positioning are presented. The article concludes with a discussion of the implications of these consequences for female entrepreneurs and a sociological understanding of female entrepreneurial identity construction.

### **Entrepreneurial identity, positioning and belonging**

Entrepreneurship may be regarded as 'the resource, process and state of being through and in which individuals utilise positive opportunities in the market by creating and growing new business' (Gries and Naudé, 2011, p. 217). Entrepreneurial abilities, attitudes and aspirations are important resources and prerequisites for being entrepreneurial. As a process, entrepreneurialism involves an individual's discovery and exploitation of opportunities. Gries & Naudé (2011) distinguish between an entrepreneur for whom entrepreneurship provides a sense of achievement, identity and being accepted, to one who is forced to be an entrepreneur because of no other options which Bjursell and Melin (2011) label proactive or reactive entrepreneurial identity construction.

Drawing on notions of identity as socially constructed (Lewis, 2013) and entrepreneurs as opportunity identifiers and executors (Gries and Naudé, 2011), developing an entrepreneurial identity would involve the appropriation of behaviours, attitudes and capabilities associated with entrepreneurship. Having reviewed taxonomic (types of behaviour) and partonomy (parts of

behaviour) approaches, Bird et al (2012) highlighted exemplar entrepreneurial behaviours that include identifying and pursuing new opportunities, time spent developing social ties, communicating, interacting with external agents, decision-making speed and leadership. However, a wealth of literature has demonstrated the challenges women face in developing these select behaviours owing to gendered associations and contexts (Ahl, 2006; Chasserio et al., 2014; Welter et al., 2014). It can be challenging for women to connect with the social identity of an entrepreneur as it has been historically, symbolically and normatively regarded as masculine located in male norms, working practices and behaviours (Lewis, 2013), and constructed through images and representations of masculinity (Bourne and Calás, 2013).

Typically, women have been considered as less entrepreneurial because of cultural norms and discrimination (Gries and Naudé, 2011). Cultural values and behavioural expectations lower their entrepreneurial intentions and constrain participation in enterprise development through cultural pressures on kinds of work appropriate for women (Mungai and Ogot, 2012). Structural barriers such as gender differentiated access to finance (Lewis, 2006) have similar effects. These factors shape women's attempts to construct entrepreneurial identities that are dissociated from male norms and encompass other gendered social identities leading to gendered patterns of entrepreneurship (Elam, 2014). Entrepreneurs have also been regarded as one-dimensional individuals (Ahl, 2006; Chasserio et al., 2014) disconnected from the rest of social life and other social identities. Yet women build entrepreneurial identities through confrontation and synergy with their other social identities (Chasserio et al., 2014) framed by their particular gendered context and stage in life. Context (historical, social and institutional) explains their entry and motivations (Welter, 2011; Welter et al., 2014). Life processes, age and family formation influence entrepreneurship so that entrepreneurial identities evolve over the life course (Chasserio et al., 2014). For example, motherhood, metaphorically representing household and family contexts of female entrepreneurs, has a larger impact on women than men's parenthood (Hughes et al., 2012). Female entrepreneurs juggle different social identities with opposing norms like being available to tend to a sick child or attend to business (Chasserio et al., 2014) or opt for enterprises undertaken at home so as to combine childcare with work at a particular life-stage (Welter et al., 2014).

Identity is produced and reproduced within micro-contexts in which women utilise discursive strategies (Grünenfelder, 2012) to negotiate entrepreneurialism and gender. Discursively constructing an entrepreneurial identity is compounded by gender stereotypes that place a greater status value on being a man than a woman; men are expected to possess more valuable entrepreneurial traits and competencies. One of the ways women construct their entrepreneurial identities is through positioning or repositioning themselves discursively. Positioning theory reveals the explicit and implicit patterns of reasoning in the way people act towards each other and detect meanings people attach to actions of each other and themselves (Harré, 2008; Harré et al., 2009; Katila and Eriksson, 2013). Positioning in relation to entrepreneurial identity construction refers to the assignment of an entrepreneurial role, characteristics and behaviours through performance. It occurs dialogically in relation to interactions or through positioning men and women within broader cultural discourses around gender. 'People are positioned or position themselves with respect to rights and duties to act within evolving storylines, and on the basis of claims about relevant personal attributes, the discursive process of prepositioning' (Harré et al., 2009, p. 5). Positioning is a useful theoretical framework for conceptualising the construction of entrepreneurial identity through discursive strategies illuminating the overlapping and contrasting positions in negotiating different identities.

Positionality emphasizes gender as a construct, shaped within a particular discursive context that gives rise to a fluid matrix of practices, habits and language that form an individual's gendered subjectivity (Wallis, 2011). Performing entrepreneurship involves gender positioning, and depending

on how gender is performed, entrepreneurial action acquires different dimensions and levels of legitimacy (Bruni et al., 2004). In legitimising their roles as entrepreneurs within contexts of masculinist framing of entrepreneurship, women perform gender and entrepreneurship in a variety of ways. These include shuttling between different and dichotomous symbolic spaces, rejecting entrepreneurship as a male performance, seeking alternative framings (Bruni et al., 2004) or reifying a divide between real work and not real work by recasting reproductive work as not real work (Bourne and Calás, 2013). Positioning is central to understanding how entrepreneurial identity is negotiated and shaped by that which is taken up or is repressed in the complex interplay of gender and entrepreneurial identities. Conceptually, positioning addresses issues of identity in terms of locations which are fluid, contingent on context, meaning and time, involving shifts and contradictions, providing an intersectional framing for the understanding of legitimacy, becoming and belonging.

