Audience Participation and BBC's Digital Quest in Nigeria

Abdullahi Tasiu Abubakar

New technologies are driving changes in the media landscape on a scale and speed never envisaged before. They have impacted on the patterns and trajectories of media production and consumption, altered the spatio-temporal configuration of media-audience relationship, and widened the scope of cross cultural interactions across the globe. But they have also helped intensify the commodification of audiences, allowed manipulation of communicative exchanges, and enhanced communicative capitalism (Dean 2010). The mainstream media are appropriating new media to reach and influence the minds of more audiences (particularly in the case of the ideologically driven ones) and improve their revenues (for the commercially oriented ones). Global broadcasters have turned themselves into multimedia corporations and user-audiences are engaging with them through multiple platforms (Cottle and Rai 2008; Price et al. 2008; Powell 2012). Digitization and convergence have brought so much changes to this engagement that many researchers (Jenkins 2006; Jenkins and Deuze 2008; Sundet and Ytreberg 2009) have concluded that the boundaries between production and reception have been blurred. The scope and 'opportunities for audience activity and participation' have expanded 'across platforms and on an international basis' (Sundet and Ytreberg 2009: 383).

Africa is not left out of this transformation. A growing body of work in the continent highlights how the new media environment has been engendering greater audience activity and participation in content production in many scenarios and at varying scales (Powell 2012; Akinfemisoye 2013; Chiumbu and Ligaga 2013; Salawu 2013; Willems 2013). Radio listeners in Zambia (Willems 2013), South Africa (Chiumbu and Ligaga 2013), Nigeria (Akinfemisoye 2013; Salawu 2013), Zimbabwe (Mabweazara 2013), Kenya, South Sudan and several other countries across the continent (Powell 2012) were found to have used new platforms—particularly mobile phones and the internet—to enhance their interactivity with the media and engage in content production. 'There is clear evidence that new media have shifted the balance of power between radio producers and audiences in favour of the

listeners' (Willems 2013: 230). And although both Willems (2013) and Moyo (2013) are quick to caution against celebrating the emancipatory power of technologies, there is little doubt that new technologies do enhance audience activity and participation. Using a case study in Malawi, Moyo (2013: 214) has argued that neither the digital turn nor the 'demotic turn' on radio should be equated with the participatory turn in Africa where the regulatory framework is weak and where digital deficiencies that impede 'consistent and meaningful use of digital media still persist'. Willems (2013: 228) too has highlighted the issue of 'technical challenges in using new media and high costs of mobile phone calls' and, even more significantly, the corporate logic of encouraging participation for revenue generation. All these are obvious legitimate considerations that should form part of a dispassionate assessment of new media's role in audience activity and participation. But overall, as Chiumbu and Ligaga (2013: 242) conclude in their study of changing radio practices in South Africa, the internet and mobile phones 'have expanded communicative radio spaces and transformed the nature of audience engagement'.

The focus of the majority of the studies cited above has been mainly on the new media's impact on audiences' engagement with the local media, primarily the radio. A broader picture, however, would reveal that a similar trend, though with some modifications, is also taking place in audiences' interactions with international media, particularly the global broadcasters. And because of their institutional prowess, technical edge and financial muscles, international broadcasters appear to have more skilful strategies of deploying new technologies for content distribution, and also offer opportunities for audience interactivity and participation without resorting to income generation from the venture. Instead they focus mainly on reaching wider audiences with the aim of influencing their hearts and minds for cultural and ideological purposes.

The BBC World Service is a major player in this permutation. Broadcasting in 28 languages to the combined weekly audience of 255.7 million across the world (BBC Global News 2013), the World Service fends off fierce competitions from both old and new rivals by sticking to quality journalism and continuous modernization of its production and delivery systems (Halliday 2013; BBC Global News 2013). Its record of effective deployment of delivery technologies is well known — right from its early days (Browne 1982; Briggs 1985)

when much of the current technology was non-existent and what was available was at a rudimentary stage, up to today when technological advancement appears to have surpassed expectations (Price et al. 2008). The corporation's current multimedia strategy—delivering content through multiple platforms—has enabled it to get more audiences (Hiller 2010; Halliday 2013). And, as Price et al. (2008:161) note, the World Service 'seems to have multiplied its interactive practices and more solidly and consistently brought listeners into the process of contributing content—bringing old technologies into a new media environment'. Specifically, using new technologies is part of the BBC's 'public purposes' remit, rooted in the Royal Charter: to 'deliver to the public the benefit of emerging communications technologies and services' (BBC Guidelines 2010: 5).

Other global broadcasters too are equally employing multimedia strategies with the aim of attracting more audiences. The Voice of America (VOA), Cable News Network (CNN), Germany's *Deutsche Welle*, China Central Television (CCTV), China Radio International and *Al-Jazeera* and so on have all developed their respective multimedia strategies (Price et al. 2008; Powell 2012). They have added to their traditional platforms, the internet, mobile phones and social media to deliver content to their audiences, interact with them, and even allow them to create their own content. While the CNN in particular is seen as a pioneer in adopting mobile phone platform, having launched its mobile news and information service way back in February 1999 (CNN 1999), others have since risen up to the challenge and are capitalizing on the opportunities offered by the new technologies. The VOA, for instance, is rapidly expanding its new media platforms and has since moved 'into interactive social media, strengthening its service to mobile telephones and computers' (Powell 2012: 16). It focuses on Africa where nearly half of its entire global audiences live (Powell 2012).

