



Briefing Paper - Promoting Research Uptake: New media versus traditional media

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Sharing information in the mobile environment: Is there a place for traditional media?

Key points:

1. Traditional media houses are losing circulation numbers and advertising revenue internationally. This trend is not followed in Africa, with circulation numbers of newspapers increasing by 13% in the past five years
2. While the internet has shown strong growth in Africa, cell phones have a much higher penetration on the continent, making it an ideal source for reaching untapped markets
3. These markets and distribution platforms will not, with current business models, make up for the loss of revenue to traditional media platforms. Cell phones could be a valuable tool for information sharing by government and developmental organisations
4. Use of new media still limited as understanding of the tools grows and access to the internet increases

New media versus traditional media

In my view, the definition of new media versus traditional media is constantly changing. What was defined as new media in 2001, in South African terms, was a website with text, audio and video (maybe combined with a bit of software to create a cohesive presentation). In other words, new media was a combination of all the old media in a new wrapping.

Four years later, Web 2.0 shoved that idea into the bin. In 2005, new media was defined as content that allowed user interaction.ⁱ Facebook, Twitter and Blogs, which allow not traditional contributors to have inputs on what is seen as very traditional platforms are run of the mill. Most news websites pride themselves on the inputs from outside on every single one of their articles.



Fig 1: Mail & Guardian online, February 2011

Web 3.0 is in the making. According to the American Journalism Reviewⁱⁱ, with Web 2.0, the focus is self-publishing and connectivity. The next step, also known as the semantic web, uses smart programs to tag and link to information across mediums, providing context and depth to stories without much human intervention. 3.0 is still a thing of the future, but online publishers are taking it seriously.

Situation Analysis: New Media vs Traditional Media

Dropping circulation

In March 2010, US newspapers reported a drop of 8.7% in the weekday sales of newspapers compared to the same period in 2009. The figures are based on reports filed by hundreds of individual papers.ⁱⁱⁱ

Africa, it is generally believed, will see an increase in newspaper readers as literacy rises.^{iv} In the past five years, more newspapers have been established on the continent and circulation has increased by 13%.^v Over five years, global advertising revenues fell -17.9%. It was down one-third in North America, -15% in western Europe and -5.4% in Asia. It rose +46.5% in Latin America, +1.1% in central and eastern Europe. It was stable in the Middle East and Africa.

The counter argument, however, is that literacy might not have as big an effect on numbers as cell phone penetration is happening at a much faster rate than traditional media could ever hope for.

Another reason for a further increase in newspaper circulation in Africa may be the absence of technology on the continent that is driving newspaper readers away from papers in the rest of the world, due to the so-called digital divide. Guy Berger, from Rhodes University, is of the opinion that “the tsunami of digital content will not pass Africa by”.^{vi} Berger says while the effect on Africa may be delayed, it is almost a certainty that the continent will follow similar trends in the near future.

In 2010 some 110 million people in Africa (or just less than 11% of the total population) had access to the internet. In the last ten years, the use of the web has grown some 2000% on the continent. That is more than five times more than the average growth of the internet in the rest of the world. Seen in that context, Berger’s statement rings true.

South Africa

In 2006, Gartner estimated global sales of cell phones at 986 million. An interesting comparison is to personal computer sales, which is only expected to reach 300-million by 2009, according to the IDC.^{vii}

In the same year, the three largest South African cell phone networks had more than 36 million subscribers. At that stage there were some 24.5-million adult TV viewers in South Africa and more than 28.5 million radio listeners.^{viii} Riaan Groenewald, operations director of Multimedia Solutions, a mobile marketing company, suggests that cell phones “are therefore the dominant medium of communication both globally and locally. As a result, the best way to offer information and services to consumers is through their cell phone”.

In 2009, daily newspapers in South Africa saw an overall decline in circulation figures of 2.57%. The numbers for weekly newspapers dropped even more; some 9% lower than the numbers recorded in 2008 and 2007.^{ix}

The literacy rate in South Africa was estimated at more than 86% in 2003.