For many entrepreneurs, constructing entrepreneurial identities entails belonging to a group, the business community. Belonging theories foreground the psychosocial need and motivation for social connection that can explain gender differences in personality and roles (Baumeister, 2012). Acceptance into the group may depend on how well one's identity is perceived to comply with socially constructed business norms. When a person does not fit the ideal type within the occupation's culture, being the wrong sex may interfere with one's professional identity and status. Having a sense of belonging to an enterprise culture that is not gender-neutral can be problematic for some women. Enterprising qualities usually associated with men such as self-reliance, personal responsibility, boldness and a willingness to take risks in the pursuit of entrepreneurial goals are promoted alongside characteristics that include confidence, assertiveness and having presence (Wee and Brooks, 2012). Not subscribing to these qualities and characteristics can impede a sense of belonging, connectedness, relatedness and feeling accepted as a bona fide entrepreneur. An absence of gender-neutrality in the constructions of entrepreneurship is also observed in representations and practices around mobile phones and entrepreneurship.

### **Gender, entrepreneurship and mobile phone representations**

Literature exploring mobile phone-related entrepreneurship in developing countries has often presented mobile phones as affording women opportunities for expanded entrepreneurship and gender equality achievements (Gill et al., 2010; GSMA and Cherie Blair Foundation For Women, 2010; UNCTAD, 2014). Yet, other studies have also highlighted the nuanced and complex outcomes of mobile phones for micro-enterprise growth (Chew et al., 2011) and gender equality (Buskens and Webb, 2009; Chib and Chen, 2011; Murphy and Priebe, 2011; Tacchi et al., 2012; Wallis, 2011), illuminating the complex relationships between gender and other axes of identity with mobile phones and labour, productivity or entrepreneurship. Mobile phones are seen as both a liberating, emancipative and equalising technology as well as one that reinforces, recalibrates and perpetuates gender inequalities (Murphy and Priebe, 2011; Wallis, 2011). They have supported women's economic empowerment and agency by providing them with a sense that they matter and belong (Chew et al., 2015; Tacchi et al., 2012). In practical terms they have enabled women to build businesses and increase their incomes by facilitating the receipt and delivery of orders from customers. By women blending them into their livelihood activities, mobile phones have also assisted women in expanding their networking capabilities and enhancing their job seeking. Broadly speaking, women have gained freedoms, voice and influence in some instances also experienced other forms of control and inequality. Women have been subjected to increased surveillance at work (Wallis, 2011), control over their mobile use and its content. Women have been less able to finance mobile phone amplifying pre-existing gender inequalities (Murphy and Priebe, 2011;

Komunte et al., 2012; Tacchi et al., 2012). Therefore, what mobile phones represent or symbolize is female entrepreneurship on one hand and a site of gender conflict and dialectical struggles of entrepreneurial empowerment and disempowerment on the other.

One explanation for these contradictory and nuanced outcomes is that technology is a socio-technical product, patterned by the conditions of its creation and use. Theoretical work in this area has been informed by the social shaping and social constructivist approaches (Wajcman, 2013) emphasising gender as social relations which become inscribed in new technologies. In these perspectives, gender relations and technological domestication are not universal or immutable, but rather are locally contingent and dependent on many social factors. Technological practices are constituted mutually by technical and social phenomena. Socio-technological analyses of mobile phones illustrate how they are imbued with social norms and ideologies (Murphy and Priebe, 2011; Rakow and Navarro, 1993), are gender-scripted (Shade, 2007) and represent a site of gendered negotiations (Chib and Chen, 2011; Wallis, 2011).

However, questions need to be asked about the extent to which prevailing societal norms regarding the appropriate behaviour of men and women diminish the entrepreneurial returns of mobile phone use by women, and what can help overcome information asymmetries and capacity constraints resulting from biased norms and gendered technological scripts. Shade (2007) describes gender scripts as representations that mobile phone designers have or construct of gender relations and gender identities – representations that are then inscribed into the materiality and use of mobile phones. Drawing on this interpretation of gender scripts, this understanding can be advanced to include users' gendered inscriptions into mobile phones and attendant practices that may emphasise, reinforce, hide or diminish gender inequalities. Gender relations are negotiated in everyday practices involving mobile phone access and use for entrepreneurship. Technological change can facilitate social change, turning patriarchy into a contested domain leading to renegotiated gender relations. This can occur through increases in women's income, mobility and say in household matters, thus redefining traditional norms yet still maintaining gender-based divisions of labour and overarching structural inequalities in markets (Kelkar and Nathan, 2002).

The relationship between gender, entrepreneurship and mobile phone representations is complex as all involve some form of identity construction through discursive practices of positioning and scripting. Combining these perspectives on mobile phones, entrepreneurship and gender provide a potent lens with which to analyse this complex relationship. Together these perspectives offer insights into how identities intersect with technology and enterprise to produce gendered social practices. The entwining of gender, entrepreneurship and social practices serves to introduce new positionings and representations as well as maintaining or reconfiguring old ones.

