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*New tricks for an old pony:*

**Is it essential for speech radio programmes to utilise social media in order to stay relevant to the audience?**

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## CHAPTER 1: Introduction

### “Radio: The Original Social Medium”

Nobody knows who the original author of this quotation is but the phrase is widely quoted among radio broadcasters. It lifts the image of radio at a time when new social networks are threatening a lot of old, legacy media; and maybe it is somehow comforting to think that this monster of social media is nothing new, just a new version of what ‘good old radio’ - the oft forgotten little cousin of the giant that is television - has been doing for years.

“For decades, radio stations have been interacting with listeners in real-time. Song requests. News, traffic and weather tips. Talk show participation. Gossip. Rants. Complaints. Games and contests. Polls. Live events. Charity fundraisers. Support in times of crisis.” This is how copywriter and marketer Scott McKelvey puts it in his blog<sup>1</sup>.

American technology writer Dan Gillmor is a supporter of this view and notes that radio call-in shows date back as far as 1945. All through its history regular people were invited to have their say on the radio. Before that, regular people had no immediate or certain outlet for their own stories and views short of letters to the editor in newspapers. Now they could be part of the program, adding the weight of their own beliefs to the host’s.<sup>2</sup>

This is an interesting argument in the face of what has been happening in the media landscape in the last ten years, especially in the Western world. The digital revolution in the wake of the invention of the internet and the World Wide Web brought us all to the Information Age; that has now led us to what is called the Social Age, with the emergence and rapidly growing popularity of interactive social media, mainly characterized by social networks like Google+, Facebook and Twitter. As Rasmus Kleis Nielsen, assistant professor of communications at Roskilde University, puts it in his Reuters Institute report, ‘Ten Years that Shook the Media World’, in the past the average media user could watch what a few channel programmers chose to broadcast or read what a few editors chose to print.<sup>3</sup> Now, there seems to be so much choice for the audiences that some call this the ‘attention economy’.

New technical innovations have given the people themselves the means to start producing what is being called ‘citizen journalism’: reports and observations from their own neighbourhoods, consequently giving journalists and other people around the world access to unique photos and eyewitness reports of citizen uprisings, natural disasters and terrorist attacks. New applications have also given the people an easy means of social

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<sup>1</sup> “Scott’s thoughts”, January 9, 2013 <http://www.ScottMcKelvey.com>

<sup>2</sup> Dan Gillmor: We the media. Grassroots journalism by the people, for the people. O’Reilly Media Inc. 2004

<sup>3</sup> Rasmus Kleis Nielsen: Ten Years that Shook the Media World. Report, Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, October 2012

communication, as well as means to contact and give direct feedback to traditional journalists. The people themselves are reporting news, commenting, interacting, and demanding their opinions be taken into account.

On the other hand social media has also given journalists new opportunities, like new tools for both gathering information and marketing the end-product to new audiences. As Nic Newman, William H. Dutton and Grant Blank say in their report “Social media and the Changing Ecology of News”:

“More and more journalists are now researching, and then selling and marketing their stories directly through Twitter, Facebook and You Tube, thereby reaching larger audiences and achieving greater notoriety than they would do by relying on their employer alone.”<sup>4</sup>

All these technological innovations and the resulting changing media use and audience behaviour have presented traditional news media organisations with a whole new set of challenges. The media most struggling with the emergence of new media in the Western World is the press. European and North American newspapers have had to think long and hard about their business model that for so many years was built on the old distribution model – paper. Dwindling revenues from paper have resulted in newspapers trying to devise new kinds of business models based on digital content.

Although this digital media revolution started already at the turn of the last millennium, newspapers have only in the recent years really woken up to the changing media environment. In his 2008 book “Here comes everybody” American writer Clay Shirky states that many people in the newspaper business totally missed the significance of the internet. Shirky calls this a ‘narcissistic bias’, as the executives of the worlds’ newspapers were slow to understand the change, and even slower to react.<sup>5</sup>

There are success stories among the newspapers, however. The Daily Telegraph is among the newspapers that are still making a profit, according to Chief Executive of the Telegraph group, Murdoch MacLennan.<sup>6</sup> MacLennan says both online and mobile readership is growing. “We have to get ahead of our customers, not just follow them,” says MacLennan. This has come at a cost, though. According to Editor Tony Gallagher, The Telegraph “had to let a lot of people go five years ago, people who thought that the newspaper idea was set in stone.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Nic Newman, William H. Dutton, Grant Blank: Social Media in the Changing Ecology of News: The Fourth and Fifth Estates in Britain, *International Journal of Internet Science*, 2012, 7(1), 6-22).

<sup>5</sup> Clay Shirky: Here comes everybody. How change happens when people come together. Penguin Books, London 2008

<sup>6</sup> Murdoch MacLennan, speaking at University of Oxford, February 2013

<sup>7</sup> Tony Gallagher: Visit to the Telegraph offices, London, May 15, 2013

Although some newspapers are being more visionary than others, online is certainly not yet providing most newspapers with revenue even remotely comparable to that of the print medium. Television on the other hand seems to be the medium that is still holding its own in this new digital communication era, but statistics show that change is coming. Latest figures from Finland for 2012 indicate that television viewing is slightly increasing among the over 45 year-olds; however, with the younger age groups television viewing is slightly declining. Time shift viewing is becoming more popular with all audiences, but especially with the young; 11% of the younger audiences is already not dependent on the broadcast schedule.<sup>8</sup>

The TV industry has also invested in the concept of the 'second screen', building engagement and interactivity on the internet simultaneously with the live TV broadcast. Television is increasingly utilising user-generated content like videos as news material. But broadcast television also has a growing number of competitors on the net, with companies like YouTube, Amazon and Netflix preparing to produce content of their own and already distributing other content on the Internet, outside traditional TV channels.

What about radio then? In all this talk about new challenges to old legacy media, radio seems largely forgotten. This is reflected in the fact that little or no research seems to have been done on new strategies for radio production in the changing media landscape. Why are the emerging new media seemingly not affecting radio to the same extent as newspapers? Would social media be even easier to adapt for radio as it is for television, substituting old phone-ins for tweets and Facebook comments? How can radio prepare itself for the future and possibly avoid the costly and in many cases fateful mistakes of newspaper companies?

For radio and especially public service radio, which is the focus of this research paper, there still seems to be time to react, as public service companies have stayed fairly stable amongst the new media chaos. Rasmus Kleis Nielsen states that in Western Europe, the continued strength of public service broadcasting sets their television and radio markets apart from for instance the commercially dominated American market. And, he continues to point out, even in the US there has been an increased commitment to public media like PBS and especially NPR, and a growing number of internet-based non-profit news media.<sup>9</sup>

One of the great advantages of radio in the midst of current technological innovations is that radio is easily portable. Technically it has been very easy to digitalize the way we are listening to radio, as almost any electronic device can have a radio in it. People are already accustomed to carrying music devices and radio with them, as those applications were included even in the first, most simple mobile phones and iPods ten years ago. Radio can be regarded as a multitasking medium suitable for our 'attention economy', as people can

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<sup>8</sup>Aalto, Tuija et al: Business Environment analysis. YLE Helsinki, May 21, 2013

<sup>9</sup>Rasmus Kleis Nielsen: Ten Years that Shook the Media World. Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. October 2012.

listen to radio while brushing their teeth, driving to work, at work while banging on the computer, out jogging, and even while reading the paper or watching television. It can be argued that this has bought radio time in the middle of the media revolutions, but, as the Head of Multiplatform for BBC Speech radio, Andrew Caspari says: "What we have not got is any time at all in which we just stand still".<sup>10</sup>

The aim of this paper is to investigate how radio can best adapt to the changing media environment. The main question is whether it is essential for radio to embrace social media as part of its journalistic processes in order to stay relevant to its audience – and how we can make radio more relevant to people when there are so many other options out there. What are the most innovative ways radio programmes are using social media right now?

The key points I will address are:

- focusing on the impact of digital and social media on radio
- looking at how audiences feel about social media and radio
- studying the benefits and challenges of social media for radio
- and most importantly, trying to gain insight into what radio needs to do to adapt to the change

I will try and find answers to these questions by studying three speech radio programmes in public service broadcasting as case studies. These programmes represent some of the most popular and at the same time innovative news magazine programmes in the UK and USA, all three very different with different aims, strategies and resources: 'The Today Programme' from BBC Radio 4, 'Talking Point' from BBC Arabic in the BBC World Service, and 'The Weekend Edition' from NPR. I will show how these programmes have incorporated social media into their strategies, how well they have managed to engage their audiences, as well as challenges these programme makers have faced and solutions they have found to those problems. Public service broadcasting has been chosen because it is not driven directly by the need to attract and court advertisers and thus has more leeway to fully concentrate on journalistic aims.

To put all of this in perspective, I will start by reviewing the general history of media, because it would be fruitless to look at radio in isolation in an increasingly converged world. I will discuss citizen journalism - the need for the audience to participate - as this has had a huge impact on what the audience expects from traditional media. I will also look at statistics about people's changing media habits and study the implications this will have for radio.

Lastly, I will ask radio experts for their views on the impact of social media on radio and what kind of options radio has to be able to thrive in the future. They will also provide insight into the changing media market and the future role of radio.

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<sup>10</sup> Interview, London, June 3, 2013

## CHAPTER 2: A brief history of media revolutions

### 2.1. From the printing press to the rise and rise of social media

The social media revolution we are going through now has often been compared to the revolutionary invention of the printing press. This invention is credited to Johann Gutenberg around 1450, when he introduced a polished version of the printing press with movable type, enabling mass communication. Up until that time scribes had been carefully transcribing texts onto cloth or paper; now, a faster and easier way of transcribing those texts was available. Gutenberg's invention was much disputed at the time and it took entrepreneurs years to make a success out of this new and previously unknown business model. Nevertheless little by little the trade of the scribes started to disappear and new trades emerge in its place.

After the printing press there was a long pause before any other important media innovations. The 19<sup>th</sup> century saw the invention of the camera, the telegraph and the phonograph, and, at the very end of the century, the invention of radio. Newspapers flourished and continued to flourish in the twentieth century, but now they had new competition: first radio in the 1920's and 1930's, then television in the 1950's and 1960's.<sup>11</sup> The British Broadcasting Company, the BBC, was founded in 1922 and NPR (National Public Radio) in 1970, with its history going back to 1925 in educational radio.

The first personal computers and mobile phones were introduced in the late 1960's, marking the start of a new technical revolution that would later accelerate the social media revolution. Both these inventions became commercially marketable in the 1980's, starting with home computers and bulky handheld mobile devices. Meanwhile, new software was devised to take advantage of all these technological innovations, with the first ARPANET (early internet) email sent in 1971. As Clay Shirky describes it: "The earliest email programs were incredibly simple tools, yet the advantages of cost and asynchrony were already there".<sup>12</sup>

However, it was not until 1991 when the full possibilities of all these innovations could be realized. That was the birth of the World Wide Web as invented by Tim Berners-Lee. Suddenly, there was infinite scope for a totally new kind of communication.

According to Dan Gillmor now the history of communications had completed a transformation:

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<sup>11</sup> Rasmus Kleis Nielsen: Ten Years that Shook the Media World. Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. October 2012.

<sup>12</sup> Clay Shirky: Here comes everybody . How change happens when people come together. Penguin Books, 2009

“The Internet is the most important medium since the printing press. It subsumes all that has become before and is, in the most fundamental way, transformative. ...The Net is overturning so many of the things we’ve assumed about media and business models that we can scarcely keep up with the changes; it’s difficult to maintain perspective amid the shift from a top-down hierarchy to something vastly more democratic and, yes, messy.”<sup>13</sup>

Digital strategist Nic Newman points out that even if the invention of the internet was a revolutionary moment, at first it was used mainly for one-way distribution of information. It has only been in the last few years that the creation of social media has really changed our way of interacting with each other:

“The internet has been a part of people’s lives for more than a decade, but until recently was mainly used for the one-way distribution of information. In the last few years, we’ve seen the adoption of sites that allow citizens to create, share and distribute their own content. This so-called Web 2.0 revolution has opened up new possibilities for debate and interaction – the creation of new personal media and the sharing of it through sites like YouTube, Facebook, Flickr and Twitter.”<sup>14</sup>

The last ten years have seen an explosion of technological innovations (smartphone, tablets) and new interactive applications: online social networking site Facebook and photo managing website Flickr in 2004, social news website Reddit in 2005, video-sharing website YouTube and microblogging network Twitter in 2006, microblogging service Tumblr in 2007, online tool-kit and news network Storyful, online pinboard service Pinterest and online photo-sharing service Instagram in 2010, social networking service Google+ in 2011, and mobile video clip application Vine in 2013 just to name a few. Some of these applications and services are thriving, some are not. All of these applications and networks can be called social media, although the term is by no means limited to these. As Nic Newman points out:

“‘Social media’ is an extraordinarily difficult term to pin down. Sometimes it refers to an activity (a journalist blogged); sometimes to a software tool (Blogger); sometimes to a platform (you can blog on Facebook). It incorporates the term user-generated content (UGC) and yet much of this content is not really social at all. Social media is also constantly mutating and evolving; just when you think you have nailed it, a new combination emerges, changing perceptions again.”<sup>15</sup>

On the other hand this constant capability to change is what makes social media so great, says Clay Shirky: “The communications tools broadly adopted in the last decade are the first to fit human social networks well, and because they are modifiable, they can be made fit

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<sup>13</sup> Dan Gillmor: We the media. Grassroots journalism by the people, for the people. O’Reilly Media Inc. 2004

<sup>14</sup> Nic Newman: #UKelection2010, mainstream media and the role of the internet. Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, July 2010

<sup>15</sup> Nic Newman: The rise of social media and its impact on mainstream journalism. Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, September 2009.

better over time”.<sup>16</sup> However, for media companies the fact that social media and technical tools are constantly changing is not making their decisions easy. “One of the difficulties for news organisations is that the social ecosystem is constantly evolving. New networks are emerging, such as Google+, and audiences are continuing to shift their behavior and allegiances.”<sup>17</sup>

While new applications are being invented, a select few of the old networks are becoming almost ubiquitous. Nic Newman assesses that Facebook continues to “sweep all before it”, reaching 1 billion users worldwide in November 2012.<sup>18</sup> In 2013 the big four social networks worldwide are Facebook, YouTube, Google+ and Twitter.<sup>19</sup>

## 2.2. The need to participate: citizen journalism

As new digital technology and social media applications were being created, people quickly found ways to utilise them in a way that the inventors themselves had probably not even foreseen. Dan Gillmor cites the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the resulting protests in San Francisco as one example: “Deploying digital cameras, laptops, and WiFi, indymedia reporters – a self-assembling newsroom – captured the events brilliantly.”<sup>20</sup>

Clay Shirky has more examples, namely the London transport bombings in 2005. According to him Flickr beat many traditional news outlets:

“The photos that showed after the bombings weren’t just amateur replacements for traditional photojournalism; people did more than just provide evidence of the destruction and its aftermath. They photographed official notices (“All underground services are suspended”), notes posted in schools (“Please do not inform children of these explosions”), messages of support from the rest of the world (“We love you London”), and within a day of the bombings, expressions of defiance addressed to the terrorists (“We are not afraid” and “You will fail”). Not only did Flickr host all these images, they made them available for reuse, and bloggers writing about the bombings were able to use the photos almost immediately, creating a kind of symbiotic relationship among various social tools.”<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Clay Shirky: Here comes everybody . How change happens when people come together. Penguin Books, 2009

<sup>17</sup> Nic Newman: Mainstream media and the distribution of news in the age of social discovery. Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, September 2011.