The global broadcasters' relentless pursuit for increase in audience share using new platforms to attract them, the rapid spread of new technologies in Africa, and the Africans' willingness to employ them for media consumption and content creation have combined to produce a media landscape the nature of which has not been seen before. Nigeria in particular presents an interesting case where the interplay of these forces has brought significant changes in the way Nigerians interact with global broadcasters, especially the BBC World Service. Mobile phones and internet are steadily becoming important platforms for consumption of news,

information and entertainment across the country (BBC Global News 2010, 2013; Abubakar 2011; Juwah 2013). A 2013 BBC global audience survey reveals that Nigeria is 'the biggest driver of mobile traffic' for the entire World Service (BBC Global News 2013). All these point to the need for careful examination on how new technologies have been transforming audiences' engagement with global media.

This chapter broadly examines the changing pattern of Nigerian audiences' interactions with global media. It specifically investigates how Nigerians use new media platforms to engage with global broadcasters in general and the BBC World Service in particular. It attempts to assess the impact of new technologies in audience activity and participation in content production. It also examines how the World Service employed new media platforms to enhance participatory programming and reach far wider audiences in Nigeria to retain its influence in the country and promote Britain's public diplomacy.

A mixed-method approach, combining documentary research technique, in-depth individual interviews and focus group discussions were employed to draw the data for this study. The documentary research technique used here involved gathering and analysing BBC publications, online content and audience survey reports as well as data from several other sources including the Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC) and the Foreign Affairs Committee at the British House of Commons. The in-depth interviews were conducted with BBC World Service's former and serving staff and with Nigerian audiences. Eight former and serving BBC staff were interviewed in London and Nigeria in January 2010, August 2012 and July 2013. Fifteen in-depth individual interviews were conducted with audience members in Nigeria between January 2010 and December 2013. They were drawn from three northern Nigerian cities: Abuja, Katsina and Yola. Similarly, four focus group discussions were conducted between January 2010 and August 2012 with audiences from those three cities which represent three out of the six geopolitical zones of Nigeria: Abuja (central zone), Katsina (northwest zone) and Yola (northeast zone). The focus groups were originally part of a wider study on general global media consumption but the aspect on using new media platforms for global media consumption was extracted for this chapter. The groups, with members ranging from six to nine, were roughly categorized as working class group, journalist (middle class) group, upper middle class group and youth group. The respondents

in both the individual and group interviews are of different educational, occupational and professional backgrounds, but they all use both old and new media platforms regularly to interact with global broadcasters, particularly the BBC Hausa Service. All the respondents (individual and group) were drawn through purposeful sampling. The interviews were conducted in English and Hausa (for the working class group), tape-recorded, transcribed and analysed.

From Communal Listening to Digital Consumption

Nigerians have a long history of interactions with global media, which began with the introduction of broadcasting in the country by Britain in the early 1930s (Ladele et al. 1979; Larkin 2008). When the BBC Empire Service (the forerunner of the BBC World Service) was established in December 1932 to reach British 'expatriates and loyal subjects of the King' in the then British Empire (Briggs 1985: 138), Nigeria—a British colonies at that time—was among the early targets. Programmes were being beamed from London to all parts of the empire. In Nigeria colonial administrators were the first to access the service, followed by local elite before the local population, who, through communal listening, received it via loudspeakers fixed in public places (Ladele et al. 1979; Larkin 2008). It was then a wired broadcasting system whereby BBC programmes were relayed to audiences 'by means of wires connected to loudspeakers installed in the homes of subscribers' and in public places (Ladele et al. 1979: 8; Larkin 2008). Later, when wireless broadcasting was introduced in Nigeria in 1951, the audiences' access to BBC's broadcasts expanded rapidly (Ladele et al. 1979).

One of the most significant aspects of the early experience was the introduction of the BBC Hausa Service in 1957 as part of Britain's new initiative for Africa (Briggs 1985). The BBC was at that time committed to 'providing certain territories with programmes more closely designed to appeal to special local interests' and the Hausa language service was designed for West Africa (BBC Handbook 1958: 41). The service expanded steadily with increase in programming and the establishment of a production centre in Nigeria's capital Abuja (BBC World Service 2007) as well as rapid growth of audiences, becoming at one time the biggest foreign language service in the BBC in terms of audience figures (BBC Global News 2010).

The BBC's combined offerings to Nigeria in both Hausa and English languages, through multiple platforms such as radio, television, web and mobile phone, ensured a continuous increase in audience figures, with the country being variously described at different times as the World Service's biggest market (BBC Global News 2009, 2010), the BBC's largest radio market in the world (BBC World Service 2007), and as the biggest driver of BBC's mobile traffic (BBC Global News 2013).