## **Context, participants and methods**

### *Context*

Women's work in the urban informal sector in Uganda is framed by a social context in which wider societal gender relations constrict their entrepreneurial capabilities and achievements. Cultural factors limit the realization of women's potential with their involvement in business referred to as immoral (Ellis et al., 2005). Women's street trading entrepreneurship in Uganda is regarded as largely reactive, survivalist or necessity driven (Mitullah, 2003; Stevenson and St-Onge, 2005), with Ugandan women's entrepreneurship considered to have been historically born out the need to survive the chaos created by legacies of war, economic crises and discriminatory legal and regulatory practices (Snyder, 2000). While gender relation models vary by ethnicity, the distribution of

economic resources is typically organised according to historical relations of social production and reproduction that privilege men. Women are excluded from owning land, a key asset for obtaining credit for business start-up and expansion, through patrilineal inheritance practices and cultural prescriptions. Son preference limits human capital investments in girls and women's education and training (Bantebya et al., 2013). Men tend to control women's participation in training and social groupings, time and access to information compounded by a brideprice system that commoditises women, transferring ownership from fathers to husbands. Patriarchal ideologies dictate which kinds of economic activities are regarded as suitable for women (Lange, 2003). Parenthood confers greater responsibilities for childcare to women (Kasente, 2006). These societal gender relations translate into women being primarily motivated to generate income to meet family responsibilities rather than by the commercial potential of enterprises.

Entrepreneurs in the informal economy tend to invest in several areas, known as occupation pluralism (Lange, 2003). However, urban street trading is segregated along gender lines, reflecting broader divisions where women are more concentrated in trade-related rather than manufacturing-related parts of the informal economy, where capital outlay is generally lower (Lange, 2003). Women dominate the street food trade and are highly represented in beverages, tailoring, textiles, services, crafts and vending airtime for mobile phones whereas men tend to be involved in carpentry, metalwork, woodwork, car spare parts, taxi and bodaboda (motorcycle) operations (Komunte, 2015; Lange, 2003; Namatovu et al., 2012). Newer sectors like electronics and second-hand clothes equally attract male and female street entrepreneurs. Negative attitudes towards businesses owned by women prevail and women's businesses operate in a hostile environment subjected to more bribery and harassment than enterprises owned by men (Karakire Guma, 2015). Enterprises run by women are typically smaller than those operated by men (Namatovu et al., 2012; Stevenson and St-Onge, 2005).

Entrepreneurship is regarded as key route for women's pathway out of poverty (Corsi et al., 2013) with mobile phones playing a central role in enhancing productivity (Komunte, 2015) and promoting gender equality. Women's entrepreneurial work has been promoted by the Uganda government, international non-governmental and civil society actors (Stevenson and St-Onge, 2005). An enabling policy and regulatory environment has contributed to the expansion of mobile phone infrastructure and services (Mulira et al., 2010; Diga et al., 2007; Esselaar et al., 2007), largely benefitting those in urban areas. However, issues of mobile phone access and affordability impede women's entrepreneurialism. In a context where urban poverty is on the increase, on average Ugandan women earn 30 to 50 per cent less than men (WOUGNET, 2015, p. 4). Since 2012, estimated mobile phone subscriptions have risen from 47.5% of the population to 52% in 2014 (ITU, 2015). However, men are more likely to own a mobile phone than women (Pew Research Center, 2015). While urban female traders are more likely to own mobile phones than their rural counterparts, mobile phone usage for entrepreneurship among female entrepreneurs is still considerably low (Komunte, 2015). Opportunities afforded by mobile phones for reduced transactional costs, enhanced productivity, increased trust, improved customer service, price comparisons and negotiations and efficiencies (Donner and Escobari, 2010) are not always made use of because of varying individual, financial, technical and educational capacities.

### *Participants and methods*

This article draws on in-depth semi-structured interviews with six female traders conducted in Kampala, Uganda in 2012. Participants were self-selecting having volunteered to take part in further in-depth interviews following a survey of 51 male and 51 female street traders, chosen using random systematic interval sampling techniques, for a wider study exploring the extent to which mobile phones support female street traders' agency and gender equality using a case study design. The

survey aimed to gauge gender differences in mobile phone access, use and impacts and to explore the perceived outcomes of mobile phones for gender equality and empowerment. One of the key aims was to explore how mobile phones facilitate entrepreneurial capabilities and agency. The survey suggested that women were less likely than men (to use their mobile phones for business (77% of women compared with 89% of men). 55% of men who owned mobile phones reported that use had made them wealthier in comparison to 32% of women. 70% of men as opposed to 54% of women said mobile phones made them more economically active. Some light may be shed on this by the reported statements of men that they were more likely than women to cite wealth creation as one of their most valued goals in life (34% to 29%).

In seeking to better understand these gender differences, in-depth interviews served to elaborate deeper social meanings and clarify the nature of these differences within their social context. Guided by Creswell (2013), a narrative approach was adopted to capture the detailed story of life experience to illustrate how individuals are enabled and constrained by social resources. The study aimed to use the distinctly 'interpretive' character of narrative (Colombo, 2003) to represent and understand experience (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000) and identify various conceptions of identity (Bruner, 1990). In order to elicit this in-depth data, a small sample size was sufficient (Cresswell, 2013). This article draws on the six in-depth interviews, as the narratives of self, elicited through in-depth questioning, revealed the complex negotiation of gender, agency and entrepreneurial identity linked to mobile phone representations and practices that provide deep insights into the individuals' lives and their reflexive construction of their selves. Descriptive accounts of states of affairs contribute to illuminating gender as an accomplishment (West and Zimmerman, 2009) and interviews maybe regarded as a relational social action enabling the local achievement of identity (Lewis, 2013). Narratives function as 'technologies of the self', the active practices of self-formation (Tamboukou, 2008) and Clandinin and Connelly (2000, p. 18) suggest narratives are the 'best way of representing and understanding experience'.