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-19816709>

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.globalwebindex.net/social-platforms-gwi-8-update-decline-of-local-social-media-platforms/>

<sup>20</sup> Dan Gillmor: We the media. Grassroots journalism by the people, for the people. O’Reilly Media 2004

<sup>21</sup> Clay Shirky: Here comes everybody. How change happens when people come together. Penguin Books, 2009

Journalist and writer Paul Mason adds the Iranian revolution from 2009 to the list, when Twitter showed its power. Perceived discrepancies in the results and suspicions of widespread ballot-rigging in the Iranian presidential elections sent people on the streets.

“Social media’s power to present unmediated reality has never been better demonstrated. And the Iranian demonstrations produced hundreds of similar videos, both of the protests and the crackdown that confronted them. Thanks to Twitter, these images exploded like a virus onto the screens of young people all over the world. The Washington Times called it ‘Iran’s Twitter Revolution’.”<sup>22</sup>

Banned from reporting in Iran, the mainstream media quickly began to realize the value of this user-generated content, and to run it. The final clincher was the Arab spring, when even the most hesitant of journalists realized the meaning of social media, and that the media landscape had changed irrevocably.

On 17 December 2010, a street vendor called Mohamed Bouazizi walked onto the streets in the Tunisian town of Sidi Bouzid, carrying a can of gasoline, and set himself on fire. It is said that this single act sparked the Tunisian revolution, which led to President Ben Ali to step down after 23 years in the reign. The unrest spread to other Arab countries, for example Libya, Egypt, Yemen and Syria, fired by the restlessness and discontent of several different groups like the youth, the workers and, as Paul Mason claims, uncontrollable social media.<sup>23</sup> Clay Shirky agrees:

“Free speech activists are harassed or detained in several countries in the Middle East, so they use Twitter to alert one another as to whether they have passed through various security checkpoints... On other occasions, though, it provides a way to spread real news. These tools allow citizens to report the news when they see it, without having to go through (or face delay and censorship by) official news channels.”<sup>24</sup>

The spread of mobile telephones and later, smartphones, has made everybody a reporter, always somebody there when anything newsworthy happens, often ahead of any professional journalists:

“Underpinning the social media is mobile telephony: in the crush of every crowd we see arms holding cell phones in the air, like small flocks of ostriches, snapping scenes of repression or revolt, offering instant and indelible image-capture to a global audience. Cellphones provide the basic white sliced bread of insurrectionary communications: SMS. SMS allows you to post to Twitter, or to microblogs, even if you don’t have Internet access and can’t read the results.”<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Paul Mason: Why it’s kicking off everywhere. The new global revolutions. Verso 2012

<sup>23</sup> Paul Mason: *ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> Clay Shirky Here comes everybody. How change happens when people come together. Penguin Books, 2009

<sup>25</sup> Paul Mason: Why it’s kicking off everywhere. The new global revolutions. Verso 2012

The new empowerment of the people should be taken seriously by legacy media, Clay Shirky argues:

“Users- people – have always talked to each other, incessantly and at great length. It’s just that the user-to-user messages were kept separate from older media like TV and newspapers. The activities of the amateur creators are self-reinforcing. If people can share their work in an environment where they can also converse with one another, they will begin talking about the things they have shared. We are living in the middle of remarkable increase in our ability to share, to co-operate with one another, and to take collective action.”<sup>26</sup>

We seem to be at a point now where the technology enabling the use of social media is becoming so easy to adopt that almost everybody in the Western world has access to it. Just as we no longer ask the question whether to use tools such as the internet or email, there is also less and less reason to ask whether to use social media such as Facebook and Twitter. As Clay Shirky puts it:

“Communications tools don’t get socially interesting until they get technologically boring. The invention of a tool does not create change; it has to have been around long enough that most of society is using it. It’s when a technology becomes normal, then ubiquitous, and finally so pervasive as to be invisible, that the really profound changes happen, and for young people today, our new social tools have passed normal and are heading to ubiquitous, and invisible is coming.”<sup>27</sup>

Although a lot of the legacy media has been resisting the change, Dan Gillmor says that far from being a threat, social media offers tools for professional journalists to do better journalism:

“I am most gratified at how the ‘former audience’, as I call it, has taken these tools and turned its endless ideas into such unexpected, and in some cases superb, forms of journalism. We shouldn’t see this as a threat. It is, rather, the best opportunity in decades to do even better journalism. Yes, this new media has created, or at least exacerbated, difficulty issues of credibility and fairness. We’ll be wrestling with these issues for decades, but I am confident that the community, with the assistance of professional journalists and others who care, can sort it out.”<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Clay Shirky Here comes everybody. How change happens when people come together. Penguin Books, 2009

<sup>27</sup> Clay Shirky ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Dan Gillmor: We the media. Grassroots journalism by the people, for the people. O’Reilly Media Inc. 2004

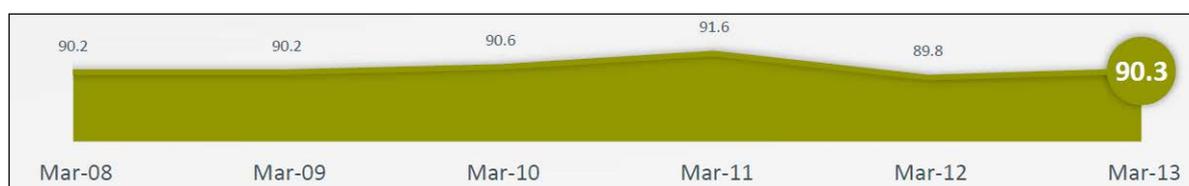
## CHAPTER 3: Radio in the age of social media

### 3.1. Changing media use and the resilience of radio

Some media consumption trends have been very clear in the last ten years in the Western world. The clearest trend is the continued diminishing circulation of newspapers, which has been accelerated by the ongoing financial recession. Even though newspapers are finding new subscribers online, digital revenue is still very marginal for most newspapers. Creating actual revenue from digital content is very difficult, as it is estimated that for every dollar gained in digital, there is a loss of seven dollars in print.<sup>29</sup>

Looking at listenership and viewership figures in the UK and the US the popularity of television and radio looks fairly stable. Television seems to be holding its own and even growing its viewership, with pay-per-view channels still relying on the content of broadcast TV, and the idea of the 'second screen' supporting the public's increasing preference for mixed-media use while keeping television in the picture. On the whole, public service broadcasting especially in Western Europe continues to stay strong with ongoing political commitment and popular support.<sup>30</sup>

Radio listenership is also still strong, but the time spent listening to radio has decreased slightly. In the UK, 90% of people over 15-years-old listen to radio every week. This figure is marginally up from the previous year, but almost exactly the same as five years ago (Figure 1).<sup>31</sup> In the US radio listening has gone down very slightly during the past ten years, with 94% of the population listening to radio every week in 2002, down to 93% in 2012.<sup>32</sup> However, the time spent listening is down also in the UK, 3% from the previous year, to 21.9 hours per week on average.



**Figure 1.** All radio listening in the UK adult (15+) population (percent of population).<sup>33</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Global Digital Media Trendbook 2012

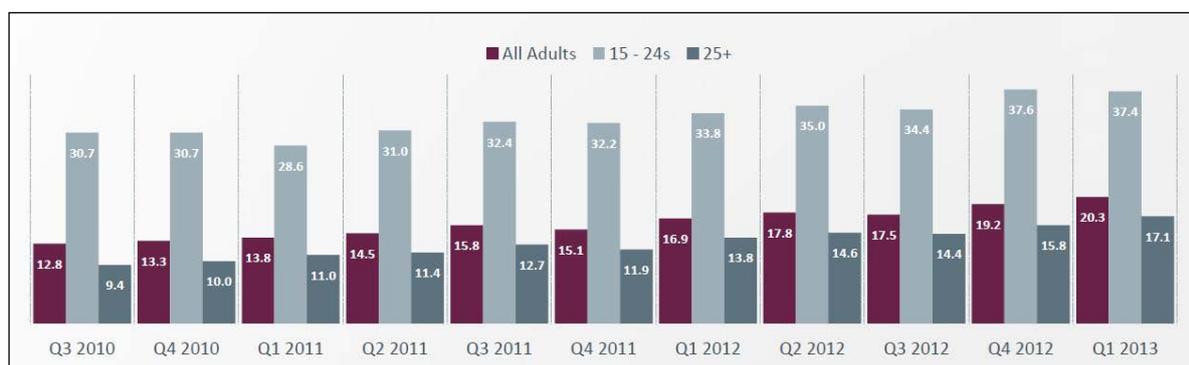
<sup>30</sup> Rasmus Kleis Nielsen: Ten Years that Shook the Media World. Big Questions and Big Trends in International Media Developments. Report, Reuters Institute for The Study of Journalism. October 2012

<sup>31</sup> RAJAR/Ipsos-MORI/RSMB

<sup>32</sup> Global Digital Media Trendbook 2012

<sup>33</sup> RAJAR/Ipsos-MORI/RSMB

Most radio listening still occurs in the home, with 76% of UK radio listeners tuning in at home, 59% in their car, and 24% at work or elsewhere. However, radio listening is becoming less and less restricted to place, with 20% of adults in the UK having listened to radio on their mobile phone in the first quarter of the year 2013, up 19% from the previous year. It is notable that listening to radio via mobile is most rapidly growing among the over 25-year-olds (Figure 2).



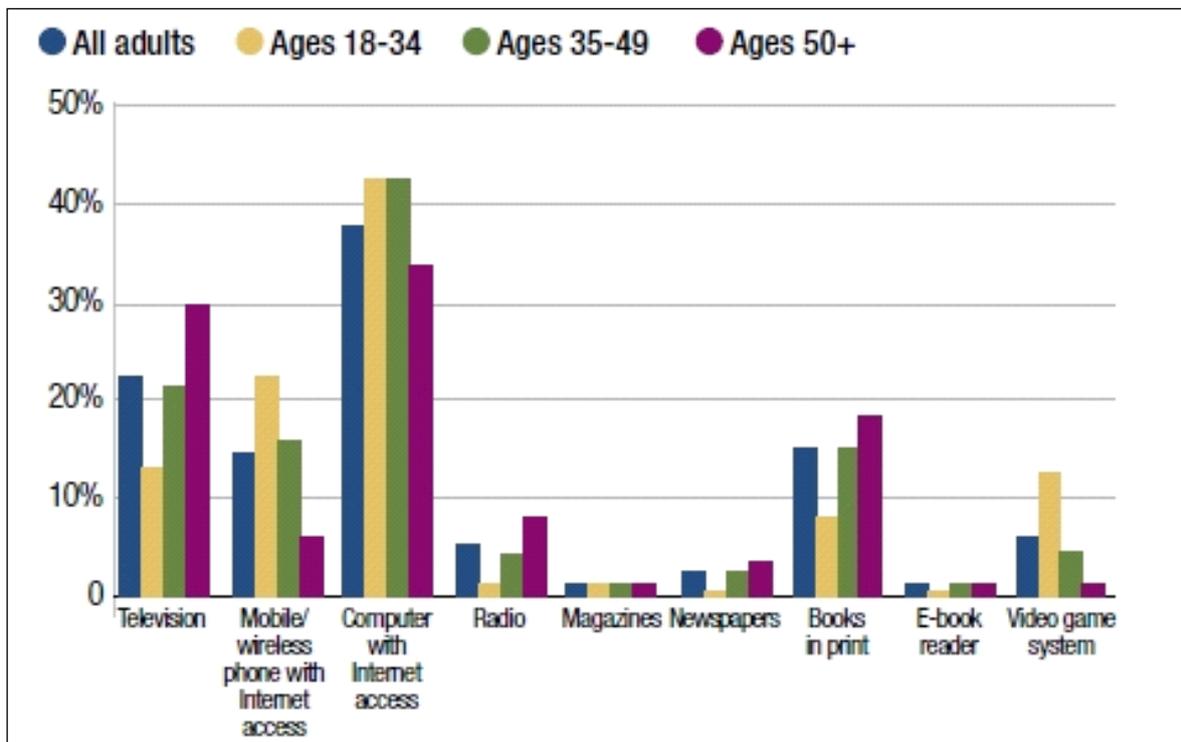
**Figure 2.** Radio listening via mobile phone, percent of UK adults (aged 15+).<sup>34</sup>

Despite the figures that show that radio listening is still strong, the growth of social media in the last ten years has been rapid and the usage of new digital platforms and devices, especially mobile and tablet, is becoming increasingly popular. 61% of all Americans over the age of 12 now own a portable digital media device, but the younger generations have been in the forefront of adopting new media. Having a computer with internet access is now equally important to 18-34 year-old young adults as it is to 35-49 year-old mature adults, but the younger demographic are mostly likely to value their mobile wireless devices more than older demographics. When asked what form of media is the most essential to users, radio fared best among the over 50-year-olds (Figure 3).<sup>35</sup> Reuters Institute research director Robert G. Picard suggests that increased investment by the NPR into news magazine radio shows, whose audience traditionally has been those over 50, may account somewhat for the popularity of radio in this older age group.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>34</sup> RAJAR/Ipsos-MORI/RSMB

<sup>35</sup> Global Digital Media Trendbook 2012

<sup>36</sup> Robert G. Picard, Discussion, Oxford, February 27, 2013



**Figure 3.** Media they cannot live without, by age, in the US.<sup>37</sup>

The number of people with internet in the UK has been steadily growing, from just over 60% in 2003 to 73% in 2011. However, there are interesting trends in how the internet is being accessed and used right now. The Oxford Internet Institute has defined a new user group called ‘next generation users’, who comprise 42% of all internet users in Britain. These next generation users are not just teenagers; they have emerged across all age groups.<sup>38</sup>

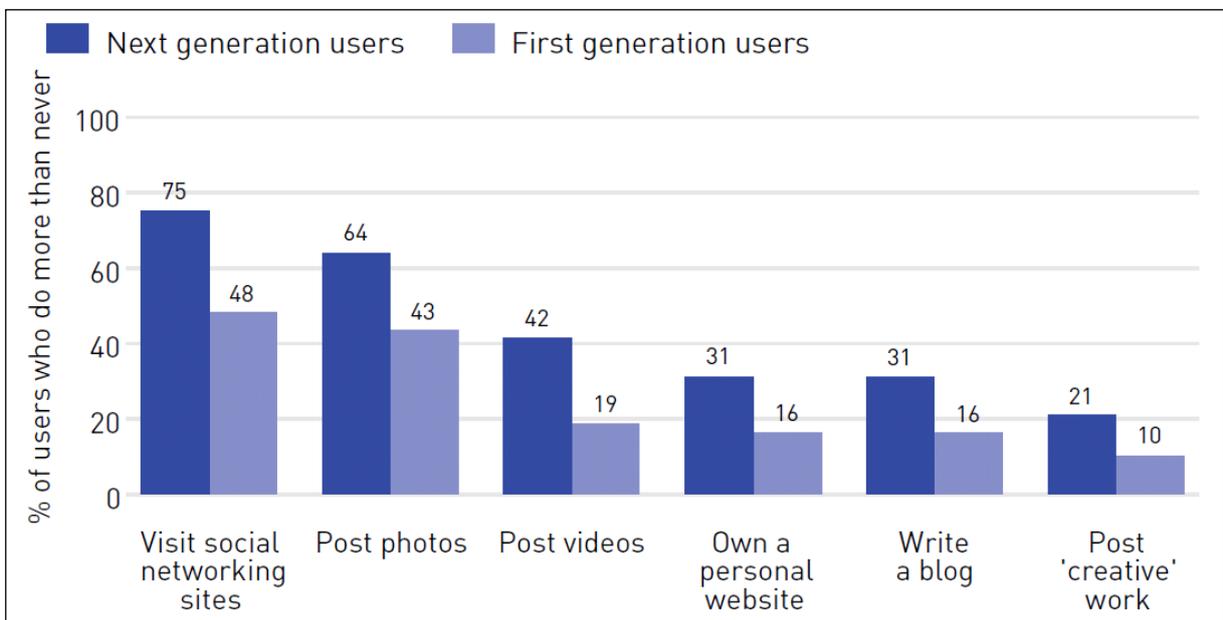
The next generation user is defined by the emergence of two separate but related trends: portability and access through multiple devices. In the last ten years there has been a continuing increase in the proportion of users with portable devices, using the internet over one or another mobile device, such as a smartphone. In 2003 85% of British people had a mobile phone but only 11% of mobile phone users said they accessed email or the internet over their mobile phone. By 2009 the proportion of users accessing email or the internet over their phone increased to nearly half (49%) of all users. In addition to mobile phones, internet users now often have more devices, such as multiple computers, readers, tablets, and laptop computers to access the internet. In 2011, of all users 59% had access to the

<sup>37</sup> Experian Marketing Services 2011, World Newsmedia Network 2012

<sup>38</sup> William H. Dutton, Grant Blank: Next generation users: The Internet in Britain. Oxford Internet Survey 2011 report, Oxford Internet Institute

internet via one or another of these multiple devices other than the household personal computer.<sup>39</sup>

According to the 2011 Oxford Internet survey, these next generation users are more likely to be producers of content than are first generation users, who focus more on consumption rather than production. Specifically, next generation users are more likely to update or create a profile on a social networking site, and they are also more likely to post pictures and videos, post messages on discussion boards or forums, and post stories or other creative work (Figure 4).