Mauritius

An interesting example to the contrary is the bloom of newspapers and radio stations in the former French colony of Mauritius. While free-to-air television is still controlled by the state, several so-called traditional media outlets (privately owned) are stealing a large portion of readers and listeners.

Subash Gobine, of the Defi Media group, however says new media is already grabbing a foothold in Mauritius as well, with thousands of users already using the group’s website (<http://www.defimedia.info>).^x

In 2007, some 74% of Mauritius’s 1.2 million citizens were cell phone subscribers.

The literacy rate in Mauritius was estimated at 84% in 2000.

Advertising

Mobile advertising allows access to consumers in markets thought to be unreachable due to the escalating penetration of cellular phones. However, the accepted view is that the amount of money spent on advertising will not increase at the same rate as the growth in new platforms to take up the marketing messages ... which will lead to a drop in spending on advertising in the traditional media such as newspapers, television and radio.

The tools used to give advertisers up to date information on the success of their campaigns make new media platforms attractive to the market, with cost per click and cost per thousand impressions allowing the marketers to pay only for advertising that they know reached interested consumers. Brett St Clair, country manager for AdMob South Africa (one of Africa’s largest mobile internet advertising platforms), goes so far as to say that mobile media is the “only choice” for advertisers in the African market.^{xi}

Despite the above, predictions were made that global advertising, on all media platforms, was expected to grow by 3.5% in 2010, according to Zenith Optimedia.^{xii}

In 2009, global newspaper advertising revenues dropped 17% in 2009, with newspapers in the USA losing almost 25% of their income through advertising sales. The statistics are not much better for Europe.

An article on Bizcommunity.com^{xiii} argues that evidence is showing that it is more effective to advertise in print than on television or the internet. A recent study in the United Kingdom by Microsoft indicates that every pound spent on print advertising yields 5 pounds in revenue. This compares with returns of 2.2 pounds for television and 3.4 pounds for online advertising.

According to the World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers' (WAN-IFRA) annual world press trends update^{xiv}, "digital advertising revenues will not replace those lost to print in the foreseeable future". The report calls for new business models - including paid-for online access for news - a key goal for many newspapers.

It states that mobile content delivery appears to hold more promise for newspapers than traditional internet delivery, but, at the moment, it does not suit the traditional advertising models. An argument could be made that mobile content cannot be profitable in emerging markets, with consumers reached through this platform not being the target of the traditional high-spending marketers. It might be that the mobile platform lends itself more to government information networks and the spreading of development-orientated information by non-profit organisations.

Development and research through mobile phones

While the mobile phone is not yet a money spinner for newspaper houses, several other applications are benefitting the developing world.

In India, farmers are receiving an SMS once every three days with a weather forecast. In an attempt to avoid crop damage, the University of Agricultural Sciences (UAS), Dharwad, has been sending out information on humidity, maximum and minimum temperatures to combat erratic climate changes.^{xv} In Haiti, cell phone banking is being boosted by the Gates Foundation^{xvi}; women needing health care in Tanzania are being sent bus fare via SMS^{xvii} and in Nigeria and Ghana people are able to verify the validity of their malaria medicines by sending an SMS with the barcode on the medicine bottle to a free checking service^{xviii}.

South Africa is using software developed on Java to gather research data on relatively cheap second generation cell phones. In a recent interview with IPS, Andi Friedman, the head of the Mobile Researcher division of Clyral, said researchers are able to send fieldworkers out to gather information on a multitude of subjects. The fieldworkers receive a questionnaire from a central database on their cell phones. They gather the data and it is uploaded back to the central point and immediately made available to the researcher.

Input from the field is, at this stage, restricted to simple answers, but progress is being made towards gathering audio and even video from the field, Friedman says. Mobile Researcher is also looking at distributing information, to fieldworkers doing researchers at this stage, but also to healthcare workers etc. in the future.^{xix}

While newspapers and other news sources are furiously looking at ways to make monetary gains from the penetration of cellular phones into a previously untapped market, it seems as if these

devices are already improving access to information for people who previously had very limited resources.