While self-selection, a non-probability sampling technique makes no claims for representativeness, the six female interviewees' ages ranged from 21 to 48 years, reflecting the typical age spread of street traders in Kampala, largely concentrated in the 20-50 age range (Mitullah, 2003). One was a college graduate and the others described themselves as having no education or having a few years of schooling, signalling different capacities for entrepreneurial skills development and engagement with formal channels for business registration and operations. Historically, the informal sector has attracted rural immigrants with low levels of educational attainment. High graduate unemployment has meant that more graduates are resorting to street trading. Participants worked across a variety of activities that included selling non-consumables, perishables and electronics. Five owned mobile phones and one shared with a live-in female friend. Table 1 gives an overview of the participants.

### **[Insert Table 1]**

Interviews were conducted in the Luganda language, a language all would be familiar with regardless of educational attainment and interpreted with the help of a female Ugandan research assistant. Conversations were recorded, transcribed and translated into English afterwards by a female professional transcriber. Interviews were semi-structured, responding to a clear list of issues as well as allowing for some flexibility for the interviewees to develop ideas and speak more widely (Denscombe, 2010). The two-hour interviews included questions about life biographies to solicit narratives about their lives and business experiences. Other questions explored their general perceptions of women's relationships with mobile phones in relation to private (personal, domestic/family/intra-household) and public (work/livelihood) spheres. They were also asked to reflect on any changes in behaviour and attitudes towards women in private and public spheres facilitated by mobile phone ownership.

Transcripts were analysed using iterative processes of coding. NVivo was used to electronically link codes to the data and identify patterns across participants and group codes into categories. In addition, as Grünenfelder (2012) remarks, in conceptualising language as constitutive of realities, I explored ways in which representations of gender were mobilised in their narratives. I also examined these narratives to shed light on ambiguities and offer multi-voiced representations (Bjursell and Melin, 2011) of entrepreneurial identity construction and highlight discursive practices that shape women's entrepreneurship (Ahl, 2006).

### **Entrepreneurial identity construction and negotiation**

Participants illustrated entrepreneurial identity construction through representations and positioning in relation to mobile phone practices. In most cases, positioning marginalized or minimised their entrepreneurial identity and overly substantiated their gender identity so that their positioning was gendered. I have labelled these marginalizing influences in the first subsection and identified five ways this positioning downgraded participants' entrepreneurial identity by: (a) contextual framing that limits technological confidence and fosters doubts about entrepreneurial capabilities (b) non-identification as an entrepreneur (c) legitimising gendered ideologies that amplify, accentuate and justify gender inequalities (d) prioritising motherhood over entrepreneurialism, and (e) gender scripting of mobile phones that situate women at a disadvantage. I also discuss the legitimating tactics, strategies and stimuli of entrepreneurial identity construction in the face of wider societal marginalizing influences in the second subsection, and the nuanced consequences to their sense of self as a result of these negotiations. I characterize these as legitimating representations and positioning and highlight five ways in which the women negotiated their entrepreneurial identities by (a) casting mobile phones as an entrepreneurial artefact or symbol of belonging to the business community (b) inscribing mobile phone ownership with notions of responsibility (c) mobilising, assembling and merging discourses to construct an entrepreneurial identity (d) associating mobile phones with modernity and a break with the past, and (e) assuming a social leadership role in a mobile phone enterprise.

#### *Marginalising influences*

Prepositioning discourses involves justifying of skills, character traits and biographical facts deemed relevant to whatever positioning is going ahead (Harré et al., 2009). These presuppositions embedded in practices can be negative or positive and are indicative of how the positioning process is a discursive practice. In this study, gendered practices in pathways to entrepreneurialism (Bjursell and Melin, 2011) and 'doing entrepreneurship' (Bruni et al., 2004) marginalised women through socially constructed limits on their entrepreneurship and discursive positioning as an entrepreneur or not. Early childhood marginalizing influences shaped women's life chances and proclivities for realising the entrepreneurial potential that mobile phones present. New forms of control that emerged over mobile phone use formed invisible handcuffs which situated mobile phones as a site of gender conflict.

Context can be a marginalising influence that positions men and women differently. It exerts direct or indirect influences where local traditions determine gender roles that in turn influence the nature and extent of female entrepreneurship (Welter, 2011). It is noteworthy that four female interviewees were forced into street trading by circumstances, and only two had actively sought entrepreneurship as a choice. For example, Fatuma indicated that her brothers' schooling was prioritised over hers and her sisters' by her father, depriving her of an education. As such her only

option was street trading as most jobs required qualifications. She explained that: *'I face a lot of oppression, because at one time I went for a job and I was asked for a primary seven certificate and I didn't have it and yet I wanted to work. If I had gone to school, I wouldn't be working where I am now.'* Fatuma also alluded to lower technological capabilities, linking them to her lack of education, in admitting she feared using all the functionalities on her phone in case she spoiled it. Yet she actively sought opportunities to expand her business opportunities by signing up to a mobile money transfer system, even though she never used it. She asserted that: *'I can't read so I can press a wrong button and spoil it...and some people are like me: they did not go to school so they don't understand anything'* As in the case of Fatuma, limited capability in using a mobile phone for entrepreneurship is a related marginalising influence. This consequence of how girls are positioned in Ugandan society meant that Fatuma doubted her mobile phone functional and entrepreneurial capabilities. Like for all the interviewees, her entrepreneurial identity is a product of the heterogeneous engineering of material and discursive practices (Bruni et al., 2004).