**Figure 4.** Likelihood of internet content production, 'next generation users' and 'first generation users'.<sup>40</sup>

Research carried out by The Global Web Index Study lists Facebook, Google+, YouTube and Twitter as the biggest social networks in the world in the first quarter of 2013. Twitter is the currently the fastest growing social platform in the world measured by active users, with a 44% increase from June 2012 to March 2013.<sup>41</sup> According to the Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2013 the five most used social media networks in the UK are Facebook with

<sup>39</sup> William H. Dutton, Grant Blank: Next generation users: The Internet in Britain. Oxford Internet Survey 2011 report, Oxford Internet Institute.

<sup>40</sup> William H. Dutton, Grant Blank: Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Stream Social: Quarterly Social platforms update Q1 -2013, Global Web Index

59% of all those on the internet using it, YouTube with 48%, Twitter with 26%, Google+ with 16% and LinkedIn with 14%.<sup>42</sup>

Whereas it is often thought that the younger demographics are the most active new media users, the biggest growth during the last year has been among older users. On Twitter the 55-64 year age bracket is the fastest growing demographic with 79% growth rate since 2012. The fastest growing demographic on Facebook are the 45-54 year olds with a 46% growth and similarly on Google+ with a 56% growth since 2012.<sup>43</sup>

Despite radio still having a strong listenership in Britain and the US, the emergence and growing popularity of new media has meant that the media audience is becoming more divided and fragmented. As a result the audience tend to spend less time in any one place, as media strategist Justin Arenstein pointed out when talking to newspaper editors at the World Editors Forum WAN-IFRA in June 2013.<sup>44</sup>

The media routines of especially part of the population, generally one that is relatively younger, more affluent, and more well-educated than the rest, has moved rapidly in the direction of digitally delivered, on-demand, multi-screen use, says Rasmus Kleis Nielsen. By 2012, nearly a quarter of the US adult population, mostly from the upper end of the income distribution, regularly accessed news on at least two different digital web-enabled mobile devices, using some combination of laptops, smartphones, and tablets as part of their everyday routines. As Rasmus Kleis Nielsen puts it, "some of us live in a futuristic world of media choice, mobility, and convenience scarcely imaginable 10 or 20 years ago."<sup>45</sup>

More and more of us are becoming these networked individuals, as Paul Mason calls them:

"If you cannot understand how somebody can simultaneously watch TV and tweet about it on their iPad, you are struggling with this concept – but hurry up: 60 per cent of all young people use a 'second screen' while watching TV. Social theorists observed the beginnings of 'networked individualism' very early in the development of information technology".<sup>46</sup>

However, this does not mean that networked individuals abandon old media. Seemingly old-fashioned forms of media use are embedded in people's routines and daily life. As Paul Mason states, looking at media use around the world, 'old' and 'new' media today coexist. Where new media are available, they supplement old media more often than they supplant

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<sup>42</sup> Reuters Institute Digital News report 2013

<sup>43</sup> Stream Social: Quarterly Social platforms update Q1 -2013, Global Web Index

<sup>44</sup> World Editors Forum WAN-IFRA, Bangkok 2-5 June, 2013 <http://www.journalism.co.uk/news/-editors13-eight-trends-every-newsroom-should-be-aware-of/s2/a553130/>

<sup>45</sup> Rasmus Kleis Nielsen: Ten Years that Shook the Media World. Big Questions and Big Trends in International Media Developments. Report, Reuters Institute for The Study of Journalism. October 2012

<sup>46</sup> Paul Mason: Why it's kicking off everywhere. The new global revolutions. Verso 2012

them. In high choice environments the broad trend – on all platforms – is towards audience fragmentation.<sup>47</sup>

Rasmus Kleis Nielsen agrees that the majority of media users mix ‘old’ and ‘new’ media. The same affluent, well-educated, urban demographics that have embraced online and mobile news also read more print newspapers than the ordinary citizen. Most media users continue to mix and match “old” and “new” media on the basis of their personal preferences and the options available.<sup>48</sup>

### **3.2. Benefits and challenges of social media**

The changing media landscape and the ever growing popularity of social networks has meant that more and more mainstream media organizations are taking social tools seriously. American technology writer Dan Gillmor was one of the first to foresee the possibilities of working with audiences already in his 2004 book, “We the Media”.<sup>49</sup>

Digital strategist Nic Newman has found three main reasons why news organizations and journalists in general are and should be interested in social media. The first motivation is to improve the way they tell stories, by using the audience as research. This means crowdsourcing ideas and acquiring user-generated content (UGC) such as comments, photos or videos. Following social media can alert journalists to breaking news or tracking trends, and social media can also be used to find and contact experts and other interviewees.

Secondly, digital and social media can be used to build engagement through interactivity. This is proving more and more valuable at a time of media fragmentation. At the same time the concept of interactivity is changing, with more emphasis put on two-way conversation. Social media users are getting more demanding and expect that they are heard and taken into account.

Thirdly, social media is used for improving reach, distributing and marketing content. Because social media drive more and more traffic to online news sites and audiences are increasingly spending time with social networks, it has proven to be a useful way to look for new audiences and distribute content to wider markets.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Paul Mason: Why it’s kicking off everywhere. The new global revolutions. Verso, 2012

<sup>48</sup> Rasmus Kleis Nielsen: Ten Years that Shook the Media World. Big Questions and Big Trends in International Media Developments. Report, Reuters Institute for The Study of Journalism. October 2012

<sup>49</sup> Dan Gillmor: We the Media: Grassroots Journalism by the People, for the People. O’Reilly Media 2004

<sup>50</sup> Nic Newman: Mainstream media and the distribution of news. Report, Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, September 2011

Nic Newman quotes Raju Narisetti, then managing editor at the Washington Post, who after became managing editor at the Wall Street Journal and now is the Deputy Head of Strategy for the News Corp., who believes that it is easy to underestimate the threat from social networks. Facebook, Twitter and YouTube don't create much, if anything, by way of original content, he says, "But they are winning by simply making the news experience easy, useful and engaging to their audiences". Newman goes on to argue that traditional news organizations have to make sure they understand the full implications of the change in media landscape: "The technology is key, but more important is to keep making distinctive content that people want to discuss and share."<sup>51</sup> Nic Newman is also predicting a change in the attitudes of media companies from just focusing on reach to engagement: "Big numbers have not translated into financial security so now companies are focused on building a core of loyal digital users and maximize value from them".<sup>52</sup>

The BBC's audience research from April 2013 seems to back these views. The BBC put together an audience panel to assess how well the different social media strategies of the nine BBC radio channels succeeded in serving users. The BBC found that when social media and digital engagement were successfully deployed there was a lot of enthusiasm for content and programming as well as for the BBC on the whole. Even among newcomers – those previously not using social media – there was surprise, appreciation and a feeling of 'getting closer' to the range and value of BBC content. The audience was consistently more passionate, opinionated and loyal after experiencing the best of social media. The BBC researchers conclude that social media is most effective in deepening engagement and strengthening loyalty.<sup>53</sup>

The BBC has been taking social media seriously for several years. The BBC UGC Hub was established in the beginning of 2005 following the Asian tsunami, as the BBC was flooded with messages, photos and video shot on mobile phones from people at the scene. The hub was originally set up as a three-month pilot project, but just as the project was being evaluated, the London bombings in July 2005 proved that the company really needed a centre where all user-generated material could be collected and evaluated.<sup>54</sup>

The process of monitoring and assessing activity in blogs and social media now operates 24/7, with a staff of 23 people interacting with audiences on social networks and through direct contacts on the website, "a clearing house and source of expertise for social media

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<sup>51</sup> Nic Newman: The rise of social media and its impact on mainstream journalism. Working paper, Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, September 2009

<sup>52</sup> Nic Newman: Journalism media and technology predictions 2012

<sup>53</sup> Like Actually? How and why should BBC Radio build relationships in Social Media? Audience research findings, April 2013. BBC Marketing & Audiences

<sup>54</sup> Claire Wardle: Case Study: UGC, social media and the BBC. BBC College of Journalism.  
<http://www.mediastudentsbook.com/content/case-study-ugc-social-media-and-bbc>

activity and community building”.<sup>55</sup> According to Assistant Editor Trushar Barot, half of the material the UGC Hub now handles is sent directly to the BBC, the other half is sourced from outside social networks.<sup>56</sup>

Allocating resources to combing social media for content whilst maintaining the old methods of distribution is a challenge to media companies. Nic Newman argues that rather than seeing it as a time consuming add-on, the most successful practitioners have built social media into their journalistic workflows, and made it work for them. Social media has opened up new opportunities for some to widen the impact of their journalism; for others, it is making the sourcing of information and contacts easier and quicker. Despite social media having been around for ten years already, a key challenge for many news organisations is still to encourage more journalists to engage with these tools. Furthermore, adopting social media as tools is not confined to the working journalists: “Social media started in most organisations as a series of bottom-up experiments, but these are now being complemented with top-down initiatives and the allocation of specific roles to coordinate activity, for example the appointment of social media editors”.<sup>57</sup>

Another challenge for journalists is maintaining core journalistic principles whilst encouraging audience participation. As Dan Gillmor writes: “No matter which tools and technologies we embrace, we must maintain core principles, including fairness, accuracy, and thoroughness. These are not afterthoughts. They are essential if professional journalism expects to survive”.<sup>58</sup> Sometimes technology helps; special tools have been developed for checking the authenticity of photographs and video material. More often than not media companies have to rely on the knowledge of their social media experts, who need to assess the credibility of the sources. Guidelines have been developed for both journalists participating in social media as well as those sourcing the social networks for content. Media companies are becoming increasingly aware of the dilemmas involved in blurring the lines between professional and user generated content.

Despite the challenges, Nic Newman does not see any alternative for mainstream media but to try and acknowledge the changing media landscape:

“The emergence of social networks and social discovery has added an extra layer of complexity to this ecosystem with the creation of new editorial and commercial

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<sup>55</sup> Nic Newman: #UKelection2010, mainstream media and the role of the internet: how social and digital media affected the business of politics and journalism . Working Paper, Reuters Institute for The Study of Journalism, July 2010

<sup>56</sup> Trushar Barot, discussion, BBC Broadcasting House, London, May 21, 2013

<sup>57</sup> Nic Newman: The rise of social media and its impact on mainstream journalism: A study of how newspapers and broadcasters in the UK and US are responding to a wave of participatory social media, and a historic shift in control towards individual consumers. Working paper, Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, September 2009

<sup>58</sup> Dan Gillmor: We the media. Grassroots journalism by the people, for the people. O’Reilly Media Inc. 2004

dilemmas. There may still be more questions than answers, but news publishers know there is no alternative but to engage – hard and fast.”<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Nic Newman: Mainstream media and the distribution of news, Working paper, Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, September 2011

## CHAPTER 4. Case studies

In order to highlight some of the best practices and innovations in radio programmes that use social media, I have chosen three different programmes with different social media strategies as case studies. None of these programmes is perfect, but each of them provides a unique look into different kinds of approaches. All these radio programmes have different motivations for utilising social media to complement their broadcasts and face different kinds of challenges. They are all news magazine or current affairs –type of programmes and part of public service broadcasting in the UK and USA.

The first case study is a tri-media (radio, TV and online) programme on BBC Arabic called Talking Point (Nuqtat Hewar). This interactive programme has really embraced social media during the past couple of years egged on by the Arab Spring. The second example is BBC Radio 4’s acclaimed and hugely popular morning current affairs show, The Today programme. The third case study takes us to NPR in the US and is an example of a presenter-driven, weekends-only current affairs programme.

### 4.1. Talking Point, BBC Arabic



Talking Point (in Arabic: Nuqtat Hewar), is a tri-media (radio, television and online) interactive programme produced by BBC Arabic, in the BBC World Service. It is broadcast live on weekdays at 15.06 – 15.57 on TV, radio and online, and then a further 30 minutes only on radio at 16.06-16.30. The BBC describes the programme as “a pioneering live multimedia interactive debating forum that gets to the heart of the matter of a single issue in each edition”.<sup>60</sup> Every broadcast includes live guests in the studio or on the phone, and audience contribution across the Arab World is encouraged via numerous new technological devices. As the BBC describes the programme: “Nuqtat Hewar aims to use phone calls, emails, text messages, blogs, pictures, and professionally shot pre-recorded vox pops in key cities, as well as 3G and webcam contributions”.

The programme was established in 2003 as a radio phone-in programme, and later expanded into online, and then television in 2008. It has been praised for mixing old and new media, as well as encouraging audience participation and dialogue. According to the

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<sup>60</sup> [http://www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/pressreleases/stories/2008/03\\_march/03\\_arabic\\_tv.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/pressreleases/stories/2008/03_march/03_arabic_tv.shtml)

BBC the BBC Arabic on the whole has a total weekly radio audience of 7.6 million listeners, 20.6 million television viewers and one million online visitors.

Of those online visitors the Talking Point programme itself has half, i.e. half a million.<sup>61</sup> In addition the programme has 80,000 likes on its own Facebook page and 16,000 followers on Twitter. The BBC Arabic Network Facebook page with its 830,000 likes also features some of the programme's topics. Other figures pertaining to the programme were not available from the BBC at the time of writing.



**Figure 5.** Talking Point live broadcast studio, with presenter and editor Mahmoud Elkassas on the small screen.

During the Arab Spring (November 2011 – January 2012) the Talking Point programme took part in an Open University research project which studied social media adoption at BBC Arabic.<sup>62</sup> For this case study, one of the researchers of that study, Nesrine Abdel-Sattar<sup>63</sup> as well as Talking Point programme editor and presenter Mahmoud Elkassas<sup>64</sup> will assess the social media strategies of the programme.

<sup>61</sup> Abdel-Sattar, N., Al-Lami, M., Gillipsie, M. and El-Sayyed, N. (2012) Global Conversations and BBCWS: A Case Study on BBC Arabic and Social Media. Report to BBC World Service. Open University and BBC WS

<sup>62</sup> Abdel-Sattar, N., Al-Lami, M., Gillipsie, M. and El-Sayyed, N. (2012) Global Conversations and BBCWS: Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Interview, Oxford, February 18, 2013

<sup>64</sup> Interview, London, February 14, 2013

## A. The programme's web page and social media adoption

The Talking Point web page is a programme web page within the BBC Arabic network pages. The programme is prominently featured on the network's interactivity pages, with the day's online audience poll, links to the programme's social media accounts as well as the programme web page (Figure 6). The programme's own web page mainly contains general information about the programme, such as broadcast times and description of the idea of interactivity, with links to that week's broadcasts.