Challenges of promoting research uptake as experienced by IPS Africa

The challenge is getting researchers to focus their work on issues that are important to the people at grassroots level. Several interviews done by IPS in the last six months of last year identified this as the single most important factor in getting the message across; if the research results do not touch the lives of ordinary people, they will take no interest in it.

The second challenge is to spread this message to policymakers, researchers and members of the public. In Africa, as discussed below under the heading dropping circulation, traditional media failed to deliver information to those who needed it. The use of older platforms, such as cell phones, could however change this picture.

At the moment it is also a challenge to find content, in any of the media ... traditional or new. In the new media, especially through Web 2.0, the challenge to place this media on a platform available to a large section of the target audience has been largely overcome.

How IPS used new media versus traditional media:

Given the decline in traditional media usage, new avenues need to be found. New media offers opportunities to distribute research information to new users. IPS Africa's changing lives programme^{xx} produced online stories which were distributed to traditional media such as newspapers and radio stations.

In order to engage users on the online site, IPS Africa also tested a number of new media tools such as:

- Twitter: Distribution of stories and identification of story ideas from Twitter feeds. IPS Africa reporters were encouraged to follow key research communicators on Twitter. In turn, IPS Africa stories were promoted through its Twitter feed. Some lessons learned here is that this tool needs constant interaction in order to identify opportunities, interact with key stakeholders and build a following. At the end of the World Social Forum in Dakar, IPS Africa (who covered the event extensively) had generated 15 Tweets during the week-long event. When the final tweet was made, IPS Africa still had 60 more followers on Twitter than tweets.
- Facebook: IPS Africa developed a Facebook presence in order to engage readers in ongoing conversation. As with the Twitter pages, Facebook entries during the WSF conference number slightly more than 10, but the content on the IPS wall looked very similar to its traditional web page. Comments on the inserts are limited to two or three per insert and there is little or no interaction from IPS in response to comments.
- Podcasts: IPS Africa has produced several podcasts, but there is, as yet, no place for interaction on the main pages of the news service. Very few of these podcasts were highlighted on Twitter and Facebook.
- Video: Edison's fifth annual study^{xxi} shows that the percentage of Americans who have ever watched or listened to a podcast is 45% (70 million), up from 43% one year ago. The podcast audience has migrated from being predominantly "early adopters" to more closely

resembling mainstream media consumers. Somewhat surprisingly, despite the growing numbers of smartphone [iPhone, Android, etc.] users, podcasts are being consumed primarily at the computer, and less frequently than last year via the mobile device or “dedicated media player” like the iPod or Zune.

- Slideshows: The tool is effective in getting complex – particularly statistics based – research across. There is a high uptake on slideshows across the world^{xxii}, but gathering statistics around slideshows is murky, to say the least.

Conclusion

Web 2.0 has seen social activity on the internet overtake traditional media on “new” media platforms. To reach the largest amount of users on the internet, on mobile or fixed platforms, these social media platforms have to be incorporated into content distribution models. The new media package has, in other words, expanded from a compilation of radio, television and text to an interactive presentation. The interactive component is driving content as much as the traditional media component.

Facebook and Twitter does get the content to the social media platforms, at the moment, but indications are that Web 3.0 will have browser tailored to the needs of the individual. Software is expected to extract content for the individual from the web in future, which could give smaller and more specific niche sites more prominence in future.^{xxiii}

It may be that cell phones, or whatever form mobile platforms take in future, may be more suitable to organisations with a development goal than the for-profit companies, especially in the developing world.

That might mean that development into this form of information sharing is slower, as less money is to be made, but the technology exists today to make a difference in the lives of people that traditionally struggled to access information.

Mobile technology has the following advantages:

- Low cost
- Consumers are reachable
- The uptake of the platform is already in place
- Advertising is readily distributable, but the model to make this effective is still out of reach

Research is already being done on a grassroots level through mobile phones and further improvements on distributing and gathering information is more than a possibility.

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iii Newspaper Circulation Falls Nearly 9%, New York Times, 26 April 2010, http://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/27/business/media/27audit.html?_r=1

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v World Press Trends 2010 released, Bizcommunity, August 2010, <http://www.bizcommunity.com/Article/196/424/50773.html>

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