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**Challenges and Obstacles of Creating Mobile  
Content for Audiences in Rural Africa:**  
A Case Study of the BBC Hausa Village Road Show

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## Introduction

### Research questions and analytical structure

This paper is an attempt to assess the challenges and obstacles of creating mobile phone content for illiterate audiences in rural Africa using the BBC Hausa village road show of 2009 as a case study. The audience in Hausa for the BBC is particularly important. The BBC's 2009 Audience Research put the total number of audience for the BBC in Nigeria at 26 million adults, of which 20 million listen in Hausa. 87 percent of them, mostly in the rural areas, listen on Short Wave (SW).<sup>1</sup>

More than three quarters of the world's population today are mobile phone subscribers, making it now the primary form of telecommunication in both developed and developing countries. Users access information, express views, produce, share and consume media. As such, news organisations including the BBC strategise on how to maximise the use of mobile phone as platform for content delivery. In 2009, the BBC Africa Services launched their mobile sites. Essentially the move was made with the aim of realizing the BBC's Royal Charter clause of "using new technologies" to fulfil its "public purposes" remit.<sup>2</sup> Today promoting mobile access is a key business objective for output editors across BBC Global News. Since the launch of the 2009 mobile sites, there has been substantial growth in traffic on some of the Africa sites. The most significant increase has been on the BBC Hausa site. From just over 200,000 page-impressions and 3,355 unique users in December 2009, the BBC Hausa mobile site recorded over 6 million page-impressions and over 100,000 unique users in April 2011.

Despite this growth however, the use of mobile phones as a platform for news consumption in Nigeria - which is Africa's biggest mobile market - is relatively low. This is even more so in rural areas where illiteracy and poverty levels are significantly high. Why haven't mobile phones, which have enjoyed such a global record explosion rate, been used as successfully to consume news in Africa?

In 2009 BBC Hausa Service journalists embarked on an extensive in-the-field reporting initiative: the BBC Hausa Village Road Show (*BBC Hausa a Karkara*). For 3 weeks, the team travelled to 22 villages in northern Nigeria by the end of which a total of 27 hours of live content were created. A wide range of themes that were of importance to northern Nigerian rural communities were explored. Although a BBC World Service review (Kantar, 2010)<sup>3</sup> revealed that the Village Road Show was very successful, it was discovered that listening was primarily via Short Wave (SW) radio. There was little or no evidence to suggest that rural audiences - who not only constitute the bulk of BBC Hausa listeners, but who were also the main focus of the *Karkara* initiative - used mobile phones to access the Village road show programmes. By using the BBC Hausa village road show, we can explore the factors driving the challenges and obstacles of creating mobile content.

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<sup>1</sup> BBC Audience Research (2009) showed that its Radio audience was 24.4 million: 19.7 Million in Hausa and 5.9 in English.

<sup>2</sup> *Review of the BBC's Royal Charter: BBC response to a strong BBC, independent of government, 2005.*

<sup>3</sup> BBC Kantar Survey, 2010

The research is organised as follows:

Chapter 1: The wider context of using mobile phones as a platform for content delivery is discussed.

Chapter 2: General issues of media and mobile phones in Africa and Nigeria are explored, highlighting how the media have been transformed since independence.

Chapter 3: This chapter will mainly examine the particular context of the 22 villages featured in the BBC Hausa village road show, reviewing the historical, socio-economic conditions and demographics of the villagers. It will also briefly touch on how they consume news.

Chapter 4: this chapter will attempt to analyse mobile phone data collected during the village road show. We will highlight the failures and challenges that exist in creating mobile content for rural audiences as well as the factors behind the obstacles.

Chapter 5: In this final chapter, leading to the conclusion, the overall lessons of the experience the Village Road show will be assessed. We end by asking what the implications are for international media and specifically for the BBC as they pursue their strategy of using mobile phones as a platform for content delivery.

# Chapter 1

## Mobile phones: A new platform for content delivery

### 1.1 The emergence of a global mobile movement

Currently 5.3 billion people around the world are mobile phone subscribers, meaning that about 77 percent of the world's population are connected.<sup>4</sup> Notably mobile growth is led by China and India, where many see the mobile not just a “want” item but as a “need” item. The long list of functions of the mobile phone is what forms a strong ground for their becoming a necessity. Their uses are being applied increasingly to a wide range of human activities. Arguably, the mobile phone has become the most versatile and convenient means of communication with users accessing information expressing opinions, producing, sharing and consuming media. Mainstream media and broadcasting outlets see in mobile phones an opportunity to further embed themselves in an increasingly over-crowded media environment. These organisations now introduce and implement organisational and editorial changes with a view to adopting mobile phones as a substantive platform for content delivery.

To better understand why mainstream media organisations employ mobiles as a platform for content delivery it is necessary to briefly examine the evolution of the mobile phone and what role the device is playing in today's globalised and communication-hungry world. Since 1973 when Dr Martin Cooper of Motorola demonstrated the world's first handheld mobile using a handset weighing 2kg, a lot has changed in the mobile phone industry. The DynaTAC 8000X mobile phone was the first to be commercially available. It then opened the door to other models. In the 20 years (1990 – 2010) of its increasing global subscription explosion, mobile phones have fundamentally changed how the world communicates. Mobiles have become a dominant technology not just in the developed, but remarkably in the developing world as well, reaching the bottom of the economic pyramid.

Although it is widely believed that the arrival of the internet was the peak of the technological revolution of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, there are increasing views that mobiles are the highlight of today's technological advancement. Henrietta Thompson<sup>5</sup> referred to the mobile as “the world's favourite invention”. The fact that mobile phones are penetrating every society including the remotest areas of human habitation perhaps gives credence to such a belief. The main characteristic which lies at the bottom of mobile success is the innovation-nature of the industry. This is evident both in terms of manufacture of the handset devices themselves (which are regularly churned out) and the range of new services constantly on offer.

### 1.2 What are consumers doing with their mobile phones?

Over the past couple of years in particular, the mobile phone has become a key information communication device. A key element driving this success was the introduction of text

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<sup>4</sup> <http://mobithinking.com/interview-susan-teltscher-itu>

<sup>5</sup> More in Henrietta Thompson's *Phone book : a handy guide to the world's favourite invention* London: Thames & Hudson (2005)

messaging (Short Message Service, SMS). Text messaging surpasses other usages of the mobile. According to a mobile messaging website<sup>6</sup>, 72 percent of mobile subscribers send or receive 664 texts per month vs. making or receiving only 176 phone calls. It was projected that 1.8 trillion texts were sent in 2010. Subsequently the introduction of mobile internet (Wireless Application Protocol, WAP) services and the roll-out of 3G networks significantly enhanced the services on offer. Coupled with improvements in international fibre and network infrastructure, the 3G networks now deliver broadband internet access to an exploding population of users. In 2009, half a billion people accessed mobile internet worldwide. According to mobiThinking<sup>7</sup> by 2011, over 85 percent of new handsets will be able to access the mobile web. Today in the United States and Western Europe, 90 percent of mobile subscribers have an internet-ready phone. (mobiThinking, 2011).

<b>Key Global Telecom Indicators for the World Telecommunication Service Sector in 2010 (all figures are estimates)</b>									
	Global	Developed nations	Developing nations	Africa	Arab States	Asia & Pacific	CIS	Europe	The Americas
<b>Mobile cellular subscriptions (millions)</b>	5,282	1,436	3,846	333	282	2,649	364	741	880
<b>Per 100 people</b>	76.2%	116.1%	67.6%	41.4%	79.4%	67.8%	131.5%	120.0%	94.1%
<b>Fixed telephone lines (millions)</b>	1,197	506	691	13	33	549	74	249	262
<b>Per 100 people</b>	17.3%	40.9%	12.1%	1.6%	9.4%	14.0%	26.6%	40.3%	28.1%
<b>Mobile broadband subscriptions (millions)</b>	940	631	309	29	34	278	72	286	226
<b>Per 100 people</b>	13.6%	51.1%	5.4%	3.6%	9.7%	7.1%	25.9%	46.3%	24.2%
<b>Fixed broadband subscriptions (millions)</b>	555	304	251	1	8	223	24	148	145
<b>per 100 people</b>	8.0%	24.6%	4.4%	0.2%	2.3%	5.7%	8.7%	23.9%	15.5%
<b>Source: International Telecommunication Union (October 2010)</b>									

As stated by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU, 2010)<sup>8</sup>, mobile Internet is expected to overtake the personal computer (PC) as the most popular way to get on the Web within five years. Strategy Analytics (March 2010)<sup>9</sup> too estimated that at the end of 2009 almost 530 million users browsed the mobile Web on their handset. Also the International Data Corporation (IDC, 2009), stated that there were more than 450 million mobile Internet users worldwide in 2009 and this will pass the 1 billion mark by 2013. The reason experts believe it is

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.motomessage.com/mobile-marketing-growth-statistics/>

<sup>7</sup> <http://mobithinking.com/stats-corner/global-mobile-statistics-2011>; accessed 17<sup>th</sup> May 2011

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/ict/statistics/>

<sup>9</sup> <http://blogs.strategyanalytics.com/dcp/category/handsets/>

inevitable that mobile access to the Web will overtake PC access is that mobile phone penetration out-numbers fixed Internet users. In the developing world, only 21 percent of people have internet access. The lowest is in Africa with 9.6 percent. In many developing countries, a majority of mobile Web users are mobile-only, i.e. they do not, or very rarely use a desktop, laptop or tablet to access the Web.

Another factor which drives the popularity of mobile internet is cost. The price of fixed broadband remains prohibitively expensive<sup>10</sup> in some developing countries where income is as low as \$1 per day. This ability of mobile phones to access websites at a cheaper rate than fixed broadband has revolutionised communication, giving users in the lower economic bracket an opportunity to be part of the global communication explosion. The convergence of the two technologies (internet and mobile phone) together with the endless capabilities they provide serves as a major “pull” factor to users.

### **1.3 Mobile phones as a platform for content delivery**

The evolution in the mobile industry shows that communication is still undergoing dramatic and fundamental changes across the world. This revolution is causing profound implications in all facets of life including in the way media is produced and consumed. According to Toni Ahonen, a commentator and author on new and social media, the mobile phone is the “7th Mass Media” (2008). He argues that the convergence of mobiles combining voice, text, video, audio, geo-location, and a host of applications, pose ‘similar to the introduction of the Internet before it, an “inherent threat” to mass media channels’<sup>11</sup>. It is this “threat” that is causing mainstream media and broadcasting outlets to continuously grapple with how mobile technology is having such an impact on media consumption and production.

“Smart” mobile phones not only transmit voice, but also offer an interactive interface on a colour LCD display capable of handling a host of media formats. Such models are equipped with a microphone, camera and internet connection. Users can make calls, and send and receive text and photo messages—including SMS (Short Message Services). Wireless carriers offer a variety of mobile content services, including news, weather, sports scores, stock updates, games, music, e-mail, and the Web. Today, there is talk of a “mobile culture” and “mobile lifestyle” (referring to things like the use of the mobile phone to simplify life). Gesar (2004)<sup>12</sup> argues that the roles and motivating forces of mobile phone use for users have made the device an item which many cannot live without in today’s highly inter-connected and information-overloaded environment. Mobile phones allow users to stay connected while “on the move”. It also provides them an opportunity to fill waiting time or kill a few minutes of free time in between activities. During an empty time period and in between voice calls, a user may use mobile to access content delivered as SMS, play games, or surf the Internet.