Nigeria's position as Africa's largest oil producer and the continent's richest and most populous nation, with a majority Muslim inhabitants, highlights its strategic significance in the BBC's journalistic and public diplomacy remits (FCO 2005; Kantar Media 2010; Abubakar 2011). One of most diverse nations on earth with more than 375 ethnic nationalities and a complex ethno-religious configuration (Oyovbaire 2001), Nigeria is both a major news source and a fertile ground for cross-cultural interactions. Significantly, it has also met the BBC World Service's key criteria of 'strategic importance', the need of the population for independent and impartial news, 'the impact of BBC services', and 'the cost effectiveness of the services' (FACOM 2011: 17). So the BBC's intense focusing on the country is not accidental — nor is the Nigerians' deep affinity with the broadcaster.

Side-by-side with their remarkable relationship with the BBC, Nigerians do also regularly interact with many other global broadcasters, including the VOA, CNN, Germany's *Deutsche Welle*, RFI, *Al-Jazeera*, CCTV, China Radio International, Iran's Press TV (Abubakar 2011, 2013). Historical, geopolitical, cultural and economic forces do play their roles in Nigerians' engagement with these broadcasters but it is technology that first made it possible and then ensures its sustainability. From wired and wireless broadcasting to digital podcasting, the role of technology in facilitating this relationship has been remarkable. And as new technologies intrude further into people's personal and social lives and media organs keep exploiting their potential, that role may even grow deeper and wider. Responses to these changes are still unfolding but what has so far been witnessed might have indicated the trajectories. For instance, Nigeria, as noted earlier, has consistently remained the World Service's largest radio market in the world, but the latest BBC survey shows that although it still retains that position, the BBC radio audience figures in the country have fallen sharply, with a loss of 400,000 listeners between 2012 to 2013 (BBC Global News 2013). And although the report

says the fall was ‘due to some corrections to the model’, it does admit that there is indeed a sharp decline in radio audiences. It, however, states that the drop was mitigated by a sharp rise in online audience figures, with the number of Nigerian visitors to the BBC website increasing dramatically. ‘Growth has been truly global with many countries exhibiting triple digit growth, not least Nigeria, which has seen visitors increase eight-fold from 2012 to 2013, making it the biggest driver of mobile traffic’ (BBC Global News 2013). The survey further reveals that while weekly English radio audience has fallen from 43.7 million to 42.6 million globally—with the biggest drops seen in USA and Nigeria—online figures increased by about six million from 19 million in February 2012 to 25 million in February 2013. ‘More than half the increase came from just two markets, the USA (+1.9m) and Nigeria (+1.1m), with a lot of the growth in these markets coming via the mobile site’ (BBC Global News 2013). So the two countries that saw the sharpest fall in radio audience, United States and Nigeria, are the ones that provided the biggest increase in online audiences.

Nigeria’s Digital Trend

The BBC’s digital success in Nigeria is not unrelated to the country’s digital trend. The way Nigerians receive and utilize digital technologies has been quite remarkable. Mobile phones and internet are steadily becoming important platforms for consumption of news, information and entertainment across the country (BBC Global News 2010, 2013; Abubakar 2011; Juwah 2013). Notwithstanding Nigeria’s decaying physical infrastructures such as dilapidated road networks, poor electricity supply and disappearance of fixed-line telephone, the penetration of mobile telephony and internet—especially in its urban and semi-urban centres—is phenomenal (Powell 2012; Juwah 2013). The number of active mobile phones in the country has far exceeded the entire adult population. Statistics from the Nigerian Communications Commission, the country’s telecoms regulator, shows that from a paltry figure of less than one million telephone subscribers in 2001, their number jumped to nearly 120 million by April 2013 (NCC 2013).

For a West African country with an estimated 180 million population, this is, by anyone’s standards, a radical change. What further underlines the digital significance of this change is the provision of internet access to mobile phone users by the mobile operators (and many of

the phones are internet-enabled). The former head of Nigerian Communications Commission, Eugene Juwah, attributes this to convergence of telecommunications technology. 'The biggest internet service providers in Nigeria today are the four GSM mobile operators which have been largely made possible due to technology convergence' (Juwah 2013). The four dominant operators (see **Table 7.1** below)—MTN, Globacom, Airtel and Etisalat—have market shares of roughly 45 percent, 21 percent, 21 percent and 13 percent respectively in 2013, while the Nigerian government-owned Mtel, which is among the pioneer operators, had virtually no active lines (NCC 2013).

Table 7.1 Market shares of mobile phone operators in Nigeria, April 2013

	Airtel	Etisalat	Globacom	MTel	MTN
No. of Subscribers	**24,051,385**	**15,120,409**	**24,252,533**	**258,520**	**52,642,943**
Percentage (%)	**21%**	**13%**	**21%**	**0%**	**45%**

Source: Nigerian Communications Commission (2013)

Feasting on the New Media Upsurge

What is happening in Nigeria is largely a continent-wide phenomenon and has been warmly welcomed by the global media industry. Africans' use of new media offers bountiful opportunities to global broadcasters. First, the rapid spread of mobile phones and other portable digital devices on the continent has made delivery of content through them an attractive venture which both the mainstream and marginal media readily grab. Perhaps the most popular device in the world today, the mobile phone is a favourite object of possession for the rich and poor alike (Thompson 2005; Powell 2012). Africans' fascination with it is linked with its utility, ease of use and affordability. Once regarded as a luxury good in the

continent, it is now considered to be essential in the lives of African city dwellers (Powell 2012). There are accounts of poor Africans who prefer to skip a meal to afford mobile phones. 'They are willing to make that trade-off because a mobile phone helps them to optimize their lives in the long term through better access to information and resources, including food,' argues Gabrielle Gauthey, executive vice president of Alcatel Lucent (Palitza 2012). Little wonder that the rate of its spread in Africa has been astronomical. From a modest figure of five million in 2000, the number of mobile phones in Africa rose to more than 500 million in 2012. No serious international broadcaster would ignore such potential.

