Gender-based Violence Campaign in Namibia: Traditional meets Technology for Societal Change

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Abstract

Reports of gender-based violence (GBV) in Namibia have increased dramatically over the last years. The First Lady of the Republic of Namibia has initiated a national campaign to fight GBV recognizing the seriousness of the matter. However, with the phenomena being researched *but* with no successful interventions and not having explored the power of technology and interactive installations, the campaign risks to be yet just another awareness campaign not addressing the root causes of the matter. Thus we are presenting an explorative interactive technology installation as part of the campaign, to provoke and trigger transformation while at the same time collecting essential data to inform the next steps of the campaign. While mixing research and intervention in the real life ensures high impact, yet it is open for criticism on a methodological and ethical level.

Author Keywords

Gender-based violence; Namibia; technology hut;

ACM Classification Keywords

H.5.m. Information interfaces and presentation (e.g., HCI): Miscellaneous;

Introduction

Gender-based violence (GBV) has taken a dramatic direction in Namibia with a shocking number of increasing rapes and deaths reported. Nearly half the crime cases are GBV related (The Namibian, 13 January 2010, see side bar). GBV has far reaching implications and lasting impacts on survivors, perpetrators, families, communities and the country as a whole. Namibia has committed itself to eliminate all forms of gender discrimination. This is reflected in the National Gender Policy (2010 –2020) which stipulates the reduction of GBV and protection of women and girls as one of the thirteen policy objectives. A number of legislative instruments and policies are also in place and Namibia made significant gains for women representation in politics and decision making, but GBV cases continue unabated (Shejavali, 2015). Gender equality is also enshrined in the Namibian Constitution and several laws such as the Combatting of Domestic Violence Act, the Combatting of Rape Act, etc exist to protect women, but GBV is a major challenge to achieving true gender equality. This prompted the First Lady of the Republic of Namibia[1] to launch the Zero Tolerance Media Campaign against GBV in July 2015.

Previous research has shown that besides alcohol abuse the main causes of violence in Namibia are based on factors such as jealousy, self-esteem, possessiveness, power and control (Badcock, 2001). Many Namibians are still deeply rooted in traditional values while living a modern lifestyle. This creates at times incompatibilities and conflicts in terms of expected behaviors and relationships. Even more serious is the fact that some men in court still defended assault or murder of female partners as their perceived right to punish a woman, which is allegedly part of their culture (Badcock, 2001). However, having recognized correlations with social and cultural values has not yet led to possible ways to combat the overwhelming trend in violence nor to deconstruct conflicting value systems. In 2015, two graduate male students from different academic disciplines grew tired of hearing about GBV and decided to start something that would mobilize mass action and inspire societal change and reform. They launched an online social media campaign titled "The Tales of Nali", which advocates cultural learning and raise awareness on pressing social issues in Namibia. The duo set up their own studio where they produce short provocative video clips depicting social ills and post this at set intervals to social media. Last year, the campaign had reached out to more than 500,000 online viewers (mostly Namibians) on social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Google+ and WhatsApp. The short video clips circulated triggered numerous on-line debates, mostly unfortunately mostly people from outside of Namibia commented on the videos. However, the current campaign has not sufficiently leveraged technology to move beyond creating awareness to achieve a long term cultural change. Also the focus has been on the act of violence rather than on the prevention of it.

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[1] The First Lady of Namibia is also the Global UN Special Advocate on young women and adolescent girls.
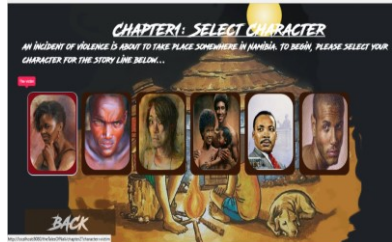
Interactive Application

Figure 3a: Select character: victim, perpetuator, witness, family, etc.
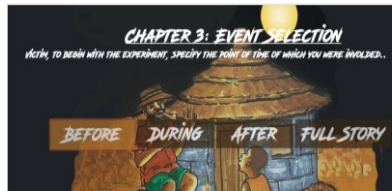