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<sup>10</sup> All figures from the ITU estimates, October 2010)

<sup>11</sup> A mobile Voice: *The Use of Mobile Phones in Citizen Media*, 2008

<sup>12</sup> Gesar (2004) in *Motivations for using mobile phone for mass communications and entertainment*, 2008

The use of mobile phone as a form of social behaviour continues to capture the interest of researchers. Academics and practitioners have investigated how the use of mobile phone has gone beyond just a person-to-person talking device. Morris and Ogan (1996)<sup>13</sup> argue that convergent media and digital devices can be used for both interpersonal and mass communications. Studies which have analysed the patterns of mobile phone use for voice and non-voice functions indicate that use of the mobile phone as a source of news and information seems to be common (Ran Wei, 2008)<sup>14</sup>.

Media organisations take such research findings seriously. In a restless and competitive environment like theirs, they do not need any more convincing to accept the potential of mobile phone in broadening an audience base that is already thinning. Media companies therefore see it expedient, if not critical, to embrace mobile phone as a platform for content delivery. In practice many are moving to design new business models as well as introduce new working culture with the aim of delivering benefits to end-users and adding value for the media organisation.<sup>15</sup>

On February 23, 1999 Cable News Network (CNN) launched CNN Mobile<sup>16</sup>. It is believed to be the first mobile telephone news and information service to be available globally with pan-regional content. According to CNN executives, CNN Mobile is “the world's first global value-added service to be built on the Wireless Application Protocol”<sup>17</sup>. At present, operators offer CNN Mobile customers the latest way that they can access CNN while they are on the go and at any time they choose. Since the launch of CNN Mobile, almost all major news organisations have developed significant mobile phone presence. The BBC offers subscribers news and breaking news alerts in a number of its main markets<sup>18</sup>. The BBC mobile site explains step-by-step how the user can access news from their site. Their service uses a version which has been optimised to work on most mobile devices that are WAP enabled. The site also has the “frequently asked questions” page which helps users answer questions like: How can I contact BBC Mobile? How can I get the BBC website on my phone? Is it expensive to browse the BBC on my mobile? How can I get BBC content as cheaply as possible?

Moreover, the relatively new Al Jazeera network also demonstrates awareness of the diversity of the mobile phone market by providing applications (Apps) for Android, Blackberry, Iphone, Samsung and Nokia phones. Launched in 2004 Al Jazeera Mobile site features 24 hour “free” access to Al Jazeera’s live broadcast, “the latest news stories, opinion pieces, features, spotlights, videos and picture galleries from across the world”. The examples of these three international

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<sup>13</sup> Morris and Ogan (1996) in *Motivations for using mobile phone for mass communications and entertainment*, 2008

<sup>14</sup> Ran Wei (2008) in *Motivations for using mobile phone for mass communications and entertainment*, 2008

<sup>15</sup> For the purpose of this research I will use the definition of “mobile content creation” to mean creating specific digital material such as audio, video and textual information for broadcast or delivery on mobile phones.

<sup>16</sup> <http://edition.cnn.com/mobile/presskit/telecel.html>

<sup>17</sup> CNN worked closely with Nokia to develop the platform for CNN Mobile, but the mobile service is independent of mobile phone manufacturer. CNN Interactive commercially licences and markets CNN Mobile, but they partner with wireless carriers to deliver news to subscribers via mobile phones.

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/mobile/web/>

news outlets show that there is a strong, market-driven effort by media organisations to develop mobile sites as platform for content delivery<sup>19</sup>.

#### **1.4 Media executives pushing mobile change**

To further understand why media organisations battle in the mobile field, it may be useful to examine how media executives view the overall changes occurring in the environment they are operating in. So far, there appears to be a consensus among top media managers that mobile phone – as a content delivery platform - cannot and should not be ignored in today's world. They recognize that mobiles serve multiple functions to users and underlying those functions are news, information and entertainment.

If television brought novelty into homes, and radio brought mystery through the airwaves, mobile brings immediacy coupled with the ability of consumers to interact with one another and be part of a global movement that is consciously seeking to shape and redefine their world. Peter Horrocks, the Director of BBC World Service, set out the vision for the future of his organisation by arguing that “overall audience requirements” must be adopted.<sup>20</sup> Unsurprisingly in 2009 the BBC African Service, among other BBC World Service language services, launched their dedicated mobiles sites. Hausa, Swahili, Somali, Portuguese for Africa and the French for Africa language services aimed to grab as many of the existing hundreds of millions of mobile users in Africa – similar to what they had successfully done via radio. In 2010, one of the BBC's global performance objectives was to achieve a “four-fold increase in mobile reach”. For 2011-2012, BBC executives are pushing for journalists to “maintain the quality and distinctiveness of BBC News, whilst maintaining 80% cross platform reach”. James Montgomery (2011), Controller of Digital and Technology for BBC Global News outlined the main areas where BBC journalists must aim to perform well in 2011 and 2012: (1) increase digital growth to become the world's leading digital news provider; (2) create new multilingual and multimedia editorial output and; (3) improve scores for online engagement and social media impact. For the second year running, a concerted push for increase in mobile reach stood out quite prominently as a key business objective.

Louis Gump, vice president of CNN Mobile claimed that despite CNN's mobile service being available in the market since 1999, “mobile was really a bit of a side business for CNN”.<sup>21</sup> He said the mobile presence had created for them “a pretty sizable group of unique users, but we hadn't really focused on building out with apps. We hadn't really focused on ad revenue and we hadn't really focused on the content as much”. According to Gump, with the accelerated growth in global mobile usage, CNN decided to “put together a very thoughtful strategy”. They changed to a comprehensive global strategy by launching applications (apps) for mobile devices including the iPhone, iPad, Android tablet and Android phone apps. For executives like Gump, mobile phones intrinsically enrich the ways in which consumers can access their news. He believes that

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<sup>19</sup> <http://english.aljazeera.net/mobile/>

<sup>20</sup> Peter Horrocks in *The End of Fortress Journalism* (2009).

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.fiercemobilecontent.com/story/cnn-mobiles-vp-takes-both-sides-mobile-web-vs-native-app-debate/2011-05-17>

“not only is it enriching the consumer experience but it is also contributing content that we never could have had otherwise”.<sup>22</sup>

For Al Jazeera, the reason for the launch of their mobile platform is simple: “mobile information delivery for end-users is proving one of the most popular mobile value-added services everywhere in the world”. According to Al Anstey, Director of Media Development at Al Jazeera, “as the mobile market continues to grow at an extraordinary rate, and with the rising number of smart phones available, mobile applications have become an important vehicle for the distribution and consumption of news. Al Jazeera has made this a key focus and is working to make its content available on all major mobile platforms.”<sup>23</sup> Safdar Mustafa, Head of Mobile Media Unit at Al Jazeera reinforces their mobile strategy by adding that “as we make our news widgets available on Nokia and Samsung devices, we are able to further expand our reach into the growing mobile application markets globally.” Al Jazeera’s approach is in effect leveraging the “Al Jazeera brand to repurpose the existing Al Jazeera TV channel and the web site content to deliver services through the mobile as the most cost effective delivery channel”<sup>24</sup>.

In my view, although mobile subscription is high in Africa, the idea of mobile as a platform for content delivery on the continent requires a separate set of propositions and considerations if the medium is to match the success rate of mobile usage there. Part of this reason is that Africa has a unique media history and attitude toward news consumption which although are slowly evolving, still remain principally the same, especially in rural areas. We shall now explore this theme in the following chapter.

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<sup>22</sup> <http://www.fiercemobilecontent.com/story/cnn-mobiles-vp-takes-both-sides-mobile-web-vs-native-app-debate/2011-05-17> (accessed 1/6/2011)

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.almajaztelecom.com/mobile.aspx?t=3> (accessed 1/6/2011)

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.almajaztelecom.com/mobile.aspx?t=3> (accessed 1/6/2011)

## Chapter 2:

### From traditional to mobile media in Africa

In this chapter, I will explore the broad issues of the media in Africa and Nigeria, against the historical background of a colonial legacy. The chapter highlights how media have been transformed since independence and how trends in today's world of portable digital devices have led to questions about the future of the hitherto deeply popular traditional media. An overview of the issues of media will enhance our understanding of media consumption behaviour in both urban and rural Africa.

#### 2.1. Africa's Media: A Colonial Legacy

The countries which make up sub-Saharan Africa are diverse in many respects. Geographically they stretch from wide coastal regions through to the arid Sahara desert. Linguistically they comprise more than 2,000 languages and dialects, and thousands of ethnic groups live there, each with their own unique culture. Partly because of their joint colonial experience, African countries have suffered from similar socio-economic and political conditions. Countries experienced artificial border creations and most became independent in the 1960's. Despite the diversity of its countries though, the media in Africa share some common traits. The media is unique in the sense that arguably, in no other region of the world have the media been forced to endure change so rapidly. Africans have shifted from face-to face communication to electronic communication.

Before the advent of colonialism, Africa had an oral culture. The word "had great power because it made things come into being" (Ong, 1995)<sup>25</sup>. Knowledge was memorised by bards who specialised in the storage and transmission of information<sup>26</sup>. Into this world of traditional oral culture came the colonialists. Imbued with the values of modernity and a belief in the superiority of the modern industrial state, they created a new political, social and economic order in Africa. European powers met in a conference in Berlin 1885 to sign formal agreements detailing how African territories would be carved up and how African lands would be expropriated<sup>27</sup>. At the end of colonial rule, African States were left a legacy of disparate ethnic and religious groupings with little or no cultural cohesiveness and little shared history save their common colonial experience (Bourgault, 1995).<sup>28</sup>

The peculiarities of this colonial legacy imposed upon post-colonial governments the huge task of forging national consciousness and national identity among disparate groups of people. The

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<sup>25</sup> Words were used to unify the people, to declare war on the enemy, to praise the lineage of a valiant warrior, to invoke the gods and to record occurrences and events such as famines and the reign of a ruler.

<sup>26</sup> It was said that knowledge resided in those who transmitted information with artistic flourish through accepted stylistic conventions. In Africa, bards, storytellers, village historians used words to recount the genealogies of people, to tell of their histories and their struggles, and to impart moral lessons. Their role was also to entertain as much as impart information.

<sup>27</sup> The borders created then bore no relation to ethnic divisions, common history or other factors on which polities had been built.

<sup>28</sup> Bourgault, L.M: Mass Media in Sub-Saharan Africa, USA, 1995

single most significant duty of the mass media which was mainly government-owned became the nurturing of these new national identities. Governments employed managers who would run the media houses according to their political agenda. Heads of broadcast services were often called to the Ministry of Information to decide on policy or editorial matters. A lot of directives also came directly from the authorities. According to LeVine (1995)<sup>29</sup>, media managers had to demonstrate their “loyalty and obedience and sensitivity to the demands of those in authority [while] undermining the values of excellence, independence, originality, and goal orientation”<sup>30</sup>.