The screenshot shows the BBC Arabic Network Interactivity webpage. At the top, there is a red header with the title "عربي شارك برأيك" (Arabic Network Interactivity) and navigation links for "الأخبار الرئيسية الشرق الأوسط العالم", "شارك برأيك", "علوم", "فنون", "رياضة", "اقتصاد", "تقارير خاصة", "فيديو", "صور", "راديو وتلفزيون", and "راديو مباشر". Below the header, there is a section for "أحدث الأخبار: بريطانيا تمنح حق الإقامة للمترجمين الأفغان" with a date of "الثلاثاء، 21 مايو/أيار، 2013، GMT 17:29". The main content area features a poll titled "هل جعل الربيع العربي السلام مع اسرائيل أكثر إلحاحا؟" with 4321 votes. Below the poll is a section for "استفتاء" (Poll) with a question "هل جعل الربيع العربي السلام مع اسرائيل أكثر إلحاحا؟" and two options: "نعم" (Yes) and "لا" (No). There is also a section for "برنامج نقطة حوار" (Dialogue Point Program) with a question "هل جعل الربيع العربي السلام مع اسرائيل أكثر إلحاحا؟" and a link to "استمع إلى أحدث حلقة" (Listen to the latest episode). The page also includes social media links for Facebook and Twitter, and a section for "تجاربكم وقضاياكم" (Your Experiences and Issues) with a link to "من يتحمل مسؤولية ازدياد العنف في العراق؟" (Who is responsible for the increase in violence in Iraq?).

**Figure 6.** A screen shot of the BBC Arabic Network Interactivity webpage, with a link to the Talking Point web page, its online poll plus links to the programme's Facebook page and Twitter account. The topic of the programme and online poll on Wednesday, May 22, 2013 is whether the Arab Spring has made peace with Israel more urgent.

The programme relies heavily on interaction with the audience; however only the poll, Facebook page and Twitter accounts are advertised on the front page. In addition, there are numerous ways for the audience to participate: the BBC interactive Have Your Say (HYS) web page which includes webcams, the BBC Arabic Facebook page and Twitter account,

Google+ in addition to older methods of SMS, emails and phone calls. This information is available, but requires a couple of more clicks on the web pages.

Editor and presenter Mahmoud Elkassas regards Facebook and Twitter to be the most important social media for the programme. On average they get 120 Facebook comments and 80 tweets and retweets on Twitter per day. He is most satisfied with the growth of Facebook:

“The social media has increasing importance in the programme. When we started the Facebook page two years ago we had 2,000 – 3,000 likes, and now more than 80,000 likes, also the shares and the engagement on our page is very satisfactory. There is no other programme in BBC Arabic that has a strong existence in Facebook like Talking Point. This did not come by chance, we got it after a lot of work, and a lot of help from specialists.”

Some of the people Talking Point has received help from are the research team from the Open University, who have done a thorough case study of Talking Point social media use.<sup>65</sup> Oxford University Ph.D candidate Nesrine Abdel-Sattar has noticed definite improvement in the programme’s web and social media strategies in the year following their research. The website now integrates social networks and gives the audience the ability to comment as well as share stories.

“On the social media, Twitter and Facebook, I think they have improved much more dramatically than the portal, and the reason for that I am presuming is that it probably requires less resources, albeit more human resources, more hours to monitor the content and review it. In the last year that they have dramatically increased their multimedia, like putting snippets of video, even just the presenter coming up and saying the topic of the discussion, changing the perception of the programme.”

Being a programme based on interactivity, getting audience input is elementary to the Talking Point. But the programme is conscious also about the marketing potential of social media, as editor and presenter Mahmoud Elkassas describes:

“On one hand, social media is a source of opinions for our programme. In every show we have an interactive producer who follows the debate online. On the other hand it is also a way to increase our audience, increasing the referral from social media to the online, BBC Arabic.com. Thirdly, we test the opinions and interest of our audience on different topics on social media. Taking into consideration that our audience is not only social media audience- the features of the radio and television audience are different - but it is a good indicator what they might be interested in.”

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<sup>65</sup> Abdel-Sattar, N., Al-Lami, M., Gillipsie, M. and El-Sayyed, N. (2012) Global Conversations and BBCWS: A Case Study on BBC Arabic and Social Media. Report to BBC World Service. Open University and BBC WS

## **B. Engaging the audience**

According to editor and presenter Mahmoud Elkassas for an interactive programme like Talking Point, using social media is a lifeline. They have to lure their audience into responding to the radio and TV programme in order to have an interactive broadcast. However, this is not necessarily as easy or simple as it sounds. The Open University researchers stress that even if just giving the audience an opportunity to express their opinions may be regarded as 'public good' in itself, there is a need for greater understanding of the expectations that online users/publics bring to 'having their say': "To speak is not to be heard, nor to be taken into account."

The Open University researchers found that Talking Point social media users practice the least demanding form of participation and tend to engage in the most convenient way – the least time- and effort-consuming. They would rather 'like' posts on Facebook than comment on them. The number of users who saw a particular post on the Talking Point Facebook wall in one particular example was 33,030, but only 72 users talked about the post and only 30 shared it.

Audience passivity could be a genuine feature of users or, rather, the researchers argue, could be extrinsically steered by editorial policies and practices. Although there is an allocated section for visitors' suggestions (called 'Free Space'), this section only allows users to suggest topics, not discuss them, which is in accordance to the BBC Facebook guidelines. But the Open University researchers feel that encouraging fans/users to post on these pages should be the norm rather than the exception. Currently, fans of BBC Arabic Facebook pages are unable to start debates or raise topics of their own. Researcher Nesrine Abdel-Sattar describes it as a clash between marketing and editorial viewpoints:

"What they are increasingly aware of is the idea of understanding and appreciating and listening more to their audience. But the marketing team looks at it from a different perspective, they look at the number of pages that have been shared, how much referral from the Facebook, how much Facebook directs traffic to the website, purely quantitative, and sometimes these can be very misleading. You can have an amazing topic discussed but you don't have as much traffic on the website that could happen when you are on social media."

The programme makers are conscious of some of these shortcomings and seem to be working to further increase their efforts. Compared to the mode of address on the BBC Arabic Facebook page, the Talking Point team uses friendlier language on Facebook, encouraging dialogue by directly addressing the users and asking them questions more frequently on the page. Also, as the Open University researchers found, preceding some

posts with the presenters' names sets an emotional connection between the team and their audiences.

In spite of the vast success of participation, there is some question of how true and diverse the engagement of the Talking Point audience is. The programme production team habitually picks the best tweets from a pre-set list of active bloggers, politicians, intellectual celebrities and other opinion leaders. This list of 100 most influential Arab users has been primarily developed by the channel's social media market team. As a result, the more 'proficient' users – ones who have the capacity to speak or are technically savvy – are selected over others. While these opinions are important, the programme does not always seem to engage a wide variety of listeners, but favours recurring contributors. This can also vary according to who is presenting the programme on any given day.

As for the gender of social media contributors, there is considerable dominance of male users over female across the various BBC Arabic platforms, with over three quarters of the users registered as males. Similarly, 79% of BBC Arabic Twitter users are males. However, the programme does succeed in attracting younger audiences: one third of the male users of the BBC Arabic Facebook page were in the 25-34 age group, and 23% in the 18-24 age group, the female users being almost equally distributed among these age groups during the Open University research period November 2011 – January 2012.

To ensure a smooth radio and TV broadcast, the social media content of the programme is mostly pre-arranged, rather than moderated as it is happening live (Figure 7). For instance, Facebook users' comments are often prepared before the live show starts. Better digital tools could enable users to interact live during the programme and the moderation to happen live. This is where reality hits, as resources are sparser in BBC Arabic than in the domestic side of the BBC, as editor Mahmoud Elkassas describes:

“One of our dreams is to have a screen with the feed of Twitter and Facebook visible all the time, to be in the graphics, it would be nice to have a continuing feed of social media, this would be a good step forward for the programme.”



**Figure 7.** The production cycle of the Talking Point programme with a description of the timeline of utilising user generated material and comments.<sup>66</sup>

### C. Challenges

Limited resources seem to be the key issue in developing the Talking Point programme’s social media strategies. Adopting new practices and learning new skills has also been a challenge for some of the staff. So far the staff has voluntarily extended their days and worked extra to produce the most high quality programme, but as editor Mahmoud Elkassas describes, the work has not been easy:

“You need resources, and clever journalists, clever broadcasters, to grow these. But if you have limited resources or weak journalists you cannot do it. Our team in Talking Point is the only tri-media team in the Arabic centre. If you are talented enough to do it, you will enjoy and you have the advantage of working anywhere. But not every journalist can

<sup>66</sup> Abdel-Sattar, N., Al-Lami, M., Gillipsie, M. and El-Sayyed, N. (2012) Global Conversations and BBCWS: A Case Study on BBC Arabic and Social Media. Report to BBC World Service. Open University and BBC WS

write a report on radio and write a report for television and work online, and they have to use the publishing tools of online, and the technical programmes for television and programmes of radio. The concept of multimedia department has a lot of difficulties.”

The Open University researchers argue that the BBC’s very top-down structure often means change and adoption of new ideas is a rather difficult and long process. Furthermore, many senior members of the BBC Arabic are still in the early stages of learning how to use social media and what it means for journalism. Senior staff requires fast-track training in order to drive the strategy and provide editorial leadership. Mahmoud Elkassas admits some of this is true:

“We sometimes have different ideas about what is the best programme. But in general the flow of work gives everyone a chance to express or to do something they like. We have rotating roles. On one hand, everyone can develop their own skills by doing different skills, on the other hand they avoid monotonous work, every day the same. I am not saying it is sorted out but by rotating you reduce the problem.”

Difficulties in co-operating and sharing material among the different sections of BBC Arabic are another factor. According to the Open University researchers, co-operation with the Talking Point and the BBC Arabic online team has become difficult in part due to cultural shifts, e.g. when Talking Point changed from ‘News’ and came under ‘Programmes’ and the team was split. Researcher Nesrine Abdel-Sattar:

“If you compare e.g. Have Your Say in English versus the Arabic you see a tremendous difference in everything across the portal, for obvious technical and funding reasons. They obviously have shrinking resources and are facing a lot of challenges to survive. I think a major part of their challenge now is finding the people to monitor and moderate, because monitoring the dialogue and making sure it keeps to the BBC guidelines of – no profanity, no insulting, keeping balance and all that, they need people, because the volume of user participation is just huge.”

## **D. Relevance**

The adoption of social media has not been clear sailing, not even for an interactive programme like the Talking Point. It is a constant balancing act: focusing on social media, but at the same time serving the broadcast audiences well, says editor Mahmoud Elkassas:

“The answer is you have to keep both. You have to keep the traditional media like radio and television, and the new media or online and social media. Of course you need to have resources to keep both, but there is no contest between developing your

viewership and listenership in traditional media, and developing your audience in social media and online. If you develop your existence online and on social media, you attract more audience.”

In order to keep the programme relevant to radio audiences the Talking point programme makers have added a new segment only for radio, once a week, every Friday. Mahmoud Elkassas explains:

“The idea is that our programme is originally a radio programme, we have a big piece of listeners in radio, so we are very keen to have a special service for them. In many cases Friday is the big day of troubles in the Arab world, and we give them a special service.”

The Talking Point differs from other similar programmes in that it uses numerous ways with which the audience can be in contact with the programme. In part this makes a lot of the conversations on different platforms separate from each other, as the conversations are not linked or aggregated together. However, offering multiple contact channels serves their particular public well. Researcher Nesrine Abdel-Sattar:

“I think especially in region like the Arab world where you have less than 1% of Egyptians on Twitter and less than 30% on Facebook, and at the same time you have 95% of people with TV at home and radio, and 90% have mobile phones. So if you want to reach these people and if you talk about relevance of creating real dialogue, you need to include everything. The BBC Arabic has a role beyond the commercial role any radio station has.”

However, the media landscape in also the Middle East is rapidly changing. It is predicted that in the Middle East and Africa, mobile data traffic will grow 36-fold from 2011 to 2016.<sup>67</sup> Despite this, social media is not the end-all saviour, if it is not used correctly, says researcher Nesrine Abdel-Sattar:

“A lot of news organizations are simply following the trend and hype, let’s go into social media! Any radio or TV programme needs to carefully think about what they hope to get out of it and other platforms of engagement. Just having a Facebook page or a Twitter account does not necessarily achieve the relevance or create the objectives of the radio station. Yes it is the future because increasingly people are in this platform, across all ages, not just especially the younger, and yes they need to be there, because this is a growing trend, but at the end of the day the same old ways of how you engage people in the radio apply, that you need time to prepare for a programme, to give it quality, understanding and opportunity for people to interact.”

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<sup>67</sup> [http://www.cisco.com/web/solutions/sp/vni/vni\\_mobile\\_forecast\\_highlights/index.html](http://www.cisco.com/web/solutions/sp/vni/vni_mobile_forecast_highlights/index.html)

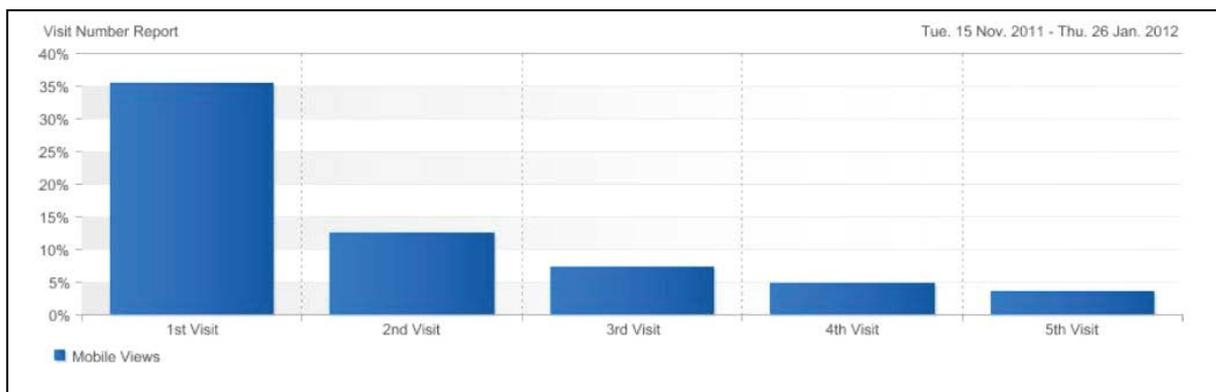
For Nesrine Abdel-Sattar this means regularly updating your social media accounts, moderating even outside broadcasting times, and generally being present and interested in the audience:

“If you have a Facebook page that you cannot maintain, it gets a lot of negativity from the users and they get angry at the radio channel, ‘how come you are taking forever’. Audiences are being increasingly demanding online and they expect a very fast reaction and response from these media organizations, so unless you are ready for it and able to dedicate this amount of staff to maintain it, then it will backfire. You need to carefully think and strategically plan how you are going to do this.”

Editor Mahmoud Elkassas admits the development of social media has been so fast that programme makers struggle to keep up with it. He still believes in the power of radio, especially in their market, but welcomes all the new technical tools that facilitate the conversation between the programme makers and the audience:

“Ten years ago this type of programme was only a phone-in programme. The only way of interaction was calling. But the development of social media has been huge in the last 3-4 years. Look at any old story on bbcarabic.com, five years ago, it feels like it was another planet. All these tools are new, you just could not do an interactive programme this way.”