Second, the ability and willingness of Africans to use mobile devices for media consumption provided great incentives to target them through such devices. For instance, in late 2011 the VOA discovered that the number of Africans accessing its services on mobile phones exceeded those who accessed its website on computers (Powell 2012). But even more remarkable was the uniqueness of Africans' use of mobile phone for radio consumption. The same VOA found that Africans use mobile phones in a very different way from Americans. 'Africans are listening to their phones for 20-minute (programmes),' notes Steven Ferri, head of VOA Mobile and Digital Media in Africa. 'No one in America would do this' (cited in Powell 2013: 24). This encouraged the broadcaster to structure long-form programmes for its African mobile phone audiences (Powell 2012). A BBC 2010 survey too revealed that 14 per cent of Nigerians listen to radio on their mobile phones weekly and that more than half of them are young (BBC Global News 2010).

The tremendous growth of Nigerian telecommunications industry is mostly in the voice segment. The demand for data has consistently been on the increase in the last decade, and 'this is driven by availability of new services online (i.e. Facebook, Twitter, Online newspapers, Blogs, YouTube etc.), devices availability as well as infrastructure provision especially by mobile operators in Nigeria' (Juwah 2013). As fierce competition among mobile service providers brings costs down and the number of users keeps increasing, digital growth becomes even more glaring. Low cost, convenience, competition and control have indeed been identified as the key forces driving the spread of mobile phones in Nigeria and the rest of Africa (BBC Global News 2010; Powell 2012).

Global broadcasters are feasting on this. As noted above, the VOA has already structured some telephone-based programmes for its African audiences (Powell 2012). For the BBC World Service, too, apart from the hefty online audience figures it has gained from the digital shift, new technologies have also enabled her to effectively run its participatory programmes such as 'World Have Your Say' for global audiences and '*Ra'ayi Riga'* (the Hausa Service equivalent of 'Have Your Say') for Hausa-speaking audiences in Africa. The content for such programmes are essentially generated from the audiences who connect with the BBC through telephone calls, text messages, emails, Skype, Facebook and Twitter to air their views. The Hausa Service also runs other interactive programmes that allow web and mobile phone users to send their stories and pictures to be used on the BBC Hausa webpage, *BBC Hausa.com*, and on the BBC Hausa Facebook page while their comments, sent as text messages and emails, are regularly aired in live radio programmes (Tangaza 2009, 2011; Abubakar 2011, 2013). So, global broadcasters do utilize the various opportunities offered by new technologies to maintain close engagement with their audiences.

Indeed, technologies are the main arteries that link Nigerians with the world media, providing the infrastructure that brings cultural goods to them and takes theirs to others, and doing a lot more in their daily lives. 'Media technologies are more than transmitters of content, they represent cultural ambitions, political machineries, modes of leisure, relations between technology and the body, and, in certain ways, the economy and spirit of an age' (Larkin 2008: 2). Examining their role here does not only unfold the nature of global broadcasters' strategies of delivering content, and the audiences' relationship with them, it also unpacks the historical and cultural dynamics of their influence in the everyday life of Nigerians.

Convenient Convergence

The bulk of the data gathered from the in-depth interviews with the BBC's former and serving staff and from the individual and group interviews with Nigerian audiences unveils different layers of convergence that define the relationship between the production and consumption sides of the media. From the audiences' side, the spread of mobile telephony

and other portable devices, as well as the convergence of mobile and web technologies, enhances their engagement with global broadcasters. The data also shows that the convenience of getting different forms of content—texts, audio and video—from the web at the same time and at one's convenient time, and even while on the move, adds to the attractiveness of such experience. It equally reveals the audiences' enthusiasm to participate in programmes and become both content creators and consumers. On the production side, with the BBC as the case study, there is a deliberate convergence drive pursued through its multimedia strategy to deliver content—texts, audio and video—online to make it simultaneously available to audiences who could access it at their convenience. There is equally a deliberate attempt to encourage interactivity and audience participation through interactive programming. The design and application of these strategies were made possible by the convergence of new technologies. And there is also the convergence of technologies for simultaneous content distribution and consumption, completing a full circle of convenient convergence.

Technologies Driving Multimedia Strategy

The BBC, as noted earlier, has a tradition of deploying technologies for the delivery of its services. It is in line with this that the corporation engages new technologies to enhance its engagement with audiences in delivering its products to them, in receiving feedback from them, in getting content from them, and in enhancing its own efficiency — as revealed by its own personnel. This comment from its former executive editor of the African region (the interview was conducted when he was still the executive editor) illustrates the kind of changes BBC's engagement with new technologies is bringing:

> In the past we used to wait for our reporters to send in their scripts or cassette, which you know would have to take sometimes a week before it arrived here for us to use [...]. But now, with very good (internet) connectivity and telephone lines—and in fact mobile phones in particular—you find that we put out the very latest as quickly and as regularly as we could.