## 2.2 Radio in Post-Colonial Africa

Radio was introduced to Africa during the colonial period. The first radio broadcast on the continent began in 1920 in South Africa. In 1927, the British East Africa Company started a BBC relay broadcasting from Nairobi, Kenya. In 1932, the British established the Empire Service which was relayed in Salisbury, Southern Rhodesia (now Harare, Zimbabwe), in Southern Africa and from Lagos, Nigeria in West Africa<sup>31</sup>. Broadcasting in Africa was largely created as part of colonial policies. Interested in building an African audience for what was seen as a political agenda, the British promoted the use of African vernaculars<sup>32</sup>. At the end of the colonial period, African media organisations were modelled along the lines of their former colonial broadcast services<sup>33</sup>.

That remained the practice until the wave of privatization of the media and cry for more press freedom hit the African continent in the 1990's. Political developments since the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union led many governments to allow the establishment of private radio stations. Related to this was a parallel move to decentralise national radio services. Also agitation for private access to airwaves against the government with their apparatus of controlled media gained prominence around this time. By around 1992 countries like Senegal, Zambia, Mali, Burkina Faso, Ghana Nigeria and Kenya had given licences for the establishment of private radio stations. Today there are thousands of radio stations in Africa – making radio the most popular means of news consumption on the continent. Audiences have access to news and information from state-owned stations, private-owned FM, and grass-root or

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<sup>29</sup> LeVine cited in Mass Media in Sub-Saharan Africa, 1971

<sup>30</sup> Media managers had to comply even if those directives were in conflict with broadcasting standards for fear of losing their jobs.

<sup>31</sup> The French began broadcasting sparingly in 1931 in Madagascar but earnestly with the establishment of Radio Dakar in 1939. Although small-scale, the first private radio operation was in 1937 by some Jesuits priests at the Albert College in Leopoldville (now Kinshasa).

<sup>32</sup> Through the Nairobi broadcasting service, the British had begun broadcasting in Kikamba and Kikuyu and then in Ewe, Twi and Hausa in West Africa.

<sup>33</sup> For example, many countries with a British legacy inherited at independence the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) model. Broadcasting on the continent then was chiefly state-controlled, heavily government-subsidized, and urban based. Although originally designed to provide some autonomy from central government organisation and pressure, most corporations were abolished after independence and placed directly under government information ministries.

community radio stations. According to Myer (2008)<sup>34</sup>, 2008 demographic statistics show that the radio set is a common household possession in Africa<sup>35</sup>.

Local radio stations in Africa exist side by side with international radio stations. For more than 50 years, different international broadcasting organisations have maintained the practice of providing news in English and local languages to Africans. The BBC, Voice of America, (VOA), Deutsche Welle (DW) and most recently, Radio France Internationale (RFI) are popular and have penetrated urban and rural Africa. Services of these international media were initially offered via Short Wave (SW) but in the 1990's they took advantage of the liberalisation of media on the continent by going into partnerships with local radio stations. FM stations re-broadcast content by foreign news outlets, giving both parties mutual business advantages.

Since its introduction, radio has always been seen as the most effective and widely used communication tool in Africa. The arrival of internet first and now mobile phones however, has begun the process of eroding the supremacy of radio as the primary source of media consumption. As the media landscape continues to change, questions about the future of radio are asked both by news makers and news consumers.

### **2.3 Television as an elite and urban phenomenon**

Just like radio broadcasting, television too had been mainly government-owned in post-colonial Africa. The television age began in Africa in 1959 with the establishment of WNTV in Ibadan, Nigeria. In most other African countries, TV was established a few years after independence, mainly around the mid-1960s. Television was then seen as a symbol of national status. However, penetration of TV in Africa has been low, largely due to high cost and poor supply of electricity especially in rural areas. By the 1970's TV broadcasting in Africa tended to have two functions: (1) it served as the President's personal address system (or that of the party in power) and, (2) it provided cheap entertainment to consumers.

Over the last ten years the African broadcast industry has slowly been liberalizing and recently the pace of this process has quickened. New free-to-air channels are planned in an increasing number of countries and there are new entrants to the Pay-TV market which has begun to grow in size. Today satellite TV companies like the South Africa-headquartered DSTV provide dozens of domestic and foreign TV channels to millions of homes on the continent. Despite the recent increase in reach, the medium of television in sub-Saharan Africa continues to be an elite and urban phenomenon. Television is still to a large extent beyond the reach of the hundreds of millions of Africa's poor rural population.

### **2.4 African Press as champions of change**

Any narrative on the media in Africa is not complete without the mention of the continent's press. The press was seen as instrumental in unleashing radical views that were to influence

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<sup>34</sup> Myers, M: Radio and Development in Africa (2008)

<sup>35</sup> In Nigeria, the level of household ownership of radio sets was estimated 90%, in Senegal at 91%, in Kenya 92%, in Tanzania 93%, in Mozambique 90%, and in South Africa 89%.

public political discourse. The story of newspapers in Africa began with West Africa in the Anglophone countries. The oldest newspaper in sub-Saharan Africa is believed to be the *Royal Gazette and Sierra Leone Advertiser*, first published in 1801. This was followed by the *Royal Gold Coast Gazette* (1822) and then the *Liberia Herald* (1820's). Ainslie (1966)<sup>36</sup> argues that the vigour of the early press in West Africa can be attributed to three factors: (1) the presence of a relatively well-educated black Africans returning to Africa after having lived abroad, (2) the growth of missionary activities across the region and, (3) the absence of a white/European settler population in West Africa which might have impeded press growth in West Africa as it did in other regions of the continent.<sup>37</sup>

Early newspapers were used to educate and entertain. But soon the dominant aim of newspapers became political protest aimed mainly against colonial officials. The 1930's were seen as an exceptional period of press fertility in West Africa with the establishment of many newspapers. Also the arrival of Nigeria's Nnamdi Azikiwe at the journalistic scene further inspired the press. Azikiwe had studied in the United States where he had absorbed the black American political currents of the 1930's. He had acquired a sensational race-conscious style derived from black American journalism.

All appeared to be set for a vibrant media until the euphoria of independence suddenly died out. By the 70's and 80's, African governments had become largely authoritarian, and military rule became the vogue. With these came the stifling of the media independence. Suppression was carried out in different forms through legal, bureaucratic and commercial mechanisms. Although a large portion of the newspapers was privately-owned, most media managers imposed censorship upon themselves. They exercised enormous caution in treating matters to do with the government.

Since the 1990's however, print journalism has been able to respond rapidly to political changes in Africa. Democracy gained ground and private ownership of newspapers increased with much less harassment and intimidation of the press. Increasingly today, journalists defend the principles of democracy and advocate respect for human rights.

Apart from the 90's political changes on the continent, another factor which has impacted on African print journalism is the emergence of a globalised world of instantaneous communication. Quick access to news and information became possible with the arrival of new communication technologies. Like other global audiences Africans too started to receive "breaking news". Local newspapers which went to print every 24 hours began to operate in this new environment. Most African newspapers have responded by having an online version of their service; and a lot can now be accessed on mobile devices. Like TV however, newspapers in Africa are still mainly seen as urban and elitist; they hardly reach remote rural areas where the economic realities of the villagers may not afford them such "luxury items".

## **2.5 Africa's market in today's mobile world**

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<sup>36</sup> Ainslie, R: *The press in Africa: communications past and present*, 1966

<sup>37</sup> Unlike in the western region, in southern Africa, Anglophone Central and East Africa, the press had been a European creation.

Mobile phones have perhaps had the most profound change on communications in Africa<sup>38</sup>. According to the *Guardian* online, Africa was the “first continent to have more mobile phone users than fixed-line subscribers”<sup>39</sup> in the world. When compared to other markets, the African mobile industry experienced explosive growth in a relatively short time span. Figures from the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) indicate that at the end of 2006, 33% of the world’s mobile subscribers are in the developed world with the remaining 67% in the developing world<sup>40</sup>. In June 2008, the number of mobile phone users in Africa was said to be 300 million. Africa’s mobile phone projections have been strong, showing that mobile penetration was expected to increase from 15.3% in 2005 to 31% by 2011. The number of Africa’s mobile subscribers was expected to grow at a compound average growth rate of 13% between 2007 and 2011<sup>41</sup>. The huge growth in mobile figures in Africa is related to the use of mobile phones to access information, express opinion and produce and consume media. In a survey (2010, BBC) one East African mobile user said that being without a mobile for a week was equal to killing him, explaining further that, “I practically do *everything* on my phone”<sup>42</sup>. Users such as these produce their own content and use the same distribution systems to share it and interact with others. They are sharply aware of new applications (apps) daily introduced into the market which facilitate the generation and broadcast of content.

Although mobile phones are not the only device to access the internet in African markets, it is one of the most important ones. Users mention three reasons for this: (1) Convenience: Users can to a large extent access anything, anytime, anywhere. They have their mobiles with them all the time, hence they can access the internet at all times; and there is no need to travel to the nearest cyber cafe; (2) Control: People are in control of what they consume and when they consume it. There is privacy as mobile internet access is a personal experience without third-party interference which may be present at cyber cafes; (3) Cost: Charges are perceived to be lower than for an internet connection at home or at cyber cafes. Although many users are not sure about the pricing system, all the same they believe that charges are more honest, as the pay-per-volume downloaded model ensures that users are just being charged for what they have consumed<sup>43</sup>.

## 2.6 Complexity of the mobile field

Despite the evident opportunities mobile phones bring, news organisations recognise that the mobile field *is* a complex one. When compared to its usage growth in Africa, the extent to which mobile phones are used as a platform for news consumption is considerably low. For example, despite having almost 50 millions of radio listeners between them, the two biggest BBC African languages services - Hausa and Swahili - delivered only 227,277 and 528,400 page impressions with 2,959 and 7,862 unique users in April 2010. This may be due to a number of factors which

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<sup>38</sup> Today, mobile data and broadband technologies are increasingly being used as a substitute for poor or non-existent fixed-line infrastructure.