Now that Talking Point has managed to open the gates, the challenge is how to keep their audience interested, even after the Arab Spring. According to the Open University research the BBC Arabic website grew significantly with the outbreak of consecutive Arab revolts (during the first half of 2011), then the curve declined to the normal threshold of half-a-million weekly visitors. However, it has proven insufficient in keeping audiences hooked to the service in the long-term (Figure 8).



**Figure 8.** The number of first and recurring visits on the BBC Arabic web page.<sup>68</sup>

<sup>68</sup> Abdel-Sattar, N., Al-Lami, M., Gillipsie, M. and El-Sayyed, N. (2012) Global Conversations and BBCWS: A Case Study on BBC Arabic and Social Media. Report to BBC World Service. Open University and BBC WS

According to the statistics the audience comes to BBC Arabic in times of breaking news; this is when the growth curve peaks, and then it declines again. This finding suggests that users hold weak emotional connections with the BBC Arabic. Users also spend very little time on the web pages, with slightly over half spending just one minute per visit.

Despite this the Open University researchers believe that the Arab Spring has created an opportunity for constant growth, highlighting the fact that investing in users' preferences to present a richer media experience that goes beyond turbulent times would help build long-term connections with the audiences.

What this requires is a more thorough social media strategy and careful allocating of resources. The researchers feels as if the BBC is still grappling with finding the right balance between its position as a news service, with its own legal accountability and journalistic values, and a forward-looking public service media company that engages (and often builds on) user-generated content.

#### **4.2. The Today Programme, BBC Radio 4**



The Today programme is BBC Radio 4's "flagship news and current affairs programme", broadcast every weekday morning from 6 to 9 am, and Saturday mornings from 7 to 9 am. The programme features regular news bulletins, live studio interviews and reports on various current affairs topics from Britain and internationally. The programme itself has a long history, starting in 1957, and a huge radio listenership of 7.18 million per week (in 2011).<sup>69</sup>

According to the programme's Interactivity editor Andy Walker, the Today programme gets 4 million hits a month to the programme's new website, launched early 2013. Each whole programme broadcast is downloaded 1.5 million times, which is the largest number of any daily domestic programme in the BBC. The separate business podcast gets downloaded on average 400,000 times per day. In addition, the programme has 230,000 followers on its Twitter account, 20,000 likes on its Facebook page, and one of the presenters, Evan Davis has 120,000 followers on his personal Twitter account (May 2013). During March – May 2013, the programme's social media accounts managed to attract 1,000-10,000 new followers depending on the account, with the biggest rise in the number of Twitter followers. To gain insight into the new media and social media strategy of the Today

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<sup>69</sup> BBC Press release [http://www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/pressreleases/stories/2011/08\\_august/04/rajar.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/pressreleases/stories/2011/08_august/04/rajar.shtml)

programme and how the programme makers have embraced these new strategies I conducted interviews with Interactivity Editor Andy Walker<sup>70</sup> and presenter Evan Davis.<sup>71</sup>

## A. The programme's web page and social media adoption

Up until last year, the programme website was mainly a news website, with some audio clips included of stories broadcast in the programme but very little other material pertaining to the programme itself, other than basic information about the presenters and the broadcast schedule. From the beginning of 2013 the website has been changed into a programme website, although it is still in a 'soft launch' mode according to Andy Walker. The front page of the web page features programme rundowns, links to the most recent broadcasts, links to audio clips and tweets from the Today Twitter account (Figure 9).

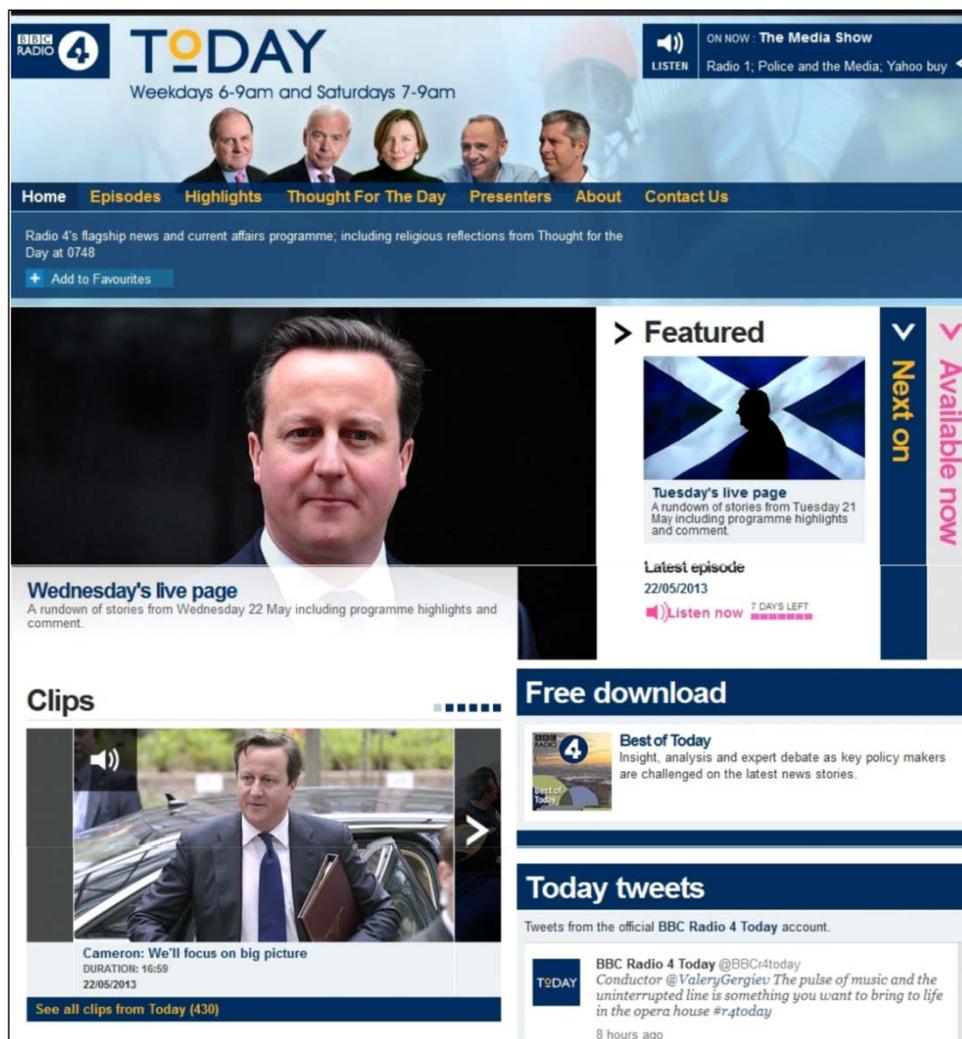


Figure 9. A screenshot of the Today programme webpage Wednesday, May 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2013.

<sup>70</sup> Interview, London, February 21 and May 29, 2013

<sup>71</sup> Interview, London, March 7, 2013

Each day's programme rundown works as a live blog, with descriptions of each story broadcast that day embedded with other online and social media material. The rundown may include a link to the relevant audio clip, links to related news stories (also outside the BBC), audience tweets, Facebook comments, emails and texts, as well as sometimes other material like photos. The design makes it easily accessible by mobile and other small portable devices (Figure 10).

**0840**

Less than half the population of London can now be accurately described as "white British". Danny Dorling, professor of human geography at Sheffield University, and Oona King, former Labour MP, discuss reasons for shifting ethnic populations in London.



**BBC Radio 4 Today @BBCr4today**  
*'Diversity is definitely a positive thing but we have to manage it carefully' @Oona\_King #r4today #London #population*  
 20 Feb 2013 08:55 on Twitter



**BBC Radio 4 Today @BBCr4today**  
*People are being pushed out of centre of London. This isn't white flight. London like a human geography volcano at the moment @dannydorling*  
 20 Feb 2013 08:53 on Twitter



**Why have the white British left London?**  
 Something quite remarkable happened in London in the first decade of the new millennium. The number of white British people in the capita...  
[www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk)



*I had tough times before I found a job and somewhere to live in Ealing. Now 26 years on, I have to leave because I am not rich enough to live in what you called one of the core areas of wealthy white people. If I stay here I have to put up with one bedroom and no neighbours who speak English. Jane*



**John James @J\_Jmes**  
**@BBCr4today @BBCMarkEaston** *I can see how this could be interpreted as 'white flight' but it just indicates that people move on.*  
 20 Feb 2013 08:01 on Twitter



*There are many parts of London which are multi-cultural, but the races are not mixed. There are Arab areas, Pakistani areas, Turkish areas, Jewish areas. People still stick with their own. Andy*

Figure 10. An excerpt of the Today programme rundown on February 20, 2013.

The Today programme website incorporates a few selected social media applications for the audience to use to make the page more interactive, namely Twitter and Facebook, in addition to other communication methods, e.g. email and text messages. However, Twitter is by far the most important social media application for the programme. According to Andy Walker all the show's presenters except one now have a personal Twitter account.

Andy Walker seems to have been a driving force behind this strategy change, which has been in the making for a while:

"We had a website that was quite pleasant, bit old-fashioned, but looked good. But my strategy has been to try and move away from being static i.e. just having features and just having clips, into something that is much more dynamic. What I have aimed for is to allow people to have what I call to have a big match atmosphere. People have called it "event TV" or "event radio" where every day you have got something that people are waiting to listen to, a reason to get involved.

We have a live page, which allows us to update it minute by minute, telling people what's coming up, reflecting what's been on the programme, adding material which might not exist in the programme, have comment from the audience either through Twitter, Facebook or texts, and hopefully in the future maybe audio as well. But to keep it dynamic all the time. And give people a reason for it."

The programme has its own Facebook page consisting mainly of audio clips of stories broadcast in the programme, with the opportunity for the audience to write comments on those stories. The programme also has a Twitter account, with some audio clips of stories, along with some photos of the presenters. The programme Twitter account and Facebook page also promote future stories and link to BBC news stories related to the programme. A select few audience comments written on Facebook or Twitter are incorporated into the programme web page, creating a varied commentary around a particular story that has been broadcast.

In addition to the programme's general social media accounts, the presenters have their own Twitter accounts that mostly build on the Today programme's success and listenership. Presenter Evan Davis thinks social media and especially Twitter has definitely benefited the programme and his work as a journalist. He especially appreciates the faster and more direct feedback from the audience and "the broadening gene pool of guests" and programme ideas:

"It just expands all of our horizons. If you follow enough people, you find interesting stuff that you can drop into a program, that gives you ideas for stories on the program, guests who have a view on something that you might want to put in the programme, and these are all just sources of a hugely useful kind.

And then another thing I would say is useful to us and it came up this morning, Twitter gives you user-generated content. We had last night a bank failure, the computer system crashed, debit cards didn't work for a few hours, it's nice to have somebody on who says

‘I was in a restaurant couldn’t pay the bill you know it was really embarrassing’, and where do you get them you go to Twitter, that kind of thing is really useful.”

Evan Davis has been the first of the programme’s presenters to adopt social media after “being completely late for Facebook”. He thinks that social media is an essential journalistic tool:

“Yes, why wouldn’t you use it, in the same way as why wouldn’t you use a telephone, you can always use the post but why wouldn’t you use the email and the telephone. It’s a way of keeping up, looking at stuff, finding stuff, and then you’d use every tool you’ve got.”

Andy Walker echoes Evan Davis’s sentiment:

“It’s just another form of journalism. There’s nothing inherently different about it and if you’re a good journalist, you have an obligation to be interested in it really, then you’ll do a good job. But it’s not about learning new skills, as much as about learning a new way of doing, using the skills you already have.”

For a long-running programme like the Today programme, whose journalists are experienced but can also be set in their ways, using social media has been a learning process. According to Andy Walker adopting new tools takes time:

“You have to gain the presenters’ trust – you cannot just push the tools. They have to have a real understanding of why new technology and new applications are happening, they have to understand what is happening in society and the world and with the audiences.

And it is not enough to have one seminar to teach them how to use social media, it happens gradually and takes time. They have to understand the principles of social media and how they are used and what we can achieve with it.”

## **B. Engaging the audience**

A key issue for the Today programme makers has been trying to figure out how to best serve their audience with the new social media applications in order to help their audience engage more easily with the programme. Andy Walker says it is very easy to be seduced by numbers and forget the quality and utility of interaction. The focus of all new inventions and applications adopted must be on the audience needs, and not on the needs of the journalists or the programme itself:

“These things are very difficult because they’re pushing the envelope, we’re doing things people haven’t done before, so we need to see what figures out. It needs to be audience focused all the way down the line, we should allow the people to enjoy the programme more and understand what the programme is saying, and everything flows out of that.”

Andy Walker says numbers do matter somewhat, but still claims in his strategy he would choose quality over quantity: “I wouldn’t give our 230,000 Twitter followers up for all the tea in China; I wouldn’t want 3 million; because in that term you’re talking about what someone could cruelly call a biomass or just wallpaper, you’re not interested in the people for themselves.”

However, their renewed online and social media strategy seems to be effective in attracting good numbers of new listeners and users. Andy Walker states that during two weeks in May 2013, when the programme’s radio broadcast promoted Twitter on air, they managed to get 1,000-2,500 new followers to the programme’s Twitter account per day, and “many days succeeded in making the ‘trending’ list on Twitter”. The live radio promotion was also successful online, with just under a million hits to the programme website per day, with 36,000 shares on average. How many of the online users found their way to the radio programme is undisclosed.

According to Andy Walker, the new media strategy of the Today programme is still evolving according to the different audience needs. ‘Utility’ is the key word behind a lot of his strategic decisions: what kind of content the audience needs to make their life easier.

“I’ve got this utility-based theory of the net, and any digital output really, same way as journalism. That utility can be immediate and severe, so get out of the way, there’s a tsunami coming. It can be less severe, but important, you know shops will be closed tomorrow or there’s a change in interest rate. And it can be playful, so you’ve got to nuance that, you’ve got to think about what the audience needs before you make any sort of great strategy decisions.”

However, finding the utility of any specific programme requires audience analysis; Andy Walker says there is no such thing as a homogeneous audience but an aggregation of different types of listener and consumer, who have their own interests. As an example of these utilities the Today programme has introduced a business podcast that is published at 7 am. It is compiled of business interviews broadcast on the programme that same morning after 6 am.

“We cut that very very rapidly, because it has to be out by 7, that’s just done. Because people need it. There’s no point in having it at 9 o’clock, because people need it before work.”

Although the programme has its own Facebook page and Twitter account, and some audience comments originating from those are used in the live radio programme and the web page, more active two-way conversation is conducted via the presenters' own Twitter accounts. Evan Davis has been the most active of the show's presenters so far, writing 5 - 30 comments and answers a day, depending whether he has been presenting the programme or not (Figure 11). Some of the comments also relate to his other work, i.e. presenting the TV-show Dragon's Den.

"I think the instant feedback element is really interesting for a program, people giving fact checks on things that are being said, people suggesting questions, people expressing views about the interview, it's just useful feedback."



**Figure 11.** An excerpt of a Twitter conversation on Evan Davis's account, April 25, 2013.

Evan Davis is conscious of the programme's listener demographics but does not fear alienating older listeners with the usage of social media in the broadcast. On the contrary, he thinks the programme has an obligation to use social media in order to help their audience integrate better into the world:

"I don't indulge the old people at all. I think it's actually the reverse. Most of our audience will have internet and email, but they won't be doing Facebook and Twitter necessarily. I think those people should be told how to do it, and that it's there. It just spreads best practice. I see it as a quite valuable public service. And I actually think one of the purposes of the program is being a sort of unifying force in the country, in which we expose old people to young people and hopefully we expose young people to old people."