In this instance, this BBC editor outlined the nature of changes new technologies have brought in speeding up the process of sending reports (often news features with regional flavour) by the BBC language services' reporters from their regional bases in Africa to the metropolitan headquarters of the corporation. A news feature that would in the past take a week to reach London from Nigeria, for example—and risk becoming stale—can now be sent instantly via the internet in perfect sound quality. News sources could also be reached easily (via mobile phones or online) and facts or opinions gathered from them. And these are just within the news gathering stage. New technologies' role goes far beyond that; it permeates various aspects of content production, as the comment by *Producer I* in London indicates:

> News reports and features are sent directly by reporters, via the internet or satellite phones or whichever technology, to the respective services they work for. Interviews are sometimes conducted directly from London via telephone or through any of the regional studios. The materials are then edited, usually by a programme producer using the editing software in the service (Radioman, Dira Highlander etc), and prepared for transmission. If the material is relevant for audiences in other services, it is shared across those services. This is done quickly by mere clicks of few buttons because the entire system has been digitalized and centralized.

The production processes do not end with the technical editing of the audio or video materials and written texts; further evaluation and editing do often follow to ensure suitability of materials for each platform. The length and quality of the audio or video materials, the length and form of the texts and the nature and quality of accompanying pictures and so on would all have to be carefully considered in preparing the final products for delivery through different platforms. Respondents reveal that unlike in the past when producers and reporters were confined to one specialised area and encouraged to devote themselves to working for one platform (often just radio), the current multimedia environment demands that producers and reporters engage in multimedia journalism for multiplatform delivery. In the Hausa language service, for instance, a producer would sometimes prepare materials for delivery on radio, online and on mobile, as *Producer II* explains:

> The programmes we deliver live on radio, which our audiences usually listen to live on radio or online and even on mobile, are also streamed and stored on our website *bbchausa.com* to be listened to by the audiences at their own time […]. We also re-structure the materials and produce texts for the online page and for mobile.

Multimedia environment entails that multimedia journalists become familiar with different technologies, not just the ones they use in the production and distribution of their products, but also the ones used in the consumption of the products. It is not only the BBC journalists that engage in this, producers elsewhere are also encouraged to do so. The VOA, for example, has developed a strategy of structuring programmes for its mobile audiences in Africa. Its head of Mobile and Digital Media in Africa, Steven Ferri, has argued that successful programming for mobile phones must to be 'short, light, vocal, personal [and] intimate' (cited in Powell 2012: 24).

The BBC's mobile programming policy was laid out in its editorial guidelines and developed over time to suit the practicalities of the rapidly changing mobile technology. The guidelines acknowledge that mobile 'devices are constantly evolving and with them the creative possibilities they offer', but that content delivered via them 'should be suitable for and meet the expectations of the likely audience' (BBC Guidelines 2010: 203). There is, however, a warning that 'special care should be taken when editing material for mobile to ensure that this does not affect the suitability or integrity of the original material and that it has not been taken out of context' (BBC Guidelines 2010: 203). Those were the key principles that guide the World Service's mobile programming which in turn helps to drive up its overall global audience figures (BBC Global News 2013).

New Technologies and Interactivity

One of the key features of contemporary media landscape is interactivity, which some theorists partly use to illustrate 'the blurring of boundaries between production and reception' (Jenkins 2006; Sundet and Ytreberg 2009: 383). New technologies enable audiences to simultaneously create and consume media content. Mainstream broadcasters capitalise on this

to pursue participatory programming and trumpet it as the triumph of the freedom of expression. Interactivity does have the multiple benefits of directly engaging the audiences, generating content from them, infusing variety in programmes, providing instant feedback and exerting subtle influence on audiences. The BBC World Service, as the case study here, has its interactive programming policy set out in its editorial guidelines: 'Interactivity provides choice and gives opportunities to be heard, to participate and to create content' but it 'must be conducted in a manner that is honest, fair and legal' (BBC Guidelines 2010: 184). It must also fit the broadcaster's public service remit: 'be distinctive, have a clear editorial purpose and match the expectations of the likely audience' (BBC Guidelines 2010: 185). The broadcaster therefore has its procedure and purposes of pursuing participatory programming, and new technologies have enhanced them. In the following comments, two editors—a former executive editor for the African region based in London and the bureau editor based in Abuja, Nigeria—explain how the BBC has been integrating greater interactivity in its programming and how this is widening its engagement with audiences:

> In terms of engagement, the only sort of engagement we used to have was actually in the form of listeners' question-and-answer slots; and there wasn't anything like 'Have Your Say' (the special interactive programme) with people setting the agenda. Whereas now, even in language services, say in Hausa or Kiswahili or in Somali, you find out that our listeners now tend to react almost instantly. Sometimes while programmes are on air listeners are able to give feedback.

> Officially, we come to realize that the audiences are trying now to sort of drive the BBC agenda on a daily basis because to a greater extent some of our […] outputs come from user-generated content […]. You find out that the amount of text messages, that is SMS, and the request you get from people who say they want to be on air to say something […] (are) just growing by the day.