Non-identification of women as entrepreneurs is another limiting influence. Self-image or self-values as an entrepreneur are important predispositions of entrepreneurial identity. Three interviewees considered their entry to business as survivalist owing to limited options, shedding some light on how they envisaged their entrepreneurial identities. This non-authenticity, absence of commitment to self-value as an entrepreneur (Lewis, 2013) was revealed in subsequent narratives about how they positioned themselves in relation to a real entrepreneur. For, example, Christine explained, *'If I was educated I would prefer to do something else'* and *'...it is men who are really businessmen. Me, I only have this small thing'*. This revealed that although women had entrepreneurial agency, they did not always have free will in the discourses they appropriated and might have found difficulty in claiming the identity of entrepreneur as it did not sit well with their internal sense of self (Lewis, 2013).

Despite female traders' perception of mobile phones as an important business tool, access and use of these technologies was restricted by entrenched gender ideologies, another marginalising influence, about the appropriate roles for men and women and gendered power relations operating at multiple levels. As Mary argued, women tend to run smaller enterprises with fewer opportunities to 'interact with external agents' (Bird et al., 2012) from further afield. She explained: *'... although these days women want to look equal with men there is a difference in our nature and the kind of work or business women run... It is very hard to get a man running a small stall like the ones women are running because for them they have more money than most women, so their businesses are on a large scale; you will find them dealing with people in Dubai'*. The female street traders suggested that women were less likely to use mobile phones for business because of the small size of their enterprises so that mobile phone ownership and use afforded them neither economic empowerment nor enhanced entrepreneurship capabilities and outcomes. Women were located in the less lucrative parts of the informal economy with less capital, a consequence of socially constructed norms and learned ideas about gender and entrepreneurship that limit women's ability to accrue financial capital to generate savings and credit (Gupta et al., 2009). When asked about differences between men and women, Mary responded, *'it is natural, men are above women'*. As such another marginalising influence is gendered ideologies that shape and justify gendered labour segregation in the informal sector and position women as having inferior entrepreneurial capabilities, secondary to men (Ahl, 2006).

This ideological positioning of women is further demonstrated when Mary implied that women have inferior entrepreneurial behaviours or capabilities: *'This is common in women; they are always selective and waste too much time bargaining before they can buy something, unlike men. A man buys in plenty and does not want to waste much time'*. Mary's legitimisation of entrepreneurial capabilities and bargaining style differences amongst men and women, positions women as inferior

entrepreneurs, as bargaining and negotiating skills are essential for successful entrepreneurship in the context of street traders. From this 'discursive positioning' (Katila and Eriksson, 2013) of women it can also be inferred that women are regarded as having a slower 'decision speed' (Bird et al., 2012).

The prioritisation of motherhood and needs of children over financing mobile phones for business limited women's use of mobile phones for business and social networking. As such, some constructions of motherhood and nurturing influence women's ability to undertake some business tasks such as 'time spent developing ties' and 'forming social ties' (Bird et al., 2012). Important entrepreneurial behaviours were also further restricted for some participants because of domestic and childcare responsibilities - activities predominantly positioned as a woman's role - but also the prioritisation of expenses associated with children over entrepreneurial pursuits. Fatuma illustrated this when she indicated that '*... imagine buying a phone when my children have nothing to eat?*' yet had acknowledged a phone would help grow her business. A dominant discourse of women as nurturers leads to social arrangements that follow suit (Ahl, 2006), shape women's entrepreneurialism and can over-validate their gender above their entrepreneurial identity.

Gender scripting of mobile phones perpetuates the positioning of men as entrepreneurs and women as immoral. For example the widespread belief was that men tended to use their mobile phones for business and women for social, nurturing and domestic interests. Jane cemented this belief when she exclaimed '*...men think differently from women [in making use of mobile phones]...men think about making money with their phones...women use their phones for chatting and their children*'. This implicit gendering of mobile phones through social uses (Shade, 2007) linked to gendered interests was a prevalent view. Codes of gender-identity or gendered messages inscribed into mobile phone use or non-use for entrepreneurship are further forms of marginalising influences. The positioning of women within negative gendered discourses and presupposing negative impacts of mobile phone and enterprise successes on women are some further examples. Christine asserted '*mobile phones have helped lift up women from the ground as women and still, what the man would have done, you as a woman, you end up paying for it*'. This supposition of negative outcomes of successful mobile phone-enhanced entrepreneurship for women is a gendered message to women suggesting that success means doing it all since men will shirk their responsibilities if their female partners are successful. Further negative associations with mobile phones are embodied in coded suggestions that women's use of them leads to misbehaviour. Christine suggested '*you find that the more the woman's income increases the more badly behaved she becomes*' and Jane also hinted '*A phone changes women's behaviors. When a woman has a phone she cheats*'. The mobile phone is thus situated negatively for women, but instrumentally as a facilitator for entrepreneurialism for men.

As women are inscribed as particular users (Shade, 2007), mobile phones can represent a site of gendered conflict within households. Prossy elucidated: '*Some men just don't want their women to have mobile phones due to the fear that they will misuse them by getting other men*'. As such many women avoided or limited their use of mobile phones at home, a trade-off as this was useful time for performing business task such as ordering stock, networking, pursuing new opportunities and organising. As Fatuma further illuminated: '*...at home if you see that the phone won't make you free, it is better you stay without it. Because there are men who are full of anguish that can demolish the phone the moment it rings because he does not know the caller number and then he tells you that if you want peace in the house, stay off the phone*'. A sharp distinction between home and work is taken for granted with a shuttling between the spaces of gender and entrepreneur (Bruni et al., 2004). Hence for some female entrepreneurs, business communications (Bird et al., 2012) at home were perilous and best avoided and their entrepreneurial identities suppressed in favour of their other social identities.