<sup>39</sup> <http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2004/may/05/citynews.newmedia> (accessed 26th May 2011)

<sup>40</sup> <http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/ict/statistics/>

<sup>41</sup> African Mobile Market Forecast (2007-2011), Bharat Books (2007)

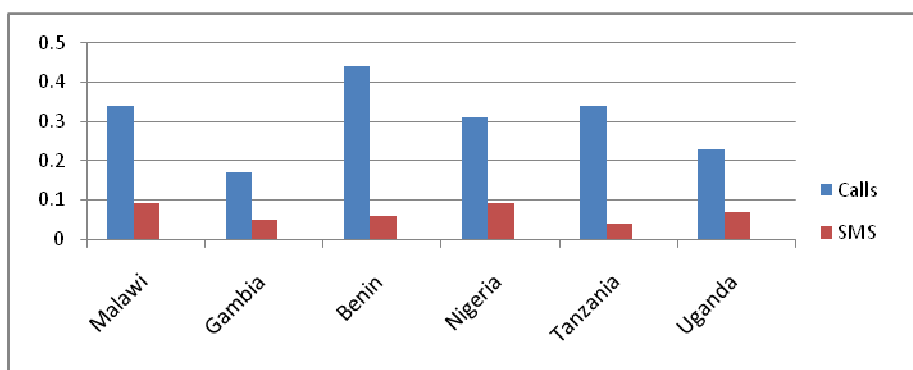
<sup>42</sup> Increasing mobile news consumption in Africa, BBC Global News Report, 2010

<sup>43</sup> *Increasing mobile news consumption in Africa*, BBC Global News Report, 2010

include (1) fragmentation of the mobile market, (2) cost to the end user and (3) the editorial suitability of content.

Of the three factors above, the first is widely seen as the most problematic to news organisations. Mobile technology is an extremely fragmented area. This makes mobile application development and use difficult and expensive for media organizations. To date there is little evidence that media organizations partake in the development of mobile applications. Fragmentation means in part the inability to write a single version of a mobile application that can run on every (or at least a majority of) mobile device available. This fragmentation is caused by a number of factors: hardware diversity; the presence of additional hardware (camera, voice recorder) which vary from one phone to another; connectivity options - which means the ability to connect devices to each other in order to transfer data back and forth (Bluetooth, IR, GPRS); platform diversity - which is the operating system (OS) and software platform designed for specific phones (Symbian, Nokia OS, RIM OS, Apple OS X, PalmOS, Mobile Linux, Android, etc.); the divergence in application programming interface (API) standards – which is a particular set of rules and specifications that software programs can follow to communicate with each other; differences in multimedia support; user-preference diversity (language and accessibility requirement); and some more technical variation problems.

If fragmentation is a headache for the news providers, on the other hand, cost is a major concern to consumers. Mobile costs in Africa are relatively high when compared to other continents and as percentage of disposable income. So as news organisations adopt mobile as a viable platform for content delivery especially in markets like Africa, user affordability remains a worrisome matter. This is irrespective of the notion that “low per capita income does not necessarily equate to a low distribution of mobile phones” and “old age and illiteracy are not barriers to gaining the basic benefits of mobile phones” (Jackson, 2009). Below is a table illustrating the cost of calls and SMS (in US\$) during peak hours in some African markets in 2008.



Source: Jackson et al, (2009)<sup>44</sup>

Call and SMS costs have not changed much since 2008. Costs are equally high for users engaging in interactivity with the media organisation, For example the time to upload an image to a news website via mobile in say Nigeria (May 2011) can last up to 5 minutes and depending on the service provider, the charge could be as high as \$3 or more.

<sup>44</sup> Use of social media to share knowledge on agricultural impact, planning, assessment and learning, Jackson et al, 2009

Apart from the cost to the end user, the type or editorial suitability of content is another factor adding to the complexity of mobile content generation and consumption. News has traditionally been offered as a package via radio or television. Also, over the years consumers have become accustomed to a particular format or style of content. For reasons including the two highlighted above, mobile content largely differs from content that's offered on radio and television. In creating mobile content, editorial leaders for example ask questions like: what should be offered on mobile to an audience that traditionally listens on radio? What will be the cost to the end user? If a 30 minutes news and current affairs programme is not suited to mobile because of cost implications, what new product(s) could be created instead? What should be the editorial focus of the content? What is the overall editorial and business proposition? Answers to such questions will vary from one news organisation to the other and will depend on several variables.

## **2.7 Nigeria's media environment**

Nigeria's media environment is similar to many others in Africa, but we will focus on this market for this study. It will furnish us with a specific and better understanding of the context within which international media organisations are operating in the most populous country in Africa. It will also give an idea as to why Nigeria is an important market for international media outlets to create mobile content in an indigenous language (Hausa).

Nigeria is the world's 7<sup>th</sup> largest oil producer, with huge gas reserves. A federal republic of 36 states and a capital territory, Nigeria's population is approximately 150 million. Nigeria's print and broadcast media sector is among the largest and most robust in sub-Saharan Africa. According to the website of the country's broadcast media regulatory body, the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC),<sup>45</sup> there are 100 radio stations and 147 television, 35 cable, five direct-to-home, and four direct broadcast satellite stations on air. While the landscape of Nigerian television is dominated by state-owned channels, listenership of several private radio stations exceeds that of the state broadcaster, and Nigeria has a vibrant privately-owned press that is often outspoken in its criticism of state and federal government.

Radio is the most important medium for Nigerians, followed by television and print media. Radio is estimated to be used by 83% of the population weekly. According to a 2009 report by MediaReach OMD<sup>46</sup>, usage is particularly high among poor, rural populations and Hausa-speaking northern Nigerians, where the relatively high cost of print media and television sets, the lack of electricity, and low literacy rates present barriers to other media vehicles.<sup>47</sup>

Media ownership plays a significant role in the coverage, prominence, and objectivity of news in the Nigerian media, particularly broadcast media, which is dominated by state-owned stations.

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<sup>45</sup> [www.nbc.gov.ng/aboutus.php](http://www.nbc.gov.ng/aboutus.php)

<sup>46</sup> MediaReach OMD is a media Independent agency, which specialises in media planning; buying & control services in West and Central Africa.

<sup>47</sup> Television ownership is highest in urban areas, according to the same source. According to 2008 data from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics<sup>47</sup>, Nigeria's literacy rate - defined as the percentage of people age 15 or older who can read or write - was 48.8% for women and 71.5%, or 60.1% overall.

Since Nigeria's return to democracy in 1998, state-owned media tend to be largely partisan and give prominence to issues favourable to the government in power. During election campaigning, opposition parties often complain that they receive little or no attention from the state-owned media and that when they do, it is too negative. Private media give more balanced coverage to issues which may not be favourable to, or in the interest of, the government. However, according to a 2010 report by the Committee to Protect Journalists<sup>48</sup> some Nigerian journalists rely on financial support from influential public figures and openly draw salaries from politicians. This undermines the independence of the press and results in low quality reporting.

It is not just state-owned media journalists who are said to be compromised. Since the liberalization of Nigeria's media industry in the 90's, private radio and television stations have sprung up; and most of these media organisations are owned by powerful business people with strong ties or connections to government. Editorial agenda tend to actively protect the interests of the media owners. Also, the commercially driven, private media are very often loyal to sponsors (i.e. advertisers and/or government), rather than to the public interest.<sup>49</sup> This has produced a cynical public who often believe that they are not adequately informed of certain crucial issues that may affect them; or even if they are, the information is not objective and/or accurate.

It is widely accepted that it is the need for credible and trusted news which had led a significant number of Nigeria's population to turn to international media organisations like the BBC, VOA and RFI, even as ironic as it may sound, for local news and information. "BBC", "VOA" are household brands with millions of audiences continuing to consume their programmes on a daily basis. In today's age of sharp, digital quality FM, the much poorer audibility of BBC and VOA's programmes via Short Wave (SW) is not a hindrance to listening. Taking into account the public's mistrust of local media, the size of their audiences in that market, as well as Nigeria's political and economic importance in regional and world politics, international media organizations often report Nigeria with added fervour.<sup>50</sup>

## **2.8 Nigeria: Africa's mobile giant and its rural market**

Nigeria's size makes it an obvious attraction to mobile service providers. Last year, Nigeria overtook South Africa<sup>51</sup> as the biggest mobile phone market in Africa with mobile phone usage now exceeding 100 million. The demand for mobile phones was growing so rapidly that at times local operators had to stop selling subscriptions in order to expand capacity. According to Nigeria's National Communication Commission (NCC), mobile phone subscription will continue to rise at a considerable rate. Market growth indicates that in 2009 mobile usage was 85,845,000; in 2010 it rose to 105,811,400 and this year it is expected to reach 121,717,300.

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<sup>48</sup> Committee to Protect Journalists is a New York-based non-partisan organization that monitors press freedoms globally.

<sup>49</sup> Consequently, some private media organizations do not report stories which conflict with the interests of their owners. Sometimes they are even said to fabricate stories with the aim of "laundering" the image or interests of their owners or sponsors.

<sup>50</sup> The business and editorial benefits to international news derive from reporting Nigeria are big. The political advantages to their home countries (e.g. UK, USA) are also numerous.

<sup>51</sup> BBC Global News: Mobile Content Provision for Developing Markets, Re-Prioritization of 2<sup>nd</sup> Tier Markets, 2009

Projections for 2014 are put at 145,855,000 (TNS Global Telecoms Insights 2009).<sup>52</sup> Internet-enabled mobile phones have become an important point of access to the internet, particularly for Nigerian youth, many of whom have increasingly incorporated social media into their lives.

The sheer size of the Nigerian market is big enough an incentive for mobile service providers to make the necessary infrastructure available in all corners of the country. For the first time, communication has reached some of the remotest rural communities. It is not unusual now to see a mobile communication mast in the middle of a village where there are no schools or hospitals. High poverty rates notwithstanding, Nigerian rural communities are today forming part of the global communication space. However, mobile usage among rural dwellers is essentially low in comparison to the wealthier and literate urbanites.

As international media organisations compete to capture as much of the African mobile market as they can, Nigeria is at the top of their priority list. Organisations like the BBC, VOA, RFI and DW all have a broad mobile strategy. Will their objective be easily achieved specifically in rural Africa where most of their audiences reside?

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<sup>52</sup> <http://www.tnsglobal.com/market-research/technology-research/gti.aspx>

## **Chapter 3:**

### **The Village Road show as an exploration of the BBC Hausa audience**

The aim of this chapter is to explore the particular context of the 22 villages featured in the BBC Hausa village road show, and to review the demographic and socio-economic conditions of the rural dwellers in Northern Nigeria. The chapter will attempt to show that poverty is an integral part of the rural communities of that region, tracing its historical context from some few years before the advent of colonialism, through the colonial period to the present. It will also highlight the aims of the BBC Hausa village road and how the socio-economic conditions of the rural communities formed the themes of the BBC Hausa programmes; and how the programmes were consumed by the village audiences.

#### **3.1. Rural north: a persistent peasant economy**

Rural dwellers in northern Nigeria are mainly peasant farmers. The basic unit of production is the household. As a typical feature of peasant economy, the demographic composition of the household is of paramount importance. This is because it determines the volume of output, the percentage of output consumed by the household and, thus, the net remainder to be used for investment or savings. The majority of household income in northern Nigerian villages is derived from agricultural production, which means that the household is dependent upon its own labour.