Andy Walker is conscious of the listener demographics of the programme, the median age of the listeners being 57 years, and admits finding younger listeners is one of their main challenges. He thinks the renewed investment in social media will help younger listeners find the programme and better relate to it, making the programme more accessible and getting the audience to feel that the programme makers are interested in them. In the end however he feels that the user experience is mostly down to the radio broadcast, which needs to sound fresh and open.

“It reflects basic journalistic values that we do not talk down to people. We have to find fresh topics to discuss that young people but also older people find relevant, like youth unemployment, but also things like Glastonbury (music festival). Just a fresh way of talking to people.”

## **C. Challenges**

For public service broadcasting, one potential problem for social media adoption is the forced utilisation of third party social media networks. Andy Walker does not see utilising Twitter, Facebook, You Tube, Audioboo or any other similar applications as a problem, but rather a win-win situation for both the BBC and the third party companies. As the audience is using these applications and tools already, it makes sense to be on the same platforms, says Andy Walker. Besides, the technological development is so fast that it would be impossible for the BBC to write its own applications.

According to Andy Walker it is important to form and maintain a good and productive relationship with the third party social networks, as the technical production of the Today programme web page relies on co-operating with them. For instance the programme uses Storify to aggregate all their social media into one place and publish comments on the web page. The programme makers moderate the comments.

“Radio will be engaging more audiences on different platforms. The technical drive will continue, with increasing speed. Mobiles are morphing into iPads and onwards, we cannot even imagine what will come. At the same time there are a lot more applications being developed all the time. So the challenge is how to make sure we are across all the major platforms. The platforms are owned by big companies, so good relationships are necessary.”

Technical challenges aside, both Interactivity editor Andy Walker and presenter Evan Davis admit the programme also faces quite a few new ethical challenges. Verification and

impartiality are two of the biggest. Getting ideas from Twitter is different from getting facts, says Evan Davis.

“You wouldn’t necessarily believe something just because someone tweeted it. You would use as you would in anything you would judge by the credibility of the source, if Sky News or the BBC tweeted it I might give it more credence than if I see it coming from an unknown. But I would never read on air something off Twitter, I would never take that as absolute gospel without checking it, I would take it as alerting or referring me to something. Although, by and large, Twitter, like Wikipedia, there is a sense of discipline in it, if someone tweets something incorrect it is corrected very quickly by someone else.”

Andy Walker says today’s instant gratification ‘click this’ tabloid culture presents companies like the BBC continuous challenges for truthful journalism.

“The BBC habitus means we need to verify our sources, all the vast material that is user-generated content, we have to understand where it is coming from and be able to verify it in minutes. Newspapers have all day before they are published, but with the radio programme we have only minutes to verify anything. So we will have a lot of ethical challenges, for instance with tweeting – making sure we obey libel laws et cetera. We need clear guidelines how to work with social media and USG.”

For presenters and other on-air journalists social media presents personal, professional challenges. When everything is personified, how do you keep the balance, asks Evan Davis.

“Social media in general, the blogs, the tweets, Facebook, they all encourage you to opionate, and indeed ranting is part of the art of social media and for broadcasters who are expected to be impartial, I think it is a little harder. And on occasion there have been things I have said and people have misinterpreted them as being more partial than I intended them. But the challenges of how you can be interesting without breaking impartiality is tricky. Sometimes the best thing is to shut up rather than say something.”

## **D. Relevance**

The key question following all the scrutiny of strategy and audience needs is to assess whether all these key points and decisions have made the programme makers think it is necessary for radio programmes like the Today show to adopt new forms of digital journalism. For both Interactivity Editor Andy Walker and presenter Evan Davis the answer is yes, and it is even something that can be considered a valuable public service.

Andy Walker cites audience needs and changing media use as the main reasons for utilising new media : “I think the way people are now consuming this product, radio, television and

all sorts of media, it has gone digital so quickly that if you're not in the forefront of it you are in danger of losing an audience."

Andy Walker also cites the audience demographics of the Today programme as an obvious and even blunt motivation: "With a programme like ours, we are looking for what we call refreshers, people in their 20's, 30's and teens to refresh our audience as it grows older and eventually dies off." And it is not only the younger people that have a lifestyle largely based on mobile devices and different ways of consuming media, but increasingly older people too. "So I think it is really important that as the BBC's biggest news programme, in fact the biggest news programme in the whole of UK, we have to keep up to date with it", concludes Walker.

Presenter Evan Davis thinks that in general, all radio programmes should utilize the possibilities of new media: "By and large, I think the default position should be that you do, it's just part of now, the vocabulary we have, it's part of the way we interact so you should."

Andy Walker thinks the Today programme has been the most innovative with the new web page, with its live updates. Not surprisingly, for them the single most revolutionary tool has been Twitter. Andy Walker says the programme is planning to use it even more in the future.

"Twitter has changed everything. The speed and ease of commenting and reaching all kinds of people and listeners. Next we want to publish more photos in Twitter – not just photos that are directly linked to the programme, like photos of guests or presenters, but also photos and links to related news, stories, web pages, other interesting information."

Andy Walker reflects that five years ago social media was very marginal for the programme, with a static web page and a Facebook page where nothing was happening. Social media has become much more central to the programme because of the need to involve the audience. Social media has changed the dynamics of the programme, because now the programme makers are thinking more about how the programme is received, getting feedback from the audience, and helping them promoting stories. They consider social media first and foremost a tool that enables them to build a more comprehensive user experience for the audience, an experience where the audience is a part of the programme.

### 4.3. The Weekend Edition, NPR



The Weekend Edition is a news magazine programme produced by NPR in the US. According to their own description, “the program wraps up the week's news and offers a mix of analysis and features on a wide range of topics, including arts, sports, entertainment, and human interest stories”. The programmes are broadcast for two hours on Saturday and Sunday mornings from 8 am. to 10 am., and distributed on NPR member stations across the United States, and around the globe on NPR Worldwide.

For the purpose of this paper, I have chosen Weekend Edition Saturday as the main case study. The Saturday programme is hosted by Scott Simon, who has been working as the programme's main host since 1985, ever since the programme first aired. He is also a renowned international correspondent for NPR as well as a TV presenter. According to the NPR, in 2010 The Weekend Edition had 5.7 million radio listeners and 1.3 million visitors to the programme website monthly. Weekend Edition on Facebook has 39,000 likes and 22,000 followers on Twitter (May 2013). Notably, presenter Scott Simon has 1.3 million followers on his personal Twitter account.

The Weekend Edition did research on the effects of the programme's social media adoption in 2010.<sup>72</sup> This study as well as an interview with NPR Senior producer Tom Bullock<sup>73</sup> and presenter Scott Simon<sup>74</sup> will provide the basis for assessing the social media strategies of The Weekend Edition for this paper.

#### A. The programme's web page and social media strategy

The Weekend Edition Saturday web page has a very simple, pragmatic design. Users can listen to previous episodes of the programme or check the rundown of the present episode. Users can also listen to story clips and write comments about them, and there are links to the programme's social media sites, namely the programme's Facebook page or Scott Simon's Twitter account (Figure 12). Comments made on social media are not integrated into the web page, but must be accessed from those applications separately.

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<sup>72</sup> Robins, Ben; Lozano, Sandra: A Weekend Edition Case Study, January 12, 2010

<sup>73</sup> Interview by Skype, February 14, 2013

<sup>74</sup> Interview by email, May 31, 2013

Figure 12. The Weekend Edition Saturday programme web page.

Senior producer Tom Bullock says the web and online strategy is currently a work in progress:

“We are actually in the process of revamping and trying to come up with a better strategy for Weekend Edition. They used to have a video blog and comment posts and it meant a whole lot of work for the staff. Then we went from one extreme to another, like we had a Facebook page where we just threw random posts. In a perfect world I want more cohesive social media in our overall online strategy than just a static web page with pictures that can go along with our radio. More importantly, I want to find a way to get these two to be more, I guess to become more of the same thing.”

According to Tom Bullock the programme is experimenting with various technical applications. For instance the programme makers have used Google phone for crowdsourcing, getting content from listeners around the country for the price of a local call. They have also used Soundcloud to promote particular programmes, as Tom Bullock says, "we try to get them hooked to come and listen". However, the key social media applications are Facebook and Twitter, which are used also on the air:

"We'll send out notices through NPR proper, through our own bank of Facebook and Twitter followers, we aggregate all the comments we get whether they are tweets or full-on comments, sometimes we'll read those like we used to read out letters on air, to get a response going. Sometimes we'll do it before an interview, in order to get some listener questions. Sometimes we will call them and try to get them either into the studio or on the phone, so that way we don't have to be their voice, they can be their voice."

Social media are also used as journalistic tools for tracking down guests for the programme, which according to Tom Bullock is "easier than using the phone book or press agent", the main applications being Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn:

"I have a feeling those are not really revolutionary uses of it, probably a lot of people are doing this, but it is effective. It really surprises me how effective LinkedIn can be to try and find a guest."

The programme also uses presenter Scott Simon's extensive network and Twitter following as sources of ideas and comments, which can also be used in the broadcast. According to Tom Bullock this forms the basis for the programme's interactivity and social media strategy, which could be duplicated elsewhere, for instance in their Sunday programme.

"There's no reason why we can't use Scott's fans to increase Rachel's fans. I just see a lot of cross-promotional ability there to build audiences both online and also to get people who may not listen on Sundays but listen on Saturdays and vice versa to start being interested in what's happening the other day."

Although a lot of the programme's social media activity depends on the presenter Scott Simon, he himself accepts it and does not admit feeling any particular responsibility about it. He also does not worry about leaving the show in limbo if and when he leaves the programme:

"I have two small children. I don't think about that stuff and I don't feel any particular sense of responsibility. It's another avenue of expression for me, and I daresay that's part of why some of us got in to this business, isn't it? And I'm sure that whoever succeeds me will be even better and more popular."

Presenter Scott Simon says he has taken the adoption of new digital tools and changing work processes as a natural technological development.

“I’ve enjoyed it, which is perhaps why I haven’t found the process onerous. Changing from typewriters to word processors must have been difficult, too.”

## **B. Engagement**

A key question for a programme that is aired only on weekends is how to keep the audience interested and engaged during the week, when there is not much material to send out to listeners. According to Tom Bullock the goal is to keep to audience steadily involved in the programme:

“I did this work for the Morning Edition too and I would be sending out wire updates or breaking news stories or rundowns of shows and things. Because Weekend Edition is a weekly not daily we are still trying to figure out how we can keep a presence and keep people tuned to what we are doing instead of just blitzing them with a whole bunch of Facebook posts on the weekend.”

One solution is to ‘lift the veil’ more, as Tom Bullock puts it, to show the audience how the show is put together and open up the work processes. It could also be used to promote interesting stories that are coming up.

So far the programme has relied heavily on the social media following of the presenter, Scott Simon. This requires a special kind of personality, but can work well if the radio programme is more or less built around the presenter’s persona anyway. Scott Simon’s huge 1.3 million Twitter following sets him apart from the other presenters. He tweets very actively all through the week, not restricted to work but also about personal and family life (Figure 13):

“On social media (unlike London and New York newspapers!) I’m in a position to choose what I disclose about me, and even members of my family.”



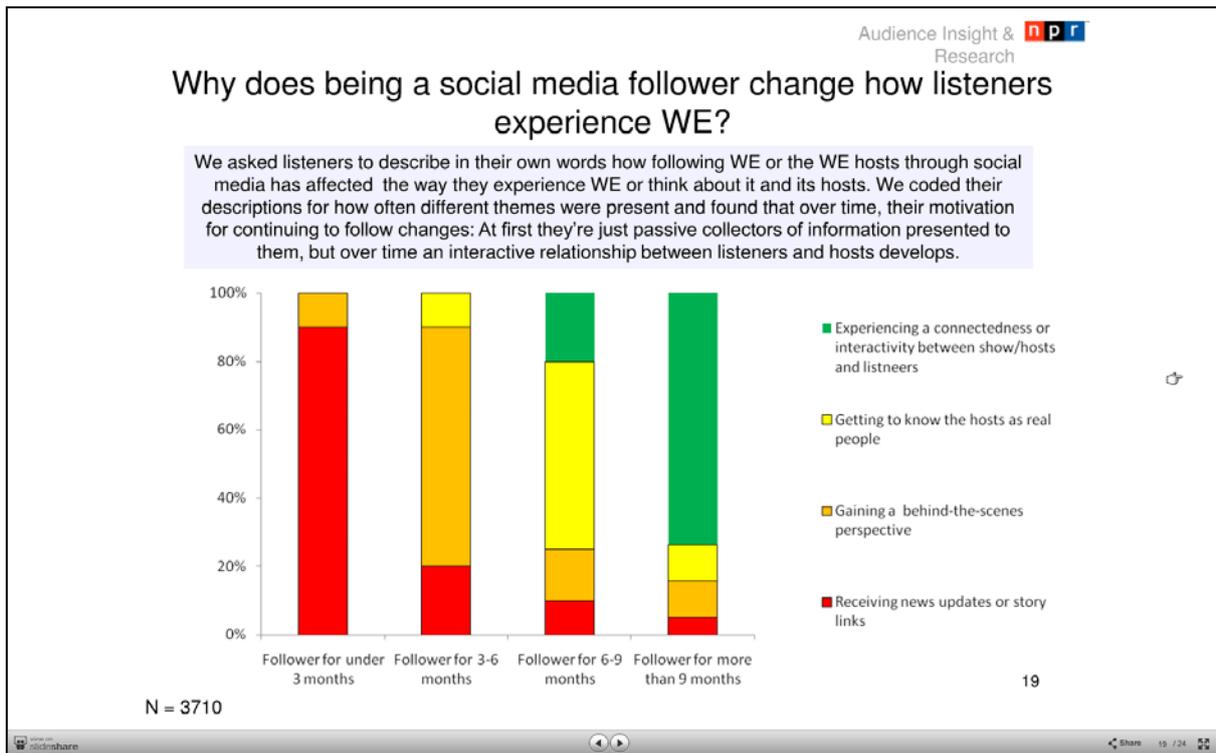
**Figure 13.** An excerpt of Scott Simon’s Twitter feed, May 19, 2013.

Having 1.3 million followers means that engagement with them is random at best. Scott Simon still feels he can engage in some meaningful conversation with his audience:

“I don’t - and couldn’t - respond to each and every tweet. But I try to choose five or six in a given day, and answer in a way that people who didn’t read the initial question can understand the answer. I find that a little of that goes a long way.”

According to research carried out by the NPR in 2010<sup>75</sup> building on the social media connections of programme personalities can have a huge effect in complementing and strengthening listener engagement. According to their results, social media followers feel a closer connection to the presenters than non-followers, and over time an interactive relationship between listeners and presenters develops. The listeners look forward to the possibility that the presenter might respond directly to them. Listeners follow Weekend Edition through social media longer, and they start coming back more often to keep following the programme (Figure 14).

<sup>75</sup> Ben Robins, Sandra Lozano: How social media can complement radio listening. A Weekend Edition Case Study. NPR Audience Insight & Research, January 12, 2010



**Figure 14** . How length of time following Weekend Edition on social media affects listeners' motivation. Weekend Edition Case Study, 2010.<sup>76</sup>

However, for the most part radio and social media are kept fairly separate. The programme's radio broadcast utilises social media only occasionally, and not always for the best of reasons, Tom Bullock admits:

"Lately it's been just reading out tweets, we are not having as much interactivity as we should have. There are times when frankly we have needed extra material for the show, we were coming just a little bit short in segments so with Scott and his twitterers we encouraged people to write comments about certain stories and pushed that a couple of times during the show and at the end of the show we actually compiled some that people had responded and what I would argue near real time at least for us on air."