### *Legitimizing representations and positioning*

Entrepreneurship is enacted in situated practices that position men and women within entrepreneurial practices through which codes of gender identity are maintained, changed and transgressed by constantly sliding between symbolic spaces of entrepreneur or gender (Bruni et al., 2004). As real entrepreneurship is equated with men, some participants acknowledged the need to discursively establish themselves as legitimate entrepreneurs. Most interviewees mentioned survivalist rationales and economic necessity as the major reasons for embarking on street trading entrepreneurship. In order to make working compatible with breadwinner/nurturer ideologies prevalent in Uganda, working was in some cases justified on the basis of need or a consequence of unfavourable circumstances, and the use of a mobile phone as enhancing business. Exploring their narratives, it was evident that Jane, Joanita and Mary's entrepreneurship identity construction appeared more proactive, illustrated by conscious choices, drive and motivation based on entrepreneurial identification (Bjursell and Melin, 2011) while that of Prossy, Fatuma and Christine was more reactive. Nevertheless there was some ambiguity for all of them in switching between both entrepreneurship types in their narratives. In this section I use five examples of discursive positioning to illustrate how they negotiated gender relations and entrepreneurial identity construction.

Jane exemplified proactive entrepreneurship in explaining how motivated (Bjursell and Melin, 2011) she was to start up and grow a business and the role a mobile phone played in this. She narrated: *'Since my childhood I wanted a bright future, I always wanted to work and you know when you are hardworking, you can cater for yourself instead of looking for money from men... When you have a mobile phone you have 100% chances... yesterday, I had run out of clothes but there was someone selling them at a lower price than me. I just called him and told him to bring the clothes over... Of course the phone is for the business'*. In her narrative of her life she had demonstrated a knack for identifying and pursuing new opportunities (Bird et al., 2012), having started up several businesses from a young age and moved on to others. Jane suggested that mobile phone ownership and use had facilitated her membership to the business community, a form of discursive positioning. She said, *'I myself ever since I got a phone, I realized I had changed from other women. When I got a phone I joined the business bond for the phone'*. As such mobile phone ownership conferred an entrepreneurship status or sense of self as belonging (Baumeister, 2012) to the business community. Her entrepreneurial motivations were enabled and supported by mobile phones through which she strategically, tactically and discursively positioned herself as an entrepreneur. Her childhood experiences and discursive positioning in relation to mobile phone ownership were a legitimating stimulus with an elevating and legitimising effect on entrepreneurial identity.

The symbolism of mobile phone as an entrepreneurial artefact is another legitimating discursive positioning. For Fatuma, mobile phone ownership symbolized responsibility, an enterprising quality (Wee and Brooks, 2012) and conveyed through technological scripting of mobile phones. She noted, *'You know like now when I am here and my phone rings, you take me to be responsible, but a person without a phone, for sure you it is like you are out of the world. As a woman, when you have got a phone, people see you as a being responsible'*. Christine also noted that *'You have lagged behind if you don't have a mobile phone'*. The symbolic nature of mobile phone ownership conferring status, independence, responsibility and entrepreneurial involvement represents an 'undoing' (West and Zimmerman, 2009) of prevailing gendered ideologies insofar as Jane and Fatuma construct identities linked to entrepreneurship afforded by mobile phones for themselves.

Some women implied that their morality was in question because of the nature of their work as street traders. So they dissociated themselves morally from other women whom they suggested were immoral because of what they wore, and that they themselves dressed modestly. Without prompting, they often brought up their own dress and appearance as differentiated from other women's (corrupted by mobile phones that represented modernity and breakdown of culture). Joanita stated *'Our women in our culture... It is not the same any more, but in our culture... It has changed these days, especially for young girls who have copied Western culture... Me I would have liked it [Western culture influences], but the problem is the girls here have gone to the extreme, you understand... Women dress up now in a way that makes you feel ashamed. In the past culture, women were supposed to stay at home and look after the kids... For me I like working. In fact for me, spending something like three hours at home is a burden for me. During Easter I spent the whole time at home, I couldn't sleep eh.'* For Joanita, mobilisation of a discourse of western infiltration linked to mobile phones, then dissociation from this infiltration through a comment on its impact on other women's dressing and being in favour of other impacts such as the work opportunities this change has afforded her, illustrates her complex negotiation of her own entrepreneurial identity.

Joanita mobilised a discourse of western infiltration to suggest that mobile phones were symbolic of negative changes happening in society that were breaking down culture, but at the same time talked of her work as a conscious break from, or redefinition of, gendered norms as a positive change. She differentiated herself from other women, justifying her devotion to employment by expressing personal interest and working not being an economic necessity, as in the case of some other women, but a strategic step and choice. As such for some there is some shifting of gendered and entrepreneurial identities and social practices developed and reworked in relation to mobile phones. Joanita's assemblage of different discourses demonstrated nuanced constructions of entrepreneurial identity that mobilise some discourses and not others, thus negotiating gender relations by merging discourses to construct an entrepreneurial identity.