The notion of audiences themselves, and not the BBC, setting the agenda is the official line of the broadcaster to stress its off-hand attitude in order to project itself as an impartial platform that merely conveys audiences' views. This makes the audiences less suspicious of the intent

of the content (after all it is ostensibly theirs, not BBC's) and therefore more likely to be influenced by it. In reality, though, what is presented as user-generated content has in it many trappings of the BBC because it is the BBC that selects the topic for discussion (though there are instances when even the topics are suggested by the audiences), decides the trend of the debate, and shapes its outcome (Hill and Alshaer 2010). It is not only in the specific case of BBC that this issue of pre-determining what content participating audiences would produce (or at least deciding its mode and direction) exists, it is a phenomenon noted in other studies too (Carpentier and De Cleen 2008; Willems 2013). Carpentier and De Cleen (2008: 1) have argued that many aspects of participatory programming do sometimes 'cover-up a multitude of restrictions that deal with muting voices, appropriations, techniques of surveillance, inequalities, and exclusions'. The broadcasters have their own objectives of introducing participatory programming and they do try to attain them. For instance, the idea of expanding interactive programming in the World Service is essentially to achieve the BBC's 'global conversation' objective (BBC 2008; Abubakar 2011) which is linked to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's 'digital diplomacy initiatives' (Sreberny et al. 2010: 280; Hill and Alshaer 2010). The key argument is that mediating the 'global conversation' may generate the outcome that the corporation and its paymasters desire.

The argument that interactive programming has other motives beyond audience participation and enhancing democratic values is not just limited to the issue of attaining the cultural and ideological objectives of the producer. There are economic and commercial purposes of it too (van Dijck 2009; Dean 2010; Willems 2013)—though not all of them are applicable to audience participation in global media programmes. Dean (2010: 4) has noted that communicative capitalism does bring a strange convergence of democracy and capitalism in which 'communicative exchanges and their technological preconditions become commodified and capitalized'. And van Dijck (2009: 55) has argued that participation should not only be seen from the perspective of audiences' civic engagement but also from the economic meaning of being producers, consumers and data providers. Willems's work (2013: 224) reinforces this argument, highlighting the corporate logic of participation 'in the sense that audiences' use of the internet and mobile phones leaves behind a trail of personal data that can be deployed in the service of communicative capitalism'. Analysing the 'corporate logic to the rising popularity of the use of new media in audience participation' in local radio programmes in Zambia, Willems (2013: 230) unveils how the local stations incorporated

participatory programming 'into their marketing and income generating strategies'. The last aspect would not apply to international broadcasters like the BBC World Service since direct income generation is not primarily their remit, but the telecoms firms and other communications agencies that facilitate the communicative exchanges would derive economic benefits from such interactive programming. With this in mind, the key argument that the new trend enhances communicative capitalism (Dean 2010; Willems 2013) still holds.

However, for many staff of the BBC World Service, who engage in organizing participatory programming, interactivity and use of new technologies are primarily meant to enhance efficiency and journalistic output. They feel that they do enable them to assess audiences' perceptions of their programmes and help improve their performance, as explained by this senior correspondent in Nigeria:

> In the past you (were) just making programmes, airing them; sometimes you (didn't) even know who listened (to them). But here you get a feedback, people telling you the (output); they react to what you do; even if you don't see them or feel them, at least you read what they say. So this will encourage you to improve on what you are doing.

As this and earlier responses indicate, the integration of the new media into the services of the 'old' media has been transforming the pattern of broadcasting and media-audience relationship. Price et al. (2008: 156) have argued that 'new technologies means far more than reaching more people, reaching faster, penetrating through greater barriers […], new technologies beget a new media environment'. The convergence allowed by both the internet and mobile telephony, for instance, has brought many changes in the BBC Hausa Service's broadcasting and in its engagement with audiences, as this Abuja bureau editor explains:

> There is now the BBC Hausa Facebook (through which) we send out a particular burning or topical issue online, and the amount of response and the debate among

> people who visit that site is just interesting […]. Now the BBC has started getting content on to mobile phones, podcast and stuff like that […]. A lot of people are coming in and saying, 'Look, this is a new development'. I had one listener with an old telephone handset (who came) and said: 'Look, you guys said I can get whatever I want with this, show me how I can get such content'. I told him 'No, look, your telephone is not a web-enabled phone, so you can't get it on this'. Believe me, the next day, the man came back with a web-enabled phone and asked me to show him how to do it.

Delivering Hausa Service content through various platforms—radio, online and mobile—and interacting with the audiences through those platforms as well as getting them absorbed in debates and discussions through both the radio interactive programming and social media platforms indicate the BBC's determination to widen its reach and increase its audience figures. Harnessing different platforms ensures that it does not miss out on any useful platform. For instance, the distribution of content through mobile telephony, as former head of the BBC Hausa Service Jamilah Tangaza notes (Tangaza 2009), holds great potential in Nigeria which in 2009 was identified as the fastest growing mobile phone market in the world, at that time with 70 million subscribers (Okonji 2009)—a figure that, as noted earlier, had reached 120 million by April 2013 (NCC 2013).