## C. Challenges

All media companies are struggling with limited resources, and adding social media to putting out the actual radio broadcast inevitably creates extra work. Senior producer Tom Bullock acknowledges that there is no easy answer to how to allocate the resources.

<sup>76</sup> Ben Robins, Sandra Lozano: How social media can complement radio listening. A Weekend Edition Case Study. NPR Audience Insight & Research, January 12, 2010

Weekend Edition can use the NPR digital team to update their web pages, but any deviation from standard content requires additional negotiation ahead of time:

"On the front end it's a trade-off, on the back end when it comes to actually putting out a programme it can be more work, especially if you are doing things like podcasts or blogs, it can be a whole lot more work. There's no easy answer, we still need to try and figure it out. But I think it's become a part of our lives so much that you know, you do it personally so maybe when you get to work and it doesn't necessarily feel like more work."

Tom Bullock does not worry about having a lot of their content on commercial platforms like Facebook or Twitter; he considers them as distribution networks where the actual content is NPR responsibility. Anything put on social media has to be something that could be posted on NPR websites or the radio programme anyway:

"We don't have 1.3 billion followers on our web page like Facebook does. Or not everybody is sitting surfing NPR on the way from work, like they are on Twitter if they are taking the subway. I see it as a distribution network, I worry about the privacy policies personally, but any time I am using a NPR account then I figure out it's still putting out what we're putting out anyway."

The Weekend Edition is most popular among the over 50 -year-old listeners. Presenter Scott Simon is conscious of the need to take younger audiences into account, but does not feel any pressing need to try and specially cater to the younger listeners. He believes quality content will have a universal appeal:

"I believe that 'news' will, for a lot of reasons, always skew a little older. Younger people just have different lives. Every now and then, some broadcaster decides to do 'news for young people' and the results are often hilarious. That 15 to 25 per cent of the audience that's in the younger demographic are looking for quality, not 'news' punctuated by gratuitous music, celeb poppycock, and other nonsense. And more people will eventually find it."

This being said it's important to remember that much of your audience doesn't necessarily know about the War in Vietnam or the Falklands war; and that they didn't grow up listening to Bob Dylan; and that Sir Paul McCartney was in a band before Wings; and that Meryl Streep played Margaret Thatcher because she was a prime minister."

## D. Relevance

Senior producer Tom Bullock acknowledges the fact that the way people use media has significantly changed, and social media is a way to get stories out and get people to listen, either in real time or unloading stories afterwards.

“I don’t think people listen to radio shows the way we programme them anymore. I don’t think you listen top to bottom, you don’t expect news at the top, maybe there’s a band that will come later in the show and you really want to skip ahead to that. We have to stop thinking of it in terms of – in television I think they use the term destination viewing, I think we have to stop thinking about it in terms of destination listening, and make it available to them when they want it, how they want it, where they want it, because that’s where we are going as a society.

We’re lucky in the fact that we don’t have to worry about ratings in the classic commercial sense. But you still want people to hear what you do. And we still have to be present and we still have to be relevant or even we would die out. If we can find a way to make sure that their feed is filled with us (NPR), I think that’s the future. So if it means that they listen in a different way, they listen at a different time, as long as they know that we’re out there I think that is important.”

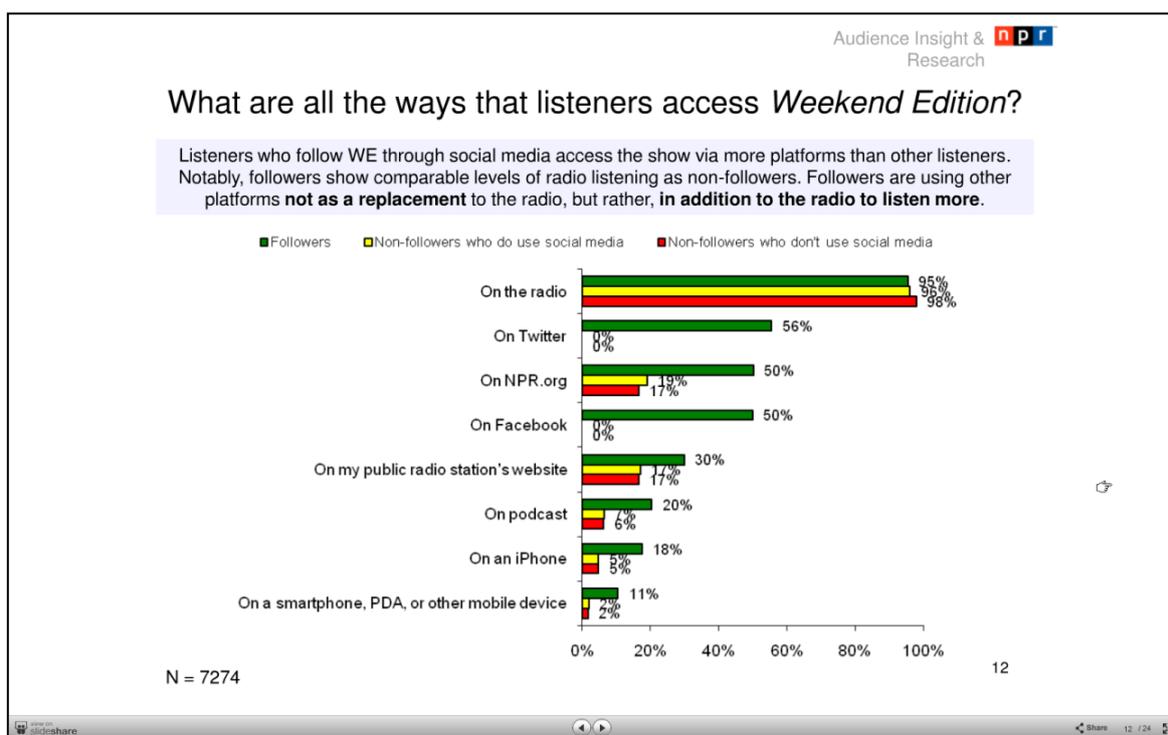


Figure 15. The ways listeners access Weekend Edition. Weekend Edition Case Study, 2010.<sup>77</sup>

<sup>77</sup> Ben Robins, Sandra Lozano: How social media can complement radio listening. A Weekend Edition Case Study. NPR Audience Insight & Research, January 12, 2010

NPR audience research has found that people continue to use both old and new media together. Social media followers of NPR do not use social media as a replacement to radio, but rather access the Weekend Edition more on different platforms (Figure 15).

According to Tom Bullock the NPR median audience age is 57, and it has stayed that way for several decades. As he says, “people tend to find us later in life”. Still he believes history does not necessarily repeat itself, because the media landscape has rapidly changed.

“Our listenership isn’t dying out, but it is still graying, at a rate that it worries somebody like me. Social media didn’t exist back then. There wasn’t this kind of mass access to information in all different kinds. So I think we have to make an imprint when it comes to things like social media, when it comes to whatever else is coming down the line, whether it is mobile, or micro or something else is coming around, who knows.

It is such a part of life for my generation and obviously people who are younger than me, that you kind of have to do it, or else you do run the risk of eventually slipping into obscurity. You may always have something of an audience but I think without a heavy social media presence you end up in the future really potentially becoming backwater.”

Presenter Scott Simon mostly thinks about the day-to-day realities of his job and points out the concrete benefits of utilising social media when budgets and resources are very limited:

“It’s our best form of advertising at a network in which we have a small to nonexistent ad budget. It lets me reach out to a huge audience at only the cost of a little time. And it’s a good way of repeating some stories from our show that some people might have missed the first time around.”

## CHAPTER 5: Analysis and thoughts for the future

### 5.1. Evolutionary or revolutionary?

The three programmes featured as case studies in this paper are among the strongest examples of speech radio programmes utilizing social media at the present time. They all have a pragmatic approach to the changing media consumption of the audience and new technical innovations; their solutions may not all be truly revolutionary, but they seem to be working well for the programmes right now. All the programmes are conscious of the fact that so far they are only covering the basics and are prepared to develop their online and social media strategies further.

The BBC Arabic programme Talking Point programme has been given some recommendations from the Open University research team,<sup>78</sup> the NPR has done some research on the Weekend Edition,<sup>79</sup> and let us also bring in Andrew Caspari, Head of Multiplatform, Speech Radio and Classical music in the BBC to give his views on the Today programme and the strategy of the BBC.<sup>80</sup>

The Talking Point programme has been able to reach a big following within their Arab audience and attract huge numbers of contributing social media users through numerous technical devices and applications. Andrew Caspari thinks that the digital revolution may have come to the BBC World Service earlier than to others and thus accelerated their need to adopt new media:

“The World Service is moving faster than others, particularly due to technology. The World Service relied on short wave radio, but it is no longer particularly useful. Domestic radio still has way to go in that direction. If you take away the means of transmission, they have a closer version of what somebody’s vision of multi-media, mobile-based - what used to be radio service but no longer is a radio station - might be. It is quite a good example of where they were forced to a situation where they had to change, from being radio into being a multimedia, albeit audio-visual based service.”

Talking Point has already managed to capture the interest of the active younger adult audiences, with a good share of users in the 18-24 and 25-34 age brackets. There is however a considerable dominance of male users, so the programme still has work to do to widen

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<sup>78</sup> Abdel-Sattar, N., Al-Lami, M., Gillipsie, M. and El-Sayyed, N. (2012) Global Conversations and BBCWS: A Case Study on BBC Arabic and Social Media. Report to BBC World Service. Open University and BBC WS

<sup>79</sup> Robins, Ben; Lozano, Sandra: A Weekend Edition Case Study, January 12, 2010

<sup>80</sup> Interview, London, June 3, 2013

and deepen its reach. But the main challenge of the Talking Point programme seems to be how to really engage their audience so that they stay loyal and keep interacting longer, and make them revisit the programme web site and stay engaged. The Open University researchers suggest the audience should be allowed to start conversations of their own and to engage with the programme as much and in as many ways as possible. The Talking Point staff should also be encouraged to comment, reply and re-share user content on social media. Incorporating live Twitter feeds in the programme and producing richer content like photos and videos on social media is another plan that the programme is investigating.

On the technical side the programme web page is still very traditional and somewhat stagnant. Developing a lighter, mobile-friendly version of the website would better ensure that users easily get to the content they need on the go. The Open University researchers suggest the programme makers should consider designing a customised portal where users could directly interact with the programme through different media. All this requires not only a clearly stated strategy but also allocating their resources in the most effective possible way. A lot of media organisations are still grappling with traditional practices and attitudes, and the BBC Arabic is no exception.

The Today programme is a prestigious radio programme with a huge established radio listenership. They have devised some very streamlined and effective solutions to developing the programme's online and social media output. Being part of the domestic production side of the BBC as well as having the enviable position of being hailed as a flagship programme for BBC Radio 4 gives them more resources than other similar programmes. So far their new social media strategy seems to be working: the programme is attracting hundreds, even thousands of new users on their different social media applications. The programme has also been forward-looking in the way they have designed part of their online content to be mobile-friendly.

Interactivity editor Andy Walker states that they do realize that where technology for radio is going is unknown, and the question remains whether broadcast radio will still be the core medium in ten years' time. However, over the years the Today programme has proved to be extremely resilient, as Andrew Caspari reminisces. Competitors within the BBC, other BBC programmes like their Breakfast show on television or Radio 5 live's speech breakfast programme have not diminished the listenership figures of the Today programme.

"The Today programme is so entrenched in the ruling class culture in the UK that it is amazing how much they listen to it, but also its audience is changing, in the way that it uses media, in the way it consumes stuff."

However, there are no statistics yet as to how effective the Today programme's strategy is in the long run. The programme makers have to keep up their activities on social media platforms and keep producing interesting content to make users want to stay. Improving

reach will not be enough, and the programme will most probably need to offer Radio 4's discerning audience real interactivity or show them the utility in engaging on these platforms. Whether the social media offerings are effective in attracting people to also listen to the radio broadcast remains to be seen.

Another challenge the Today programme faces is whether they are doing enough to gradually entice the younger audiences. Although the programme makers try to keep the radio broadcast sounding fresh and gear some of the topics towards younger listeners, it only goes so far. Andrew Caspari thinks social media might need a different language:

“Even if you talk a particular way on the radio and attract that same (younger) individual, the individual expects a tone of voice that's suitable for the media they are using. The tone of voice that they hear come out of the radio is not necessarily the appropriate tone of voice that you need on Twitter. So the same way as we appoint people who are good at talking on the radio, should we actually be looking for some specific writing skills that enable people to write on social media? I suspect we are more likely to start training our own people, to be just another part of the journalist skill set.”

Andrew Caspari has noticed that hiring people who have expertise in writing for social media is already happening on television on show's like *The Apprentice* and *The Voice*. Another thing he is wary of is looking at audience numbers only. As he points out, even if a quarter of a million people have clicked to follow the Today programme on social media at some point in history, it does not mean that the same number of people actually follow or care about the programme. The real challenge is how to engage with those people:

“What are they actually trying to do with an account for BBC Today programme? Is it just trying to tell people what's on the Today programme; is it trying to extend the conversation that is going on in the programme, is it just trying to point people towards bits of audio, is it trying to extend the programme out of its 6am to 9am window to become a multi-media brand? Now, if I am honest, I do not think we have answered those questions yet.”

NPR's Weekend Edition has managed to accumulate a loyal audience that especially for the Saturday broadcast of the programme engages with the programme's presenter in numbers that can only be envied. Presenter Scott Simon's huge 1.3 million Twitter following has remained stable for the past three years. So far his persona and Twitter activity has been enough to entice users and build engagement with the programme.

However, the programme has exhibited little in ways of technical innovations; everything depends on the radio listenership as well as the personality of the presenter. This is a risk if people's media consumption keeps changing, and if new technical innovations truly hit radio. According to senior producer Tom Bullock the programme makers aim to renew the programme website and make it more interactive. Whether this is feasible taking into

consideration the meagre resources the programme seems to have is unclear. On the other hand, in the past couple of years NPR has invested somewhat in trying to get younger audiences in, but this requires continuing support from the audience to public service programming. However, even if the programme is not being technically the most creative, they are offering listeners a lot of interesting digital content: audio clips of all the stories broadcast on any given day, a blog by the presenter, and an active Twitter conversation.

According to NPR's audience research, building engagement for the presenters rather than the show itself has worked well, and social media users feel a sense of community with the programme and with the whole NPR.

“Over time an interactive relationship between listeners and hosts develops. They become interested in getting to know the hosts as ‘real people’ and look forward to the possibility that the hosts might respond directly to them. They keep coming back and increasing their level of following because it enables them to feel closer to Weekend Edition and gives them a sense of belonging to the larger NPR community.”<sup>81</sup>

All the programmes have chosen different tactics to achieve their goals, focusing on the needs of that particular programme and their core audience. However, it is surprising that none of these more-innovative-than-most programmes seem to have a clear, carefully formulated social media strategy. Instead they seem to rely on the vision and sometimes benevolence of a small team of programme makers, with some background support from research or enthusiastic staff.

With the BBC Arabic interactive programme Talking Point co-operation with the Open University research team seems to have been their driving force for developing their audience engagement. Editor Mahmoud Elkassas gets a lot of support from staff willing to invest their time and creative skills to make the programme's social media output as all-encompassing as possible. The BBC Radio 4 does back the Today Programme's new mobile friendly, interactive web and social media strategy, but they are also getting invaluable support from the side from at least one of the programme's most visible and active presenters, Evan Davis. NPR's Weekend Edition relies heavily on the enthusiasm and benevolence of their star presenter Scott Simon, who almost single-handedly attracts loyal and engaged social media users for the programme.