Fatuma augmented this by commenting on changes in terms of modernity and a break with the past, whereby women are increasingly entrepreneurial and using mobile phones to facilitate their business. She stated *'There is a big change because modern women are now working and have mobile phones that make their businesses move smoothly. She can just make a call and she gets whatever she wants from where she is, which was not the case in the past.'* Joanita typified such women, as a successful mobile phone entrepreneur with three stalls and several employees. She explained, *'Most women nowadays are employed... Mobile phones have helped us to run our businesses. Now like for example my husband can go out to China and he can spend like 3 weeks when he is not around and I can find myself that I am missing some stock I use phone to order more that can keep me until he comes back... It [mobile phone] really helps me so much, particularly concerning my business. We have so many friends, so many friends as in business-wise'.*

However, she also had a sense of a clear division of entrepreneurial roles (or identities) between her and her husband so that despite her success she saw herself as deputising for her husband in dealing with local external agents while he was away on business, yet she took on the day-to-day leadership role. She noted, *'My husband, let me say he is my boss, he is the owner of the three [mobile phone] kiosks. So I help him to run them, look after the employees ... it is really very difficult eh if you are self-employed you have employees. I have a lot of responsibility which many people do not have, I am different... So that is why I always feel that I should work hard, because of the responsibility I have... I have to be the super model for my employees... They keep calling me mummy... They give me respect, they call me mummy'.* By discursively positioning herself in a social leadership role, she casts herself as an empowering leader, a facet of entrepreneurial behaviour (Bird et al., 2012). While socio-cultural arrangements framed how her employees perceived her, referring to her as mummy, connecting leadership with motherhood, she described her leadership style as consultative.

Entrepreneurial identity negotiations of the street traders suggest that there are differences in how women navigate the gendered terrain of street trading through mobile phone practices and representations. Symbolism, breaking with the past and assuming leadership roles are part of the discursive repertoires of strategies and tactics employed by women that also open up spaces for their entrepreneurial agency as a step towards social change, in contexts where prevailing ideologies of gender and entrepreneurship put women at a disadvantage in constructing favourable entrepreneurial identities. As Chassiero et al (2014) suggest, these entrepreneurial identities are built through confrontation and synergies with other identities.

## **Discussion and conclusions**

Female street traders' entrepreneurial identity construction linked to mobile phones is a complex and multi-faceted process. Women operate within particular contextual situations and have varying discursive and material capacities and capabilities to harness the entrepreneurial opportunities mobile phones present. Discursive repertoires that include scripts, codes, ideologies, values, beliefs and cultural prescriptions within observable practices in representations (Shade, 2007; Wajcman, 2013) and positioning (Harré et al., 2009) around mobile phones demonstrate the extent to which the opportunities afforded are internalised and enacted discursively. Through discursive repertoires, mobile phones come to represent a site of gender and entrepreneurial identity contestations where legitimacies (Bruni et al., 2004) as a woman and entrepreneur manifest as hidden affirmations, struggles and disruptions. Reflecting the nuanced outcomes of mobile phones for both entrepreneurship and greater gender equality observed internationally (Buskens and Webb, 2009; Chew et al., 2011; Chib and Chen, 2011; Murphy and Priebe, 2011; Tacchi et al., 2012; Wallis, 2011), socio-technical effects of mobile phones on entrepreneurial development and gender equality for the female street traders are mixed and uncertain.

Symbolically for some, mobile phones come to represent a break from a past, a signifier of belonging (Baumeister, 2012) to the business community, an entrepreneurial artefact conferring the status of responsibility and an opportunity to exercise leadership in a mobile phone-based business. Yet, despite female traders' perception of mobile phones as an important entrepreneurial enabler, effective use is compounded by some women's non-identification as a real entrepreneur, justification of historical and socio-cultural bases for women's lesser use of mobile phones for business and naturalness of gender inequalities as well as women's avoidance of using them at home in the evenings. Unsettled scripts discerned from Christine's assertion that mobile phones have helped lift women up but they end up paying for it signal change and the conflict it sometimes generates for women establishing their entrepreneurial identity. Merging of discourses by Joanita serves to illustrate the complex figuring out of traditional cultural gender prescriptions and evolving cultural changes symbolised by mobile phones and work and her making sense of self.

As Tacchi, Kitner and Crawford (2012) have argued, mobile phones are an active agent in complex and evolving gendered relationships and tensions. Prossy's elucidation of men not wanting their partners to use mobile phones for fear of them conducting affairs illustrates some of tensions in owning and using mobile phones for women as mobile phones are perceived as making extra-marital relations easier. Mobile phone use reproduces differences rooted in gender ideologies (Rakow and Navarro, 1993) reflecting gendered divisions of labour and responsibilities so that Jane's comment about men using phones for making money and women for chatting and their children underline the reproduction of gender ideologies in negating women's entrepreneurial identities. Non-investments in girls' education (Bantebya et al., 2013) framed the opportunities and constraints for some female street traders' use of mobile phones for business and constructing their entrepreneurial identities

later on in life, intimated in Fatuma's fear of using some functions on her mobile phone in case she spoilt it. The gendered nature of livelihoods shapes mobile phone use (Murphy and Priebe, 2011) mirroring broader societal norms that downplay women's entrepreneurial identities and self-image as real entrepreneurs. Female street traders tended to be confined to businesses of a smaller size than men's enterprise (Namatovu et al., 2012) as Mary explained with less need and opportunity to use mobile phones. This was illustrated by Mary's comment that it was not usual to see women running large enterprises that benefitted from mobile phone use. Social shaping (Wajcman, 2013) and representations of mobile phone practices come to mirror societal beliefs about women's engagement in enterprise as lacking important entrepreneurial behaviours, for example, negotiating prices with suppliers as Jane narrated, a practice mobile phones ease and make more convenient.