Digital Consumption and Participation

With digital distribution comes digital consumption. And the rapid spread of digital devices is coinciding with new needs for information and new ways. Data gathered through the individual and group interviews with audiences in Nigeria suggests that although radio and television remain the dominant reception platforms, there has been a rapid increase in the use of internet and mobile telephony for global media consumption. The use of multiple platforms—combining radio, television, internet and mobile phone—for such consumption was found to have spread across social strata and age groups, but greater use of internet and mobile telephony appears to be more prevalent among the affluent and the young. The greatest use of new platforms, particularly the internet, to access the contents of both old and

new media was found among local journalists who do that for personal and professional purposes.

> I think because of my work, I always [access news] through the internet. I browse BBC, *Al-Jazeera* and Reuters [*business editor*].

> I use the internet most of the time [for global news consumption]. I also listen to radio and watch television [*sports editor*].

> The internet is my major platform [d*eputy political editor*].

> I listen to the BBC very often; I also watch CNN and then *Al-Jazeera* […]. The internet really [is the major platform] [*political editor*].

> I think in a day I spend between 10 and 14 hours on the internet; so most of the stories I get come from the internet [*deputy news editor*].

The dominance of the internet as the main means of accessing international media by these journalists is undisputable. They read written reports and listen to radio broadcasts and watch television images all on the internet. The last respondent even attempted to quantify the time he spends daily on it: 'between 10 and 14 hours' every day. Internet consumption is part of their work: it is not only for accessing news and information and entertainment; it is also for earning a living. Their consumption and use of international media products have special significance here because they do re-distribute part of the content, sometimes with little editing, to their local audiences too. Digitalization makes this faster and easier. These journalists' consumption pattern may reflect the extreme side of using internet for news consumption since it serves both personal and professional purposes, but a steady shift to the

web and mobile telephony is also taking shape among average media consumers in Nigeria, as the following responses reveal:

> I access international media on my radio, TV and smartphone. I rely on these three for accessing mostly Hausa and English services of the BBC. If I missed [live] broadcasts on radio and television, I would come back to my handset and get what I'd missed [*banker in upper middle class group*].

> I usually get my news from radio, although I regularly browse the internet and get news alert on my mobile handset [*female politician*].

> I use both internet and my mobile phone to listen to BBC but I still rely more on radio, especially in the morning before I leave home for work [*female school teacher in the working class group*].

> Most of the times I get news headlines from my mobile handset. I also read and listen to BBC and VOA and CNN news on the internet [*student in the youth group*].

The internet and mobile telephony function both as complementary and as alternative platforms. The mobile telephony—perhaps because of its multiple utility, ease of use and portability—has, as noted earlier, become the fastest spreading technology in Nigeria (NCC 2013) and its potential in content distribution and consumption has never been in doubt. The fact that internet-enabled mobile phones are spreading rapidly in Nigeria and across Africa (Powell 2012; NCC 2013) and that people find them very convenient to use give the digital shift an even greater resonance. For instance, BBC surveys do indicate that accessing BBC content through mobile phone, especially by the youth in Nigeria, is on the increase (BBC Global News 2010, 2013). This, the corporation argues, confirms its 'wisdom' in employing 'multimedia strategy' in content delivery and in engaging with audiences in interactive programming (Hiller 2010: 2). This applies to both the English and non-English language

services. The BBC Hausa Service, for example, first studied its audiences' familiarity with the new technologies and responded accordingly. 'To help us deliver the best for our audiences, we looked at how (the internet and mobile telephone) were changing the way they live their lives and their increasingly sophisticated approach to media' and made use of them ((Tangaza 2009). This led to the introduction of the Hausa mobile news service *Labarinku a Tafinku* (Your News in Your Palms) and the subsequent increase in mobile offerings (BBC Global News 2013). The digital expansion also includes harnessing of social networking sites, such as Facebook and Twitter, which widens interactivity and makes both delivery and instant feedback possible. Many audiences do now participate regularly in BBC's interactive programmes using both the social networking sites and mobile telephony, as illustrated by the following responses:

> I do regularly (participate in BBC programmes through) Facebook. Whenever there is a topic I have interest in I offer my own contribution [*political editor in the journalist group*].

> I participate actively, making comments mostly on the BBC Hausa Facebook. I also send SMS and emails for *Ra'ayi Riga* (Have Your Say) programme [*trade unionist*].

> Well, I sometimes call on phone to express my worries over certain (BBC) programmes because some of the interactive programmes do not really contain useful information to us [*graduate student*].

The viability of new technologies in enhancing interactive programming has long been established (Jenkins 2006; Sundet and Ytreberg 2009). The findings here have reinforced that perspective and highlighted their significance in the transformation of media landscape. 'With the Internet and broadband has come the culture of interaction and user-originated content' (Price et al. 2008: 156). But what is worrying to some, such as the graduate student quoted above, is that the quality of the content generated by media users may tend to be of lower quality than the one generated through the rigorous of serious reporting by trained

journalists. Triviality at the expense of quality journalism has long been noted in the growing influence of new media (Morley 2006). Even the producer-generated content designed for new media users does not often meet the quality level of serious journalism, as the content for mobile phone users, for instance, needs to be 'short, light, vocal, personal (and) intimate' (cited in Powell 2012: 25). And although Africans' unique use of the device has, for instance, encouraged the VOA to structure long-form programmes for them (Powell 2012), the content is still far below what audiences can get from the radio and the web.