Historical conditions under which the rural population of northern Nigeria was initially incorporated into a world of capitalist system of exchange and production laid the foundation for the persistence of peasant poverty up to today. These conditions were characterised by rural inequality and rural exploitation. Agricultural production for the capitalist market commenced in West Africa long before colonial rule (Mobogunje, 1988). The period from 1850, which witnessed the rapid growth of this type of production, was broadly characterised by a highly competitive form of European merchants' capital in the West African coast.<sup>53</sup>

#### **3.2 Colonialism shaping rural economy**

When colonialism was imposed in wider Africa, formal colonial control was established over the producing regions. Well before then however, rural agricultural producers engaged in commodity as well as subsistence production and reproduced themselves through a complex set of production relations. Maize, guinea corn, millet, sorghum were some of the food crops produced by families at the end of each harvest. The state controlled the means of production, land, and appropriated through taxation the surplus product. In return the state guaranteed the continued existence of the conditions of production and reproduction.

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<sup>53</sup> Capital and class: Peasant differentiation in Northern Nigeria ; Journal of Peasant Studies, Volume 9

The conquest and colonisation of northern Nigeria was partly a continuation of the earlier expansion of British merchant capital on the coast and partly the continuation of an older, more wide-ranging story in the history of British capitalism. From its earliest days, the development of the British industrial economy had been based heavily on the production of textiles for the home market and for export. The conquest and colonisation of northern Nigeria was significantly backed by the industrial capitalists of the Lancashire cotton industry because the region was known to be a major cotton-producing one. It was reported on numerous occasions that northern Nigeria was capable of exporting vast quantities of raw cotton lint.

With the co-operation of the British government, in 1902 the Lancashire cotton interests sponsored a trading firm, the British Cotton Growers' Association (BCGA), to oversee the development of a cotton lint export industry in northern Nigeria and in other appropriate areas of the Empire.<sup>54</sup> In their attempt to gain a foothold in the northern Nigerian market, BCGA pressed for monopoly buying rights. In 1905, the Colonial Office granted this request. The BCGA then asked other merchant firms to act as its buying agents, buying cotton at a fixed price on a commission basis (Hogendorn, 1978)<sup>55</sup>. When the railroad reached Kano in northern Nigeria in 1912, rural producers swamped the rail sidings with cotton and groundnuts – cash crops headed for Britain. As an incentive to farmers, BCGA agents would travel across the region and offer salt and cloth which came from Europe as gifts to the cotton grower. In return the grower was expected to sell their cotton to the agent at harvest (Hogendorn, 1978).

### **3.3 Subsistence agriculture to cash crop production**

Inevitably, production shifted from subsistence agriculture to cash crop production. Producers were offered cash as an advance payment to be deducted from the sum the producer received on delivery of his crop at harvest. Each year the rural producer found himself requiring larger and larger sums of ready cash. Part of this need was related to taxation, the incidence of which not only steadily climbed, but the collection of which was said to be due before the cotton harvest. More and more, the rural producer was caught short, already having spent the cash realised from the previous year's harvest. To this end the conditions of the extension of the production of agricultural commodities for sale to European firms were established.

When in 1926 cotton sales for export dropped by half due to labour unrest in Britain, great uncertainty in the home cotton market was created. Consequently, BCGA stopped offering advances to producers. As a result many farmers resorted to the sale of what little grains they had in order to get cash for tax payments. The grains were mainly for household consumption. Farmers who found themselves without grain reserves were forced to provide labour in their more fortunate neighbours' farms in order to find an immediate source of cash to purchase food and pay tax to the state. By the late 1930s, the situation had so deteriorated that the colonial

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<sup>54</sup> *Empire Cotton Growing Review, 1924, Hogendorn, 1978:1.*

<sup>55</sup> The establishment of this monopoly market was the first step in the BCGA's eventual control and integration of northern Nigeria into full-scale cotton production. Exploring additional ways of control and monopoly, BCGA then instigated abolishing the collection of taxes in kind and local currencies. The fact that tax now had to be paid in British currency meant farmers had to sell cotton to the BCGA in order to get the British currency they require to pay tax to the government. Also put in place were other additional colonial authorities' activities to aid the cotton industry. These included the building of a railroad from the south Nigerian seaport of Lagos to the north.

administration commissioned a major study of indebtedness in a principal cotton growing area. This report demonstrated that between 30 and 40 per cent of all rural producers were indebted and that they could not get through an annual agricultural cycle without borrowing<sup>56</sup>. Inquiries as to why people borrowed showed the three most frequent causes to be food shortages, marriage expenses and tax payment — three crucial instances in the social reproduction of the rural household.<sup>57</sup>

Another study conducted in 1957 showed that 68 percent of the total rural population sought loans. Rates of interest were high. Food and ceremonial costs remained two of the most important reasons for borrowing. Many small rural farmers had to continue borrowing in order to meet their obligations. Surveying sixteen villages in two provinces, the 1957 report indicated that 38 percent of all informants had exhausted their grain supplies by April which was before the beginning of the planting season. Household heads had to borrow or sell their labour to stay alive. By May which was the first month of sowing, the figures had risen to 80 per cent, adding the vast majority of rural producers to the ranks of the hungry and indebted. These figures remain proof of the fundamental changes that had taken place in rural Hausa society (*Vigo, 1957*).

### **3.4 Post Independence poverty in rural Nigeria**

By 1960 when Nigeria became an independent state, the vicious cycle of loan and poverty in the villages of northern Nigeria had become deeply entrenched. Rural dwellers had been effectively reduced to poor subsistence farmers. The discovery of oil in Nigeria which was once seen as an opportunity to earn billions of foreign dollars that would accelerate national development became a disappointment. The attention of the new leaders of the independent Nigerian state was further diverted from agriculture which used to be the main income earner for the country. More than 75% of Nigeria's income is today derived from the sale of crude oil. The estimated US\$200m earned per day is spent on running the government - from the federal, to the state and down to the local units, shared through an agreed fiscal allocation formula.

Oil wealth in Nigeria has failed to bring the development commensurate to the billions of dollars the country earns. Deep-rooted corruption along with weak system of public governance is prevalent. Nigeria's per capita income of US \$1,160 is one of the lowest in the world. According

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<sup>56</sup> Capital and class: Peasant differentiation in Northern Nigeria ; Journal of Peasant Studies, Volume 9

<sup>57</sup> The study also revealed the two main ways to obtain a loan among rural farmers. First, through the mortgaging of un-harvested crops to rich farmer/trader for a quantity of grain; and second, taking an advance from a produce buyer against an un-harvested export crop. In the first case, a needy man borrowed a given quantity of grain in return for twice that amount at harvest. Given this rate of repayment, from the time of harvest the borrower faced the next annual agricultural cycle with an already depleted grain store. As a result it was likely that he would run short of grain once again and have to resort to borrowing. Like labouring on another man's farm, mortgaging food crops established a vicious cycle of exploitation and poverty for the borrower. In the case of taking an advance from a produce buyer, the cost of borrowing was more difficult to calculate, as theoretically an advance was interest free. In reality however, it carried its own hidden costs. For example, a producer already mortgaged to a buyer had little alternative should the lender try to short weight him or offer an uncompetitive price at harvest. Furthermore, buyers rarely awarded the full advance in cash, forcing the seller to accept overpriced goods in partial payment. These in turn had to be sold at a loss in the village market to obtain much needed cash.

to the World Development Indicators of 2007 published by the World Bank, more than 70 per cent of Nigerians live on less than US\$1 per day. This impairs their ability to afford many of life's necessities. Disparities in poverty among Nigeria's numerous ethnolinguistic groups and between the states of the federation and local governments are marked. Poverty in rural areas especially in northern Nigeria is remarkably high. Rates were put at 64% in 2004.<sup>58</sup>

Since its return to democratic rule in 1998 following decades of military interventions, Nigeria's political leaders have been struggling to deliver the much talked-about "dividends of democracy". Bad governance and poor infrastructure have impeded economic activities not just in urban areas but most significantly in rural areas – where the majority of the country's population lives. Basic amenities like schools, hospitals, water, roads, and electricity are conspicuously absent in most villages across northern Nigeria.

### **3.5 The BBC Hausa Village Road Show: Engaging rural communities**

As highlighted in the previous chapter, radio is estimated to be used by 83% of Nigeria's population weekly. Usage is particularly high among poor, rural populations and Hausa-speaking northern Nigerians where the relatively high cost of print media and television sets, the lack of electricity, and low literacy rates present barriers to other platforms. For more than 50 years, international news outlets like the BBC and VOA have become household brands, with millions of audiences continuing to consume their programmes via Short Wave (SW) radio.

As part of its objective "to be closer to the audiences" in Nigeria, in 2006 the BBC established the Abuja production bureau. The BBC Hausa Service transferred half of the output it produced from the London headquarters to Abuja.<sup>59</sup> By 2008, more than 98% of reports emanating from Nigeria came mainly from urban centres like Abuja, Kano, Kaduna, Maiduguri, Sokoto, and Jos. Following an in-house editorial evaluation at the beginning of 2009, the BBC Hausa editorial leadership acknowledged the need to focus on rural Northern Nigeria – where the bulk of their audiences reside. BBC Hausa organised a village road show with a view to filling the editorial "gap". The aims of the village road show included:

*"(a) to re-connect with the rural audiences - demonstrating to them they are still very much significant contributors to BBC Hausa programmes; (b) to publicise and showcase what the BBC Hausa Service is about i.e. not just to urban listeners but the rural audiences as well; (c) give rural audiences an opportunity to present their stories to the world as well as those in power - thereby promoting general debate on issues affecting their lives and; (d) as part of journalists' job*

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<sup>58</sup> The then Central Bank Governor of Nigeria Professor Charles Soludo disclosed in 2008, that "very high level of poverty is essentially a northern Nigeria phenomenon". He said that their research showed that Jigawa State tops the list with 95% high incidence of poverty, followed by Kebbi with 89.7%, Kogi 88.6%, Bauchi 86.3%, Kwara 85.2%, Yobe 83.3% Zamfara 80.9 % Gombe 77%, Sokoto 76.8% and Adamawa 71.7%. (Northern Development Initiative [NDI] 2008)

<sup>59</sup> Journalists were recruited to produce and present two of the four daily Hausa radio programmes. They were also expected to be field reporters in the city, feeding into the two other Hausa programmes produced in London. The output by the Abuja journalists was complimented by content from an additional dozen BBC Hausa reporters across Nigeria.

*of holding public officers to account, assess the issues of development and democracy from the grass root in Africa's most populous country*<sup>60</sup>.

In March 2009, a team of about twenty journalists and production staff set out to broadcast live programmes from some of the remotest villages in northern Nigeria. The 22 villages covered were spread across the North East, North West and North Central parts of Nigeria. Editorial themes ranged from education, to health, road networks, water, local economy, agriculture, political participation, etc. I formed part of the BBC Hausa production team that travelled more than 7,500 kilometres through some of the worst roads in Nigeria. Everyday the Karkara team visited one village. Prior to the commencement of our journey, an emissary had been sent to all the villages to inform the village head or *Dagaci* of our planned visit and the objectives we hoped to achieve. Upon arrival we went to the house of village head which also doubled up as his office.