While entrepreneurial identity has historically often been associated with men and masculine attributes (Bruni et al., 2004; Lewis, 2006) and women regarded as less entrepreneurial than men (Gries and Naudé, 2011), this study suggests that the Ugandan women negotiate entrepreneurial identities through a range of discursive repertoires, but that competing marginalizing influences dovetail with their positioning of themselves as entrepreneur. For them, the process of becoming entrepreneurs (Bourne and Calás, 2013) and performing entrepreneurship (Bruni et al., 2004) is affected by how they are primarily positioned in society as nurturers, deprived education and denied opportunities to develop select successful entrepreneurship capabilities and behaviours, gendering the organisation of informal enterprise. Entrepreneurship becomes gendered through reproduction of historical and cultural events into contemporary contexts, particularly the recasting of the public-private divide (Bourne and Calás, 2013). Structural and contextual factors mean that women's entrepreneurial identity construction therefore needs to be understood within historical, institutional, socio-cultural, spatial and temporal contexts (Welter, 2011).

Female street traders tended to cultivate entrepreneurial identities whilst negotiating other identities linked to being a woman, mother, partner or wife, making trade-offs at particular points, as Chasserio et al (2014) have observed in relation to specific identity regulation. They demonstrate the various forms of women's identity work as stretching along a continuum from accepting prevailing societal norms and gendered expectations to integrating or challenging them by accommodation or transformation, thus redefining or developing new norms (Chasserio et al., 2014). Codes of gendered identity were kept, changed or transgressed by sliding through different symbolic spaces (Bruni et al., 2004) such as those signified by mobile phones and entrepreneurship.

However, while there are continuities in scripting of gender that are carried into entrepreneurship and mobile phones representations and practices, discursive repositioning can create fissures in the patterns of inequality (Ridgeway, 2009; Ridgeway and Correll, 2000). Doing gender and enterprise with mobile phones is reflected in discursive repertoires that are continually reshaped in relation to need or drive, often through a merging of discourses (Grünenfelder, 2012) and scripting of mobile phones (Shade, 2007), to make sense of one's life and decisions, resulting in the 'heterogeneity of women's entrepreneurship' (Hughes et al., 2012) and entrepreneurial identity construction. This presented opportunities for new gender discourses and scripts to emerge that validated and legitimated female entrepreneurship.

This article demonstrates the need to make entrepreneurship theory 'more context-sensitive' (Welter, 2011) and the usefulness of the concept of entrepreneurial identity construction in understanding those influences that marginalise and empower female entrepreneurship and the ways women negotiate gender and entrepreneurial identities. In doing so it contributes to research on entrepreneurial identity and mobile phones in a number of ways. First, viewing women's identity work through mobile phone representations and practices provides us with a lens to understand how some women negotiate gender and entrepreneurial identities and the opportunities for social

change that this presents. Different versions of entrepreneurial identities exist (Bruni et al., 2004) with differing emergent identities coming into play with women's use of mobile phones.

Second, by drawing on notions of positioning, both dialogical and in the context of broader cultural discourses about appropriate gender roles we can deconstruct the opportunities and constraints for entrepreneurial identity construction that have implications for micro-enterprise development as a strategy to overcome poverty and achieve greater gender equality. The female street traders positioned themselves more in relation to gender than entrepreneurial identities. The 'situatedness' of entrepreneurial identities in particular cultural contexts reflects the participants' particular socio-economic situation where micro-enterprise is regarded as a strategy to overcome poverty. Yet, women's experiences suggest ambivalent outcomes in this regard. As Strier (2010) has demonstrated, entrepreneurial engagement offers women an occupational status that counters some of the multiple gender constraints they face, but there was little evidence in this study that, as a strategy, engaging in micro-enterprises promoted gender equity and alleviated poverty. Rather, women construct entrepreneurial identities in complex and contradictory ways (Strier and Abdeen, 2009), and in some instances other social identities such as motherhood were prioritised over entrepreneurial risk taking and developing skills and traits required for success. In domesticating and adapting mobile phone use to their roles in the household and business community, women reinforced gender structures and patriarchal hierarchies as well as challenged these.

Third, focussing on the socio-political character of mobile phones shows us how they reinforce power structures and unequal gender relations. Reflexively constructed biographies evidence street traders' entrepreneurial identity construction through socio-technical representations and practices that provide insights into how identities are a product of an assemblage of technology and particular socio-cultural, economic and historical factors. The intersection of these factors within different individuals' lives produces entrepreneurial characters that cannot be reduced to one particular set of entrepreneurial skills and traits. It counters the optimism, reductionism and determinism of mobile phone apologists by illustrating the nuanced socio-technological outcomes of mobiles phones for enhanced female entrepreneurship and gender equality. Mobile phone practices and representations both reproduce inequitable power relations and open up spaces for individual agency, and thus social change. Technological change has the potential to turn patriarchy into a contested domain redefining gender relations through inter-cultural discussion, non-conformity and dissolving old bases of inequality (Kelkar and Nathan, 2002).

Specific attention needs to be paid to how female entrepreneurs construct entrepreneurial identities and those factors that marginalise them, drawing on a gendered analysis that pays attention to the complex relationship between identity and context. Of particular interest are those women who lack entrepreneurial interest, motivation, capabilities or skills and yet have no option but to become entrepreneurs to survive, in a context where there is drive to encourage female entrepreneurship as a route out of poverty and to inform organisational efforts to support female entrepreneurs in relation to the benefits mobile phones provide.

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