The key consolation, though, is that many consumers of mobile phone content also use other platforms to access additional details on their areas of interest. The use of multiple platforms, as shown in this chapter, is the norm rather than the exception among all segments of audiences, and as such different delivery and reception devices complement one another and make the convergence of old and new platforms mutually beneficial to both the production and consumption sides of the media. This complementary role equally extends to the aspect of audience participation. Audiences are increasingly using both old and new platforms to both consume the global media products and participate in their programmes, as the following comments reveal:

> The truth is I am a regular user of both radio and mobile [phone] to listen to BBC and VOA programmes. Sometimes I would be listening to BBC on my radio and at the same time participating in *Ra'ayi Riga* [Have Your Say] programme. It is exciting: you are sitting in your room and you are talking to the world [*lawyer*].

> I listen to VOA, BBC, *Deutsche Welle* and *Radio France Internationale* every morning before going to work. And I always send them emails and text messages, commenting on the reports they carry. I often send them while they are on air, and occasionally they read them while they are on air, especially the BBC [*civil servant*].

> I don't miss VOA programmes, their political debate programme particularly, which always features our local politicians. I also like BBC and send messages to them regularly. They sometimes air them [*health worker*].

The sense of being part of a programme or even being the creator of its content seems to excite many audiences, and that is one of the objectives those who run participatory programming want to achieve (Tangaza 2011). It gives audiences not just opportunities to express themselves and participate in 'global conversation' (BBC 2008; Tangaza 2011) but also a sense of personal esteem and an apparent power to decide what the output should be. But, as noted earlier, what may appear to be opportunities for open participation and enhancing democratic ideals are also encumbered by many restrictions arising from the cultural, ideological and economic interests of media outlets and communications agencies (van Dijck 2009; Dean 2010; Hill and Alshaer 2010; Willems 2013). Whatever the level and length of participation and however instantaneous it may be, the evidence from previous studies (Carpentier and De Cleen 2008; Hill and Alshaer 2010; Willems 2013)—and from this research — suggests that media institutions remain the main deciders of the final output.

The debate about the balance of power between media and audiences is not new. Long before the new media landscape, which revives it, media scholars (Lasswell 1927; Adorno and Horkheimer 1944/1979)—and generally those associated with hypodermic needle theory—had spoken about the power of media and passivity of mass audience. Using experience of propaganda in the First World War, Lasswell (1927: 220) pointed to media's ability to weld 'millions of human beings into one amalgamated mass of hate and will and hope'. But when research evidence suggested otherwise, uses and gratification theorists (Herta Herzog 1941; Halloran 1970; Katz et al. 1973; Blumler and Katz 1974) shifted almost all the power to audiences. This too was countered by studies that gave birth to minimal effects theory (Klapper 1960), which accepts that media do indeed have power (though not omnipotent)—but so do audiences. They have the power to select what they want to consume and to interpret it in their own way (Hall 1980; Morley 1980, 2006; Ang 1996; Michelle 2007; Abubakar 2013). That is, however, not an omnipotent power either. It 'is the power not to change or overturn imposed structures, but to negotiate the potentially oppressive effects of those structures where they cannot be overthrown, where they have to be lived with' (Ang

1996: 8). Not much has radically changed in this respect, even under the current new media landscape. What the new technologies do is to provide wider opportunities for interactivity and participation, which have certainly enhanced the power of audiences. But that power has not been sufficiently enhanced to overturn the imposed structures of the media and communications agencies—the two institutions responsible for bringing and propping up the new phenomenon itself, both of whom are also reaping benefits from it.

Conclusion

The massive spread of mobile phones and other portable devices and digital technologies in Nigeria is transforming the pattern of media consumption in the country, with an increasing number of people—especially the young and the affluent—using mobile telephony and the internet to interact with global media. The BBC World Service and other global broadcasters are taking advantage of this to expand their reach and maximize their potentials in the fight for the hearts and minds of Nigerians. The strategy has enabled the World Service to turn a steady decrease in the number of its traditional audiences in Nigeria into a digital success, with the country becoming the broadcaster's biggest driver of mobile traffic in the world. New technologies have certainly brought changes in the patterns and trajectories of media-audience relationship, enhancing greater engagement and facilitating a convenient convergence of content creation and consumption. They speed up the processes of production and delivery, improve individual and corporate efficiency, and enhance participatory programming. Audiences are actively involved in both content consumption and creation, thereby gaining more leverage in their relationship with the media.

However, beneath the façade of open participation and enhancement of civic engagement that interactive programming appears to have engendered lies the hard economic, cultural and ideological interests of the media and communications institutions that set their framework, determine their outcome, and ultimately profit from them. Audiences have certainly gained more power than they previously had but they are still not powerful enough to overturn the institutional structures imposed on them. It is the power to select what to consume, to interpret the content in their own way and to participate in content production within the framework set by the media and communications agencies. There is certainly a change in

power relation between the media and their audiences, with a shift in favour of the latter but the former still appears to remain in the driver's seat.

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