The BBC team was then split into three groups: Team (1) was in charge of sourcing the people who would be take part in the radio discussion programme. The subjects of discussions were topics the villagers felt mattered to them the most; Team (2) would consist of reporters who would disperse into the villages in search of special and unique stories. These reports were transmitted as part of the *Karkara* trajectory; Team (3) formed the technical personnel who ensured a smooth transmission of the programmes. In total production covered a minimum of 12 hours daily for each production staff. The village road show team produced audio content for three 30 minutes Hausa transmissions and additionally produced and presented a daily 30 minutes of live transmission from all 22 the villages covered in the road show. During the production and transmission of the programmes almost the entire village population came out to watch and be part of the experience<sup>61</sup>.

The BBC prides itself as a media organisation which “takes issues that matter to the audience at the heart” of everything they do. Some of the most compelling stories about the social and economic conditions of northern Nigeria’s rural population were heard over the three weeks of the *Karkara* programmes. The main themes heard over the period included: (a) poverty: which was very high in the rural areas to the extent that some of the villagers lived on a meal of wild grass and groundnut powder; (b) lack of potable drinking water: many villages did not have access to clean, potable drinking water. In villages like Lishegbe villagers fetched water from stagnant ponds where animals drank and people bathed at the same time. Water-borne diseases were common; (c) poor education was another major problem, with many villages lacking primary schools while those that did, had an insufficient number of classrooms. Often children were taught under the shade of trees. Classes were not held during the rainy season; (d) poor health care system: almost all the villages did not have access to basic health care. Villagers travelled significant distances to neighbouring towns in order to receive medical attention. Maternal and infant mortality rates were high. Some villages had local health dispensaries which they had communally built themselves but there were no health care workers; (e) low agricultural output; over-dependence on fertilizer by farmers to aid better

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<sup>60</sup> BBC Hausa, 2009.

<sup>61</sup> Often the women would peep from behind the doors as the culture prohibits them from engaging in outdoor activities in which they would mix freely with men other than their family members.

yield was rampant across all the villages. Due to high demand there was often a shortage of fertilizer before the planting season. At the end of harvest agricultural output is often low which then impacts on the household economy; (f) poor transportation system: bad roads meant eighty percent of the villages were disconnected from other rural communities or the cities. Consequently farmers were unable to take the little harvested grains they have to markets outside their villages. That had impacted further on the households and wider rural economy; (g) bad governance: most of the rural population felt they had been abandoned by the political class. They were dismayed that infrastructural development was yet to reach their villages. There was ample evidence of illiteracy and ignorance, as many of the villagers did not know their rights as citizens or even who their political representatives were at the local councils, state and federal levels.

### **3.6 Local agenda driving news consumption?**

“Recently they have created a niche for themselves by going down to the community beyond our imagination”. These were the words of a local Kano resident, Nigeria’s biggest northern city. He was responding to a question to gauge the success of the road show. According to independent research prepared for the BBC, “there was a feeling that generally BBC Hausa should get more involved in local issues to make the service more relevant. The village road show proved to be a very popular outreach radio programme with the audience” (*Kantar 2010*). The survey reported that “considering the comments from participants”, the “programme’s objective of engaging rural audiences and getting them involved in conversations that matter to them appeared to have been met”. The initiative enabled the Hausa Service to drill down “deeper into issues that have a powerful impact on lives”. The village road show “was seen as being groundbreaking because it reports from rural populations that would normally be overlooked.” (*Kantar 2010*) Conversely, the road show received considerable attention as well as generated debate amongst urban listeners - including Nigeria’s political class.

The *Karkara* road show was successful and the main driver of its success according to the 2010 Kantar Report was the BBC’s strategy of taking “issues that matter to the audience at the heart” of their programming. The living conditions of the rural dwellers formed the basis of the road show thereby resulting in an increase in listening amongst the rural population. Although radio listening was significantly high during the village road show, what BBC Hausa appeared not to have achieved was driving its audience to connect to the programmes via mobile phone. We shall now turn to an analysis of why this was so.

## Chapter 4:

### **Rural audiences, mobile ownership and consumption of mobile content**

This chapter will attempt to analyse the experience of the BBC Hausa village road show exploring the failures and challenges of creating mobile content for rural audiences as well as the factors driving the obstacles. The road show proved a highly popular outreach programme with increased radio listening over that period, but as mentioned above, it was not as successful in getting audiences to access the programmes via mobile.

Why did rural audiences not use mobile phones to access the village road show programmes? We will analyse survey data collected from the villages to illustrate the challenges and failures. Overall, the data suggest that the characteristics of the rural population are not conducive to the use of mobile phones for news consumption.

#### **4.1 Radio Vs Mobile**

As we have seen in previous chapters, radio is still the most powerful medium for news consumption in rural Africa and in particular, Northern Nigeria. This largely stems from their tradition of oral history. As Obeichina (1975) suggests oral tradition persists in Africa because rural Africans are “still largely illiterate, because most live in traditional and culturally and linguistically homogenous village settings, which fosters oral culture”.

In the villages of northern Nigeria, the made-in-China Kchibo radio set is the most widely used receiver. The price of the radio ranges from 650 Naira to 950 Naira (\$4-\$6). It is a portable handheld device which can be carried everywhere. The Kchibo radio uses two AA 1.5 mini batteries which cost 15 Naira (\$0.10). The battery life span ranges from three to seven days depending on the listening habit of the consumer. Essentially the cost of news consumption via Kchibo is relatively cheap in comparison to the villagers’ disposable income.

On the other hand, the mobile phone revolution is slowly but steadily reaching rural communities in Nigeria. Mobile network providers are investing more in infrastructure across rural areas in the country. The cost of handsets and connectivity are also falling. Increasingly too, people in villages are using mobile to consume media.

In the light of these developments we asked if rural dwellers used mobile phones as a vehicle to access news.

#### **4.2 Methodology**

In order to explore the patterns of mobile use as a platform for news consumption, we analysed survey data from the twenty two villages featured in the village road show. A combination of interviews and participant-observation were used. These are of a qualitative approach suitable

to the study of a cultural form, and relate to the ethnographic character of the study. I was part of the BBC village show team and I conducted questionnaire interviews with randomly selected people from the villages before the start of each of the programmes. All my interviews were conducted in the presence of other villagers and often answers to the questions I asked a respondent would be replied in chorus by the other people who were present at the scene. I noticed that although some people stood close by to watch and listen to the programmes as they went out live, many more clustered together around a radio set just some meters away from where we transmitted with a view to listening to the programmes via their device. I also observed villagers while they made use of mobile phones and I took notes. Various aspects of the road show programmes and interactions in all the villages, which were widely dispersed, were videotaped as well.

Local BBC Hausa reporters returned to fifteen of the villages about a year after the *Karkara* road show for follow-up interviews with villagers to assess whether there has been any change in the use of mobile phone to consume news.

### **4.3 Findings**

Based on the collected data, I found that although dwellers in the villages relied almost entirely on radio for news, all the same they were receptive to the idea of accessing news via mobile phone. 97 percent of rural dwellers knew what a mobile phone was, or had heard about it, and/or were aware of what mobile was generally used for. However, individual ownership of mobile phone was low in all the rural areas visited.

#### *Mobile ownership and cost:*

The percentage of mobile ownership compared to the population was negligible in villages like Burkusuma, Tudun Bude, Kurungunki and Miyal Yako with figures ranging from one mobile phone to a maximum of three in a village. In all the villages visited, mobile ownership was almost 100 percent by males. The age of mobile owners ranged from early 20's to late 40's. Most were the family breadwinners or major contributors to the household economy. Their main occupation was farming and/or rearing of livestock. The respondents were part of, or maintained, relatively large households comprising of 2 to 4 wives and children totalling up to 12.

60 percent of the respondents did not have any Western education. 6 percent of villagers interviewed during the road show stated that they had been to secondary school. 100 percent interviewed said they had no university education<sup>62</sup>. 90 percent had some form of Islamic education and 75 percent of these could read verses of the Quran written in the Arabic text, although they did not speak the Arabic language. 26 percent could read and write in Hausa using the Arabic text known as "Ajami"<sup>63</sup>, while 28 percent could read and write in Hausa using the Roman text.

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<sup>62</sup> Some few families however said they had a member who had a university degree but who had migrated to the city to work. Jobs for people who have reached that level in society were only found in the urban centres.

<sup>63</sup> Since around the 12th century CE when the Hausa became one of Africa's major powers, Ajami as a modified Arabic script was used by 1500 CE to record their own language.

Data on whether people would like to own a mobile phone showed that 88 percent answered in the affirmative although only 2 percent owned a mobile. The fact that only 2 percent had a mobile phone was a clear indication that mobile ownership patterns differed between rural and urban areas. 91 percent gave cost as the reason for not owning a mobile while the remaining said they did not need it or have no use for it. The issue of cost was also reflected in the type or model of mobile used by the villagers. With as many as 20 models and makes, Nokia, Techno, and Samsung were among the top most used handsets in the villages. Price of these devices varied between three to six thousand Naira (\$20-\$40). Reasons for buying particular a make included “durability”, “inexpensive”, “easy to use” and “good at retaining battery life”. 96 percent of these phones had limited or few functions.

Data collected by BBC reporters a year after the village road show indicated that there has been an increase of about 5 percent in the number of people with mobiles in the rural areas. That might be connected to the fall in both the cost of handset devices and connectivity charge. 15 percent of the few people who owned mobiles in the villages had two handsets. That was linked to the erratic nature of mobile service connectivity in Nigeria. Sometimes a network would be unavailable for several hours in a day. Having more than one handset therefore, provides access to different networks.

All the respondents were conscious of the running cost of mobiles. 69 percent stated that they spent between three to five hundred Naira (\$2-3) per week on call credits. *MTN* which is considered as the biggest network provider in Nigeria charged N30 (\$0.25) per minute for voice calls and ten Naira (\$0.06) per text message. The second largest provider *GLO* charged fifteen Naira (\$0.10) per minute for voice calls and eight Naira (\$0.05) per text message. Also the cost of charging mobile phone battery was high. Nigeria suffers from severe power shortages. The country’s inability to generate enough electricity for domestic consumption has led to heavy reliance on generators not only in urban areas but in villages as well. Whereas the majority of households in the cities own their personal generator, on the other hand, often only one generator is found in a village, if at all. That was usually owned by a village entrepreneur who collected a fee of \$0.10-\$0.20 per phone charge. Those who could not afford battery charge cost relied on national power supply which was often unavailable for days. During such blackout days, their mobiles were out of use.

#### *Mobile use and functionality*

As we gauged what the mobile was actually used for, we found that all the respondents wanted to “communicate with family or friends”. According to them the mobile had a social function as they used it to inform family and friends about births, deaths, marriages; and to exchange pleasantries during festivals like the Muslim Ramadan and Eid. 38 percent claimed to use mobile for business purposes - for instance keeping track of commodity prices or sourcing commodity or services. 40 percent said they used their mobile to listen to Hausa pop songs/music which was often shared between co-mobile owners in the same village or those in

neighbouring villages. All the respondents used the mobile for voice calls and 31 percent used text messaging apart from voice calls<sup>64</sup>.