Figure 3b & c: Storyline description and point of interaction

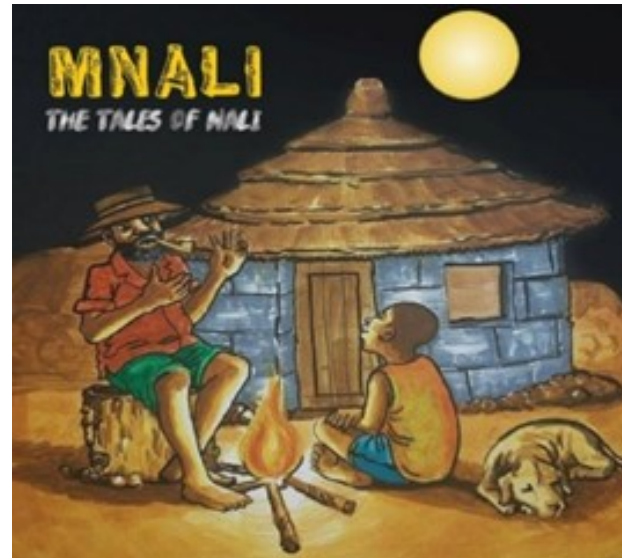Figure 3d: Answering related questions

Fig. 1: The Tales of Nali cover

Thus we set out to investigate the current tone, opinions and underlying values of the Namibian public in order to make more informed decisions on the direction of the on-going GBV campaign ensuring that all stakeholders are addressed. Secondly we set out to construct an interactive installation that would be able to create a very specific user experience combining cultural elements with technology, allowing for contrasting feelings while collecting valuable data.

The Tales of Nali installation
Set up
This installation uses a free standing model, computer programmes and multimedia materials to interact and confront the participants with the uncomfortable topic of the culture of violence and negative pressing issues

in Namibia. The setup of the model resembles a traditional Oshiwambo/Rukavango (ethnic groups) cultural homestead as illustrated in figure 2.

Figure 2: Setting up of Nali's hut at the conference site

On the inside of the hut traditional paintings along the wall, cultural probes and the scenes of the OvaHimba tribe ensures a feeling of traditional life.

Participants' Interaction
Each participant entering the installation sees three computer screens (A, B, C) mounted on the interior walls of the installation. Screen A plays videos specifically chosen to provoke the participants to react and interact with the technology presented. Screen B presents an interactive computer application. The computer application of the installation has features to capture inputs from the participants during the interactive session. The interactive screens of the application on Screen B are as illustrated in figure 3a – 3c. Thus the user chooses a character such as a victim, perpetrator, bystander, police officer, parent, etc. The user personalizes it, runs through the crime and is

asked questions on along the way such as: how do you feel? You wish you had a …, What could you do to avoid the crime? Why did you choose this specific character? Screen C displayed previous answers of participants at random. After existing the hut, the participant is then invited to sit outside around a "fire" and reflect on what they experienced or GBV in general.

At Events
The installation was first displayed in incomplete versions at a 24-hour GBV Hackathon[2] to obtain ideas and feedback. In addition to students and Computing experts, Social Workers, Psychologists, Lawyers, Police Officers and GBV survivors who were also present as expert informants at the Hackathon gave initial feedback on the installation. Its first complete set up was demonstrated at the International Conference on Culture and Computer Science in Windhoek in October 2016 (Ndjibu, 2016). The conference was attended by a mix of international and national academics mostly, politicians, and a few cultural heritage officers. The second set up was at the #BeFree Activation Conference that was held under the auspices of the Office of the First Lady of the Republic of Namibia. The event was attended by 500 participants inclusive of parents, children and stakeholders around a variety of topics concerning the youth. It was mostly attended by school learners aged between 14 and 22 years old. The third exhibition was held during a workshop with marginalized and unemployed youth in Havana, an informal settlement at the outskirts of the capital city. Between 10 to 15 participants interacted with the

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2   http://nust.na/?q=news/technology%E2%80%99s-fight-against-gbv

installation and at times two participants entered the hut at the same time.

Participants' Impressions
The installation drew a lot of attention from the participants that have attended the events. The majority of the participants were amazed by the design and cultural concepts that were applied to the installation. Although, there was a limit to the number of participants entering the installation, it couldn't stop many participants from interacting with the installation in other forms such as taking photos and videos next to the installation. A large number of event visitors have shown interest in wanting to know more about the installation and the study. Many of the discussions that were brought out during the intervention with the participants evolved around the topic area of design and purpose/usage of the installation. Many of the senior and elderly participants have complained that the installation is too small and required a lot physical effort to enter and exit.
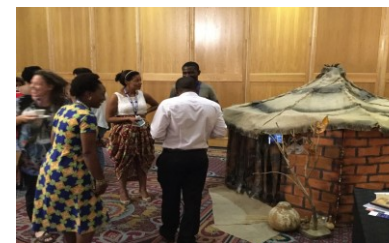

Figure 3: Participants outside the hut

Reflections
Having taken a rather unusual data collection tool and research object into the public space associated with the national GBV campaign has impacted visitors of the

events and brought valuable data at the same time. Besides numerous discussions with the persons responsible for the national campaign, nurses, social workers, psychologists and lawyers have illustrated the complexity and sensitivity of the topic.

Value of the research
While many local participants have identified the installation as a good tool with a potential to teach about Namibian cultures and traditions, many participants from foreign countries have raised questions as to why we have to use a Hut model in tackling violence in Namibia. While we postulate that the violence is in direct relation with the traditional values imparted and lost. Thus re-contextualizing violence in a techno-cultural setting elucidates the conflicting values in relation to GBV.

Participants expressed surprise with using the hut as a technology tool as this is a demarcated space, e.g. technology belongs with the modern while a hut belongs in the traditional space. However, precisely this mixture attracted participants to enter the hut. This curiosity of participants provides a unique opportunity to expose and effect change as the campaign's objective is also to shock and suggest change.

Data collected indicated that the majority of local participants have been directly affected by GBV, either themselves or someone close to them. A number of participants also entered the hut multiple times and assumed different characters.

Some participants reported that there are a few characters in the installation that are not easy to personify especially where professional experience or

knowledge requires the responded to personify a given character; for instance being in the shoes of a magistrate/judge or lawyer.

Ethical concerns
The installation was not obviously declared as a data collection tool. In the initial versions of the installation, participants expressed concern about being video recorded or giving consent for data collection. One reason is that GBV is stigmatized as a private domestic affair (Badcock, 2001). Another concern was that participants also did not know what to expect or what emotional reactions would be once inside the installation. Instead the emphasis was on the creation of a very specific user experience which would allow for most local participants to get an underlying feeling of home, tradition and safety, while the videos would create uncomfortable feelings and the interactive system allowing for a feeling of being in control and in privacy to honestly answer the questions. While the data recorded ensuring anonymity.

On the other hand, the effects on the participants could not be predicted in terms of evoking trauma memories. Social workers also expressed concern that it might encourage more aggression and violence, especially in potential, ex or current perpetrators. Indeed, feedback on one of the videos was that an overwhelming number of participants wanted a gun. This might potentially not have the desired social change. Thus, we are considering using different video versions of the same event to stimulate less aggression. The response will be gauged in the next sets of data collected but also in the overall response of the Social Media comments.

Compromises being in the Wild

In order not to interrupt the flow of interaction and the event a number of demographic and other data was not collected. Thus a compromise in terms of completeness of the data collection was made.

Another challenging area was using cameras to collect video data of participants, where consent have to be obtained prior to the participant entering the installation. Since it is mostly an emotional encounter with participants not knowing what to expect inside and early feedback indicated that participants are unlikely to enter the hut or give consent for video recordings and data collection, we decided against video recordings inside the hut.

Although we recognize the tremendous value of having facial video footage for sentiment and emotion analysis, we can then not assure anonymity. We are also fearing that participants will be less forthcoming in their answers should we declare our intent to collect data. Instead we only made short video recordings and took pictures of participants entering the hut, but they interacted completely privately inside.

In order to elicit more feedback on our model, we invited the participants and audience at the public gatherings into an open platform to discuss the topics of the installation model presented, topics relating to gender-based violence and the technological intervention to contest violence in Namibia.

Although we had to make a number of compromises with our data gathering method for both the hut

installation and the online videos, we received valuable information thus far. We will continue exploring the blending of established research methods and the compromising complexities of real life to achieve our goals.

Acknowledgements

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