While a lot of what the programmes are doing is innovative, too much seems to depend on luck or the fact that those programmes already have a huge following. The Arab Spring has brought Talking Point a lot of new social media audience, but will that audience stay loyal after the headlines fade? The Today programme serves middle-aged, tech-savvy businessmen well, and aims to gradually convert its older audience into the social media world, but will they be able to attract new, younger audiences? As for the Weekend Edition:

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<sup>81</sup> Robins, Ben; Lozano, Sandra: A Weekend Edition Case Study, January 12, 2010

what happens if and when the presenter inevitably changes? And will the younger audiences keep morphing into core listeners as they age, or will the potential audience have so much other options when the media landscape keeps changing?

All these programmes still have great potential to further strengthen their social media engagement and relevance with their existing as well as new audiences. As Reuters Institute research fellow and assistant professor of communications at Roskilde University, Rasmus Kleis Nielsen puts it: “change is just beginning, and we are living through a formative period, not a critical juncture.”<sup>82</sup> These programmes are already well on their way to incorporating social media into their strategies and thus less vulnerable to changes that ever accelerating technological development and changing media use can bring.

## 5.2. Expert views on the future of radio and the changing media landscape

Although speech radio has not yet been affected very much by the changing media landscape, there are signs that the evolving needs of new fragmented audiences will have an impact on radio also. How should radio adapt to competition from other media outlets and social media? Can social media help radio stay current and relevant to the audience? Sharing their expert views are radio futurologist James Cridland,<sup>83</sup> digital strategist Nic Newman<sup>84</sup> and Head of Multiplatform, Speech and Classical radio in the BBC, Andrew Caspari.<sup>85</sup>

One of the points the radio industry does not seem to agree on is the speed of change. The social revolution started ten years ago, but the media world is still in the point of transition, says Andrew Caspari. He thinks all will be well for radio quite a while, even if radio programmes do just the minimum in terms of adopting new technology and social media:

“We’ve gone through the stages of grief; through denial, ‘oh no radio is still good’, to ‘oh heck the world is changing’, and throwing a few things out, some successfully, some less successfully. In social media I think we’ve thrown quite a few things on the wall, haven’t really worked out which of them are going to stick, but we have recognized very clearly that, at a basic level, we have to exist in a range of digital spaces and digital means of communications that either our audiences are using or will be using in the future. We cannot any longer assume that so long as we pump some speech radio out of the wireless set or the PC or as podcasts, then all will be well. Even though, if we do all those things, all will be well for quite a while.”

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<sup>82</sup> Rasmus Kleis Nielsen, RISJ Media Seminar, Oxford, October 11, 2012

<sup>83</sup> Interview, London, June 10, 2013

<sup>84</sup> Interview by email, June 6-7, 2013

<sup>85</sup> Interview, London, June 3, 2013

Radio futurologist James Cridland is worried that the radio industry is being “a little bit wilfully blind” in terms of some of the problems that radio might have in the future. He points out that even if the total reach of radio has remained fairly static, the time spent listening to radio is declining, and among younger audiences even drastically so. When those younger audiences get older, they do not tune in to radio like the previous generations:

“What has always happened in the past is younger people have always tuned in to less radio, but as you move to older they tune in to more as their commute gets longer and their lifestyle changes, but we’re seeing that’s not actually happening now. People who theoretically should be tuning in to more radio are listening much the same as five years ago, so we’re not actually seeing radio coming back in the same way as it used to.”

Andrew Caspari does not like to predict how quickly the change continues, but states that “what we have not got, is any time at all in which we just stand still”:

“What we think we might be doing in two years’ time from now is certainly not what we will be doing in two years’ time. And the problem with speech radio is expectations are high, we have got a pretty critical existing audience which is pretty conservative. So changing what you’re doing in response to the digital revolutions without disturbing your core existing service is a hard trick to pull. Particularly in a world where resources even of the BBC are going to be reducing over that period. It’s always as important to think about what you are going to stop doing as it is to think what you’re going to start doing.”

Digital strategist Nic Newman agrees with this dilemma: “If your programme is trying to reach 'everybody' you have a problem because you can't go too fast because you risk alienating your core audience, and in many cases this core audience is the one that provides legitimacy or funding.” The 2013 Reuters Institute Digital News Report<sup>86</sup> shows a big and even growing split in behaviour between the habits of the under 35’s and over 35’s in all countries, and in some countries the split is more under 45 and over 45. Younger groups prefer online media for news and use social media extensively to discover and share stories and to discuss their implications. Older audience groups are more comfortable with the traditional broadcast mode but also are happy with some social media and digital additions.

Digital strategist Nic Newman agrees with the findings in this research paper that radio “is still on the nursery slopes, still mastering the basics.” However, according to him, the evidence from both the NPR and the BBC is clear:

“If people feel involved they will be more committed to your programme or media brand. Brand loyalty and community outreach is the key to survival in an

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<sup>86</sup> Nic Newman, edit.: Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2013. Tracking the future of news

ultra competitive media landscape. Radio needs to find ways of making every listener involved at some level through a range of formats and styles.”

One of the key points of discussion is the way radio content will be delivered in the future, as the new digital devices will link the different kinds of radio content, and make the content both mobile and social. Nic Newman points out that even though the adoption of smartphones “is younger skewed right now”, in a couple of years the trend will run across all age groups and therefore needs to be at the core of radio strategy. All experts agree that the spread of smartphones, tablets and other digital devices equipped with a screen will be elemental in future programming. As Andrew Caspari puts it:

“Yes, we will still have the box in the middle of the kitchen but for a lot of people they plug their iPhone in the dock in the kitchen, that’s their radio. And the range of things I can do on that – including listening to the radio – is far greater, the range of entertainment that this can give me is far greater.”

However, James Cridland criticises the view that radio’s future is solely in the mobile phone, at least in the traditional way. It is not enough to put radio in the mobile phones: “It just doesn’t fit with me having to have dangly headphones that you’re connected to and you’re having a beautiful colour screen in front of you that they could use to do something”. He argues that a lot of music radio aimed at younger audiences is doing well delivered through, surprisingly, television:

“If you’re a 17-old kid in your bedroom, you’re not realistically going to have a radio, but you are going to have a TV, and so maybe you’re there doing your homework and you want to listen to radio, and to you radio is whatever channel it happens to be on your Freeview TV.”

But the other experts also agree on the importance of the screen, although they stress the importance of mobility. As Nic Newman says: “Mobile and social are deeply linked and the mobile phone - or something like it - will become the radio of the future.”

This brings us to another important aspect for the future of radio, which is designing a new content strategy for different platforms. What the linking of mobile and social offers people is more choice, and maybe the possibility to customise the radio content. According to Nic Newman creating more programming aimed at different audiences and using audio to get into the niches is already what radio can do quite well because of its relative cheapness. Andrew Caspari envisions customising radio output on the different new platforms:

“What the radio does, it pumps to me what the people sitting on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor of the Broadcasting House in London decide to give me, and at the time they decide to give it to me, based hopefully on some kind of insight as to what I might want that way. What a

website or a mobile phone can do is that it can give me all those things but in a different order effectively. It can also give me all those things more according to what my needs and desires and tastes are. What I may want to do is to be able to read some of the content a radio programme has, I may want to listen so some of the key elements of that programme, I may want to look at a set of visuals related to that programme, or do any one of those three things. So this requires repackaging the content.”

Nic Newman also thinks one of the key points is about using digital and social media to give people control over radio programming so they can turn it into social objects for themselves:

“A live moderated stream of backchannel chat punctuated by photos and videos and presented comments where relevant should be a core part of all morning radio news programmes. It should be designed first for a mobile phone - small screen experience – and radios will eventually catch up and provide screens too. A second strategy should be the delivery of the best clips and post programme remixes into the social media universe.”

However, Nic Newman does not advocate this strategy for all radio programmes, for obvious resource constraints. In his opinion radio channels should focus on the biggest brands and make them even bigger, concentrating on live morning and drive peak programmes, providing more programming that is designed to be consumed on-demand, and squeezing resources elsewhere. Making different kinds of audio assets that are made for sharing and consuming in mobile and social networks, and on the other hand also creating technical and marketing hooks for the best and most relevant bits that can be shared would mean “making less and marketing more”.

James Cridland thinks the core of radio, the live broadcast, needs to also offer the possibility of personalisation according to the needs and wants of the listener. He takes BBC Radio4’s Today programme as an example and visualises how the programme could be delivered in the future:

“My radio would have a big thumbs down button, so that it would learn that I don’t like some particular feature like sports news, and that my radio would give me something else. Wouldn’t it be nice given that my parents live in Yorkshire, that the news the news at the top of the hour contain not just the national news but also from where my parents live, and also news from North London where I live. We’re not taking away that human connection, that shared experience, we can also still talk about ‘did you hear Tony Blair being grilled on Today this morning’, we could all also talk about that, but actually each of us would get a slightly personalised version of that radio show.”

Taking into account the vast amount of choice and information available to the consumer, a growing trend will be the need for curation, says Andrew Caspari. The automated algorithm

“will not take over from the human being”, although algorithms will be used by editors to be better able to deliver what people want. Still, he is quick to point out that technical advances might prove him wrong, as the speed with which new applications are put on the market place, changing behaviour, keeps accelerating.

The continued strength of radio as a shared experience will be another important strength for future radio, if the radio industry is to thrive in the social media market. Nic Newman would not cite social media per se as the saviour – the underlying issue is what he calls the ‘return path’:

“People now have an opportunity to answer back and connect 24 hours a day. That is the dilemma and the opportunity. How do you manage - scale - and harness that real time feedback effectively to create better programming and use these new networks to promote your brand? That is the key question radio needs to answer and that everyone in the organisation needs to focus on.”

James Cridland could not agree more. In his opinion what radio stations need to remember is that they are broadcasting to a community and need to respond to those audiences. People in the radio industry are sometimes so used to the one way method of broadcasting on the radio that they forget that social media is two-way. The solution could be as easy as following people back on social media, or favouring their tweets, and acknowledging what people have to say.

“If you sometimes acknowledge what the audience does by saying ‘Oh that is funny’ or whatever, then all of a sudden that’s a very different relationship, and that’s something that many radio broadcasters can learn a lot from. I follow Radio 4’s Twitter account, and every so often you get somebody saying that ‘I am so exited, my life is now made, I have been retweeted by Radio 4!’.”

Another key strength of radio is that it has been the medium providing the most intimate human connection. According to James Cridland that human connection, “knowing that there’s another human being at the other end”, is still one of radio’s most valuable assets. Nic Newman also reminds us of the importance of friendship and companionship radio can uniquely provide and thinks that radio channels and programmes need to plan how to incorporate their best assets, the hosts and presenters, in their social media strategy better.

“Scott Simon and Evan Davis can get hundreds of thousands or more than a million Twitter followers by being themselves and extend a programme brand through a whole week. Imagine what could happen if there was a bit more thought and invention behind these personal accounts.”

James Cridland reminds us that being a radio journalist has changed greatly during the last ten years: "Before you could go on the air at six in the morning and come off the air at nine and be properly off the air, and now you almost need to be on the air 24 hours a day". However, this can also work in the journalist's favour, as social media is now an important way of marketing both what your radio station is doing and what you are personally doing: "Twitter and other social media actually allow them to cross promote in a way that they have been forbidden to in the past."

But according to James Cridland this human touch must be visible not only on the presenter's personal social media accounts, but also the radio channel accounts. He cites an example from BBC Radio 4:

"When you follow the Radio 4 Twitter account rather than the Today programme's it is very obvious that it is run by humans, by a friendly face of Radio 4, that occasionally you might want to go and listen to. On Saturday for instance I was listening to somebody else, looking at my Twitter and Radio4 said 'Our lifts are all broken here at Broadcasting House, so we are a little bit worried about getting Bill Gates into our studio in 10 minutes.' I thought it was a really interesting human way of saying Bill Gates is on the radio, tune in, without just obviously marketing it. And of course somebody commented on that saying 'Oh it must have been a Microsoft lift'."

## CHAPTER 6: Final conclusions

So is it essential for speech radio to utilise social media in order to stay relevant to the audience? How radio futurologist James Cridland wants to rephrase this question is, 'Is it essential for radio to stay relevant to the audience?'.<sup>87</sup> Indeed, social media are becoming so ubiquitous that it is hard to imagine a future media world where anybody could escape their effects. As the experts have stated, a lot of radio channels and programmes will most probably happily survive another couple of years, maybe even several, but those purporting to be the flagship programmes of their respective channels cannot.

If we accept the claim that radio is the original social media, it should be relatively easy for radio to adopt new technological tools and applications to do what it has always been doing. However, traditional speech radio seems largely to be still staying put, as it has not yet felt the urgent need to change. Even the most innovative speech radio programmes have only been utilising social media for a short while, and are still in the experimenting and innovating stage. What sets the forerunners apart from the rest is that these programmes have fundamentally accepted the changing media landscape and recognize the need to adapt, even if the traditional radio broadcast still remains in the core of their existence.

When talking about the future of radio, there are two big key issues that have emerged in this research paper that the radio industry should really focus on: the role of mobile technology for radio, and the human connection radio can offer. Both these factors can provide radio key solutions for thriving in the new, fragmented media market.

One of the key assets of radio is that it is characteristically a 'multitasking media', making it easy for the listener to do other things while listening to radio. In an attention economy this offers consumers more flexibility and thus makes radio more alluring. Mobile technology means that what we call 'radio' will increasingly be some kind of a mobile device with an added feature of a screen, presenting the consumer with even more potential for multitasking. While the live broadcast will most probably – at least for the foreseeable future – be in the core for radio, radio broadcasters will have to start thinking seriously about what the new portable devices and their growing usage will mean for media consumption.

So far the growing popularity of portable devices has only really affected online output, which some of the programmes have adapted to the smaller screens of mobile phones and tablets. Like television which is already using 'second screens', radio will have to think and plan innovative new content for, what is for radio, the 'first screen'. It will not be enough to just modify existing output for new devices, although doing this is a start, as it helps radio

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<sup>87</sup> Interview London June 10, 2013

broadcasters in learning new methods and language appropriate for those platforms. The ultimate goal will be allowing listeners to personalise their radio consumption to suit their needs better. This will be a big strategy change.

The second key issue is the fact that radio is by nature an intimate medium that builds on the human connection. As the ever growing popularity of social media shows, consumers have an increasing need for interaction with other human beings, and this is a strong point that radio can continue to build on. Radio lends itself well to social media, and all radio now needs to do is utilize its natural assets more effectively and in an even more innovative way.

What the three radio programmes featured in this research – the BBC Arabic Talking Point, BBC Radio 4's Today programme, and NPR's Weekend Edition - have found is that engaging with the audience on different platforms and different social networks can extend their audience reach and keep their brand alive. According to the radio programmes' own research, social media are also instrumental in helping the programme makers and the audience to create human connections, making the listeners more loyal to the programme and radio channel. Having the means for direct feedback, the audience expects to be heard and taken into account. This requires investing in real interaction on the part of the radio programmes and their presenters; listening, acknowledging and reacting to the input of their audience. Some of these communication skills are still lacking, but at least the programme makers seem to recognise the need for a specialised kind of interaction on the new platforms.

In addition, social media provide journalists valuable new tools for making better journalism. Social media can be a useful source of news and ideas, they can be used to crowdsource photos, eyewitness reports or audience opinions, and they can also help find contacts and experts to be interviewed, supplementing and complementing the journalists' own sources.

However, most radio channels and programmes are still far from understanding the need for major strategy revision. Denial can be one of the biggest obstacles for realising the meaning of emerging social media, especially for public service companies, who have not had to face dwindling advertising revenue. If denial