In all the 22 villages, only 2 handsets were 3G devices. Owners of these devices said they were given them by a family member who was resident in the city. In both cases, the owners had inherited the handsets from the previous owners after they had upgraded to newer phones. 18 percent of the respondents had 2G WAP-enabled phones. All the 2G and 3G owners did not use their phone to connect to the internet because of three main reasons: either because they did not know what the internet was; because they did not know how to connect to the internet; and because of the cost attached to internet connection. 99 percent of the villagers did not have any previous experience of the internet.

#### *Mobile gender ownership patterns*

Analysis of the data collected reflects gender differentiation in mobile use among villagers of Northern Nigeria, which is predominantly Muslim. The practice of *purdah*<sup>65</sup> is high. 95 percent of the village men said they would not allow their wives to own a mobile phone. That stemmed from their belief that their wives might communicate with men other than her direct family members. Ownership and usage patterns between the genders were also seen in the cultural contexts. Islam permits men to marry up to four wives so polygamy is a common practice in Northern Nigeria. In the past thirty to forty years it was rare for women to take up jobs outside their husband's homes. But even today as women engage in farming and other forms of petty economic activity, most decisions including personal spending and other domestic expenditure are still made by husbands/males. This makes women financially dependent on men.

The decision to buy a mobile phone by a woman in Northern Nigeria will not be her prerogative. If the husband decides that his wife should own a mobile, he would then not only buy the device but would also be responsible for running costs like call credits and battery charging. In a polygamous household the husband may buy two to four mobile phones depending on the number of his wives. In a household of five adults (i.e. the husband and four wives), the total cost for purchasing five mobile phones would be about \$150, while other overhead costs will amount to a minimum of about \$30 per month. For such low income families like the rural dwellers, a financial burden like that would far outweigh the social benefits of the mobile. 98 percent of the male respondents said they would rather invest excess income in seeds for the next planting season, or save towards the purchase of a farm land or livestock than purchase a mobile phone for their wives. Based on this survey, the BBC Hausa business objective of increasing news consumption among females may be hard to achieve. Past market surveys have consistently shown that more than 60% of BBC Hausa audiences were male. If getting females to listen on radio was difficult, getting them to access the news via mobile may be even more challenging.

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<sup>64</sup> People who did not own a mobile or could not read Roman text received text messages from a family member who is resident in the city. Text messages are sent to a mobile owner who then read out the messages to target recipients. Should a recipient wished to reply the message, the mobile owner did so on their behalf. A fee of about \$0.07 was usually charged.

<sup>65</sup> Purdah is the seclusion of married women from men other than their direct male family members. A woman's withdrawal into purdah restricts her personal, social and economic activities outside her home.

### *Awareness of BBC news on Mobile*

The data collected showed 93 percent of respondents were aware that BBC Hausa programmes were delivered on mobile. They claimed to have heard either from a fellow villager or through the trailers played regularly on BBC Hausa radio programmes. In responding to how they felt about getting BBC Hausa content on mobile phone, 67 percent said they would like to do so if it would not have any cost implication to them, but that they would still prefer to listen to programmes on radio rather than on mobiles. In terms of preference of BBC Hausa mobile content type or format, 82 percent stated that they preferred audio<sup>66</sup>. 18 percent said they would like to receive text alerts of news.

#### **4.4. Creating Content for Mobile**

I explained earlier that mobile content is referred to as any type of media provided by news organizations and which is accessed on mobile phones. This content could be *text* or *multimedia* hosted on *websites*, which may either be standard internet pages, or else specific mobile pages, or accessed via *IVR* (interactive voice recognition). Mobile content delivery poses many challenges to the numerous stakeholders who are involved in the process. These are the content producers, content carriers and content consumers.

To start with, generally due to its size, the capability of a mobile phone is restricted. Mobile display resolutions start at around 128 x 128, barely 1/100th of the available resolution on a Personal Computer (PC). Although mobile device display resolutions on smartphones are typically 240 x 320 and can reach 640 x 480 or greater, the physical size of the display is limited by the requirement to have a small pocket-sized device. Increasing the resolution provides more dots-per-inch, but delivers limited benefit on such a small screen. As well as the limited screen size and data input capabilities, the use cases for mobile devices is of paramount importance when designing services and content for mobile. Just taking an existing PC website and reformatting it for the mobile phone is not a good idea<sup>67</sup>.

#### **4.5 Challenges and Obstacles of Creating Mobile Content for Rural Audiences**

The difficulties of providing and accessing mobile content by rural audiences in Africa are numerous. Given the realities of village life, it may not be worthwhile for news organisations to provide multimedia content to users. This is because only a negligible percentage of the rural population has access to 3G phones and even for them, the cost attached to internet connection and download are unaffordable. News organisations including the BBC now produce mobile

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<sup>66</sup> Preference of the audio format may be correlated with the oral tradition of Hausa society as explained earlier. Radio listening is a significant part of Northern Nigerian culture. When Radio was introduced to Nigeria during the colonial period, it easily became part of, if not a substitute to traditional Hausa bards and village historians. By the mid-1950's the BBC transmitted programmes in Hausa which since then have remained very popular especially in rural areas.

<sup>67</sup> Mobile Content Delivery – The Need for Content Optimisation, Ronnie Forbes, 2009

content mainly in text format<sup>68</sup>. But even then, there is no guarantee that rural dwellers will subscribe to news texts alerts. As our data showed, less than a third of respondents could read and write using the Roman text and a huge majority of the phones had limited functionalities and did not connect to the internet. The table below illustrates the design specification of two of the most popular mobile phones in the villages:

Nokia 2323 at a glance		Nokia 2330 at a glance	
Available:	Q2 2009	Available:	Q2 2009
Network:	GSM 900 / 1800 or GSM 850 / 1900	Network:	GSM 900 / 1800 or GSM 850 / 1900
Data:	GPRS	Data:	GPRS
Screen:	128x160 pixels, 65k colours	Screen:	128x160 pixels, 65k colours
Camera:	No	Camera:	0.3 megapixels
Size:	Medium monoblock 107 x 46 x 14mm / 90 grams	Size:	Medium monoblock 107 x 46 x 14mm / 90 grams
Bluetooth:	No	Bluetooth:	No
Memory card:	No	Memory card:	No
Infra-red:	No	Infra-red:	No
Polyphonic:	Yes	Polyphonic:	Yes
Java:	Yes	Java:	Yes
GPS:	No	GPS:	No
Battery life:	4.8 hours talk / 22 days standby	Battery life:	4 hours talk / 22 days standby

Source: Mobile Gazette (2010)

There is evidence to suggest that villagers are more interested in receiving audio data rather than text alerts via mobile. The main drawback for providing audio is that it will need to be reformatted into shorter and lighter files thereby minimizing the size and scope of the editorial offer. But an advantage is that the cost to end-users will be lower in comparison to the cost of a long format audio download. Specifically Hausa audiences have become accustomed to long audio formats which they have been accessing via short wave (SW) for more than half a century. 78 percent of the rural population have stated that shorter audio formats were not suitable to their news consumption habit. The BBC Hausa a *Karkara* road show was evidence that rural dwellers were more likely to listen to radio than access news via mobile. They stated that radio was more reliable and cheaper to consume news than the mobile phone.

During the village road show BBC Hausa provided long programmes of 30 minutes duration via radio. The programmes were transmitted four times daily. The *Karkara* programmes were also available on *bbchousa.com* which meant that only consumers who had PCs or WAP-enabled mobile phones might have accessed the programmes. BBC Hausa did not create short formatted audio files (e.g. mp3). The cost of downloading 30 minutes programmes, four times daily would have been astronomical and that might have deterred consumers from using mobiles to access the programmes. News text alerts around the road show were also not provided. Even if BBC Hausa had done so, illiteracy would have inhibited the villagers from taking advantage of the

<sup>68</sup> Recently some BBC Services have started to provide audio formats to specific markets. Examples of these are the Hindi and Hausa Services. Apart from text formats they provide short audio formats to their target markets. These are proving popular among users.

service. Another obstacle was that among the very few people whose phones were WAP-enabled, and who claimed to be aware of the existence of BBC mobile offer, they did not know how to use their mobile to connect to the internet.

## Chapter 5

### **Mobile as a platform for content delivery in rural Africa: Implications for international media organisations**

Analysis of data in this study has shown that few people in Nigerian villages own mobile phones. Also usage of mobiles for anything other than calls or texts is still a very niche activity, dominated by urban and younger users. The good news though is that mobile phone penetration is growing rapidly in villages due to a number of factors including fiercer competitive environment in the telecom market which in turn pushes prices for contracts, prepaid cards and handsets down. However, rural areas are still characterized by a high percentage of pre-paid subscriptions. This suggests that most users are still reluctant to pay rates for advanced data services. During my extensive interaction with the villagers during the BBC Hausa village road show as well as in the findings of my survey, I found that the use of mobile to consume news was very low.

In this final chapter, , the overall lessons of the experience the Village Road show will be assessed finally asking what the implications are for the international media and specific implications for the BBC as it pursues its strategy of using mobile as a platform for content delivery.

#### **Overcoming challenges for a mobile future**

The main lesson we took away with us from the BBC Hausa village road show was that for the predominantly illiterate rural population, radio was the “king” of communication. Low-cost radio sets were still used to consume news across villages. Ownership of shortwave receivers was widespread. These receivers were cheap, portable and battery operated, making them useful in difficult circumstances. Shortwave (SW) radio was convenient because it was used in situations where Internet, satellite and telephone services were unavailable (or unaffordable). Villagers used their sets to listen mainly to international broadcasting services whose brands have penetrated remote communities. The ability of SW to cover a large geographic area and the fact that it is somewhat less prone to interference from severe weather conditions and repressive governments makes it even more attractive to the audiences.

The underlying implication for international news organisations is: the use of radio to consume news particularly among rural audiences is likely to continue in the near and medium terms. Factors such as demographics, low income statuses, low literacy levels, and poor infrastructure will provide a level playing field for radio in rural areas. International news organizations that are keen to provide mobile content in African markets must accept the primacy of radio as a communication tool in rural Africa. The best strategy for them may be to adopt an approach which may gradually help to move their traditional media rural audiences to the new mobile platforms. This approach is based on anticipation of a possible change in the circumstances I have highlighted above. Building and implementing such a strategy itself will be based on a number of considerations:

## **1) Mobile apps and village mobile architecture**

Content providers must confront the problem that mobile technology is an extremely fragmented area. At the moment they have to face the reality that there is no such thing as a write-once-run-anywhere application in the mobile world. But recent technological developments show that convergence of content services used on a number of different devices is probably going to be possible soon technically.

Mobile application (app) development therefore is crucial. To date there is little evidence that news organizations partake in the development of mobile applications. Content providers must begin to think and act as mobile apps designers. Key to this is figuring out what the special properties of the platforms are. Recently (June 2011), the BBC launched its international news app. The BBC News Android app includes live World Service radio, video and the ability to share news articles. It builds on the previously launched iPhone/iPad app, which has been very successful with 3 million downloads outside the UK since 2010. During the apps launch, BBC executives argued that more people have Android based phones than iPhones, so this will help to expand the mobile market further. Consumers will have access to “very big breaking news and genuine exclusives, good, solid documentaries and quirky stories”<sup>69</sup>.

Although this is considerable progress toward mobile apps development by the giant news organisation, it may come somewhat of a disappointment to millions of mobile users in Africa where the use of 3G phone is low. In a piece of BBC research<sup>70</sup>, it is estimated that in 2011 more than 244 million people that are jointly serviced by BBC Hausa, BBC Swahili, BBC French for Africa, BBC Great Lakes and BBC Somali will be using 2G phones in Africa. During the BBC Hausa village road show we found that the devices used in rural areas were mainly the Nokia 2000 series and other cheap brands like Techno. These handsets had severe limitations on form factor, display, battery life, processor speed, communications range, data rate and memory. Given the findings of the BBC research that by 2014 the number of 3G phones among the main BBC Africa markets will still be lower than 2G devices, it may make business sense for the news provider to develop mobile apps for low-end devices. But even if the BBC develops apps for cheap mobile devices, there will be a big unknown: what will consumers actually want on mobile?

## **2) Mobile content type for rural audiences**

It is very hard to understand what consumers will want by guessing or brainstorming in a vacuum. Therefore it is essential both to track and attempt to leverage the practices and cultures rapidly evolving around mobile technologies. It is important to understand the key properties of the devices, how consumers adapt to them, and the implications of particular business models on both user experience and content development.

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<sup>69</sup> BBC World Service Communication, June 2011;

[https://market.Android.com/details?id=bbc.mobile.news.ww&feature=search\\_result](https://market.Android.com/details?id=bbc.mobile.news.ww&feature=search_result)

<sup>70</sup> Mobile content provision for developing markets - Re-Prioritization of 2nd Tier markets, BBC, 2009

Although cost is seen as the primary inhibitor to media consumption on mobile phones, the type or suitability of editorial content is another factor that could influence consumption behaviour. Already village dwellers have demonstrated that they were more disposed toward radio. For more than 50 years they have listened to a format of hard news and current affairs transmitted over thirty minutes, four times a day. The editorial spectrum included international, regional, national and even local news, often with in-depth analysis by local experts, interviews with local politicians and other relevant stakeholders. The chord which has been struck by this type and style of news has gone far and deep into the hearts of people residing in the remotest settlements of Africa. The mobile offer hugely differs from the one that is available on radio. As they create mobile content, editorial leaders and content creators must bear in mind issues surrounding the suitability of the editorial proposition and the type of format that is most appropriate (i.e. audio or text) to their consumers.

When asked what sort of issues they would like to hear/receive about on their mobile, 66 percent of respondents in our survey said: first - national news, second - local politics and third - international news. However a more striking finding was the number of respondents who said they would prefer to receive news to do with important issues like the ethno-religious crisis. 89 percent said they would value such content on their mobile as they were concerned about safety or it would help them to “avoid danger zones”. Unwittingly rural audiences were asking for essential or life line information from a global news organisation that essentially provides hard news and current affairs. So this begs the question: should BBC provide essential/life line information on its mobile content? Or should it carry on providing what they are traditionally known for i.e. providing international and national news? In what format should the content be provided? What will be the incentive for rural dwellers to consume media via their mobile phones?

### **3) Cost to the end user**

Up to now wireless devices have proliferated on the back of user-created content. People are much more willing to pay for connectivity than for media content. For the most part, content is not something consumers buy. As such news organisations will have to learn how their content becomes worth something to mobile users. A suggestion to international news organisations may be in the direction of what Forrester Research calls “conversational content”<sup>71</sup>. This is a label for the observation that user-generated content has been the driving force of mobile and much of the internet. Drawing from the reality that customers have shown a greater willingness to pay for communication than for third party content, the generalised model for mobile is to seek opportunities for providing low value content with high value mobile communication. But even this model may not entirely work for villagers in Africa where barriers to mobile communication are high.

At least for the foreseeable future, international news outlets must accept that cost will continue to be of concern to consumers especially in villages. They may need to explore and adopt more creative ways of delivering mobile content at very little, or even if possible, no cost to the mainly poor, illiterate audiences of rural Africa.

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<sup>71</sup> De Lussanet et al., 2002, p.7. in *Mobile Media; Content and Services for Wireless Communication*, ed. By J Groebel, E.M. Noam, V. Feldmann, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publisher, 2006.

#### **4) Toward production and attitude change culture**

News organizations have been particularly slow in adopting and fully utilizing digital tools in their newsgathering and news production process. But as I have argued in this research, developing strategies for incorporating digital-based innovations into the businesses of news organizations is essential. Developing appropriate content for mobile devices is a key element that will determine its consumption by the mobile end user. But attention must be paid to the actual creation and production of mobile content. Indeed, mobile content must be edited for both the physical limitations of the small screen and the lack of bandwidth which may place limitations on an optimal user experience. As other researchers have posited, “no matter what medium is used, it will always be necessary to format the content specifically in order to fit the method of interaction of each device and its technical specialties”<sup>72</sup>. Content providers must be aware of what types of content best suits context-specific formats and limitations of technologies.

Apart from the technology issues and the challenge of defining business models, managers in news organizations are grappling with how to structure their organizations and allocate resources in order to successfully take advantage of new media and technology. In addressing the challenges of the mobile arena, there appears to be no one model that large content companies are following. The BBC World Service for example, which has more than thirty language services, provides content to diverse markets with differing needs and unique cultural peculiarities. Different services within the organisation have varied models, which may be the right approach as different services work better than others in certain markets.

During the BBC Hausa village road show all efforts and resources were put into radio production. Had BBC Hausa leveraged the editorial human-power and expertise of the reporters and radio journalists to create mobile content, might the outcome have been different? To this end news organizations must see the essence of allocating the right amount of resources and necessary editorial attention that are needed in creating mobile content. Changes in editorial and production attitudes are of paramount significance if the mobile business objective is to be achieved.

#### **5) Forging strategic partnerships with mobile carriers:**

In the narrative of the obstacles to creating mobile content, critical partners in the enterprise are often forgotten. Carriers or mobile operators are a key element in mobile content delivery. News organisations may create the best and most editorially suitable content but they will need carriers to deliver the content to users.

When mobile phones first emerged as a platform, there was not much content available to the general user population and usage was limited to voice calls. News organisations took a

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<sup>72</sup> Toward a New Paradigm of Innovation on the Mobile Platform: Redefining the Roles of Content Providers, Technology Companies, and Users. Nina D. Ziv, Institute for Technology and Enterprise Polytechnic University, 2005.

cautious approach as they began to exploit this new platform. They had already undergone major changes in the mid-1990s due to waves of technological innovations known as New Media. While companies had integrated digital-based technologies into their back office operations for some time, the impact of New Media, which are defined as those media which either enable the development of digital content or deliver such content, was profound.

Conversely from the onset carriers recognized the value of content and began to formulate strategies for content provisioning. They began to create content they themselves had developed, although they provided a limited offer. This approach to content provisioning, called the 'walled garden' approach, gave carriers the power to decide how content was positioned on the 'top deck' of the handset screen, the area subscribers usually access first. However, recognising that content creation was not their core competence, carriers conceded that they were not doing it well. To further add to their predicament, the average revenue per user (ARPU) steadily declined - mainly as a result of the proliferation of social networking. That in effect introduced a shift in the way carriers viewed content providers. The relationship is now changing from a linear to a more collaborative and networked one. The hitherto difficult relationship between content providers and carriers for instance can be exemplified in the duration of negotiations that took place between a leading carrier in Nigeria and the BBC. More than a year and a half had passed before a partnership deal was signed by both parties.

As media organisations push through their mobile agenda, the relationship between them and network providers must be clearly defined and harnessed. A lot of advantages will be derived especially given on the one hand the extensive intelligence<sup>73</sup> at the disposal of the carriers and on the other hand, the expertise content providers have which may potentially increase data usages and by implication increase revenue for the carriers. Another benefit that may be derived from this relationship is on the part of the end user. In the past, carriers solely determined the pricing and business models for mobile content. A strategic partnership based on perceived benefits may enable content providers to influence a pricing structure that may be more favourable to the end user<sup>74</sup>. In the medium and longer term carriers will be more willing to invest in marketing, promotion and infrastructure that will support content delivery.

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<sup>73</sup> Network providers or carriers have huge data on consumer behaviour which they do not share with content providers. The same person could have different consumption behaviour. Such information is bound to be useful to the content providers as they make editorial decisions.

<sup>74</sup> Operators rely on mass markets. Consumption of BBC mobile content by millions of users is likely to encourage them to foster a better business relation with the content provider - after all their main objective as a business is to make profit.

## Conclusion

Mobile phones present unique opportunities for news organisations to create content in African markets where the continent's mobile industry has experienced explosive growth in a relatively short time span. However, as data in this research shows, socio-economic conditions of the rural population contribute to the low usage of mobile as a platform for content consumption. But as competition among telecommunication companies, handset manufactures, carriers and even content providers intensifies, prices of products and services may fall. This is likely to lead to more access and availability of varied content to villagers.

Short term opportunities for international news organisations include delivering breaking news and other information contextualized and customised to the location of individual audience members (i.e. information about current or recent news specific to the consumer's destination, planned route, preferences or demographics, etc). Medium and long term opportunities include designing content that embed multidimensional and multimedia reports to mobile audiences. Whether and how this future is realized depends on a number of factors. Among these are: (a) whether audiences will find sufficient value in the content to make them pay for it; (b) whether (and how quickly) the traditional culture of editorial production in news organisations will adopt new models that are suitable to mobile devices, and especially those at the low-end; (c) whether international news outlets design and develop low-end mobile apps which are mainly used in rural African markets; (d) whether news organisations are able to develop a more collaborative relationship with carriers; (e) whether there will be sufficient bandwidth to support the delivery of customised multidimensional, multimedia news and information on demand in the longer term.

That radio is still the main platform for news consumption in rural Africa should not be a deterrent for international news organisations. This is because the potential advantages of driving audiences to mobile devices are there despite the obstacles and challenges associated with the creation and consumption of content via the mobile device.

As a recommendation, international news organisations could adopt approaches that would leverage their brand awareness as they pursue their mobile strategy. For example, large amounts of BBC audiences of traditional media are potential future mobile content users – so if planned properly, traditional audiences can be encouraged to move to mobile phones for their news consumption. International news outlets could also make use of first mover advantage as most of the markets do not have credible and trusted mobile news content in non-English in rural areas. News organisations must also forge collaborative and strategic partnerships with other stakeholders in the mobile field. These will include not just carriers or operators, but handset manufacturers whose alliances on hardware (e.g. inbuilt DRM-receivers, solar chargers) are promising. So although the current complexity of the mobile field present numerous challenges in creating mobile content especially for audiences in rural Africa, in the long term international news organisations may have an advantage as their brand, experience and first mover advantage give them an edge in the markets they have traditionally dominated.

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This research used online data, quotes and media sources available on BBC ([news.co.uk/](http://news.co.uk/) Hausa and World Service's web data), CNN, Aljazeera, The Guardian (UK), Mobithinking, International Telecommunication Union (ITU), National Broadcasting Commission (NBC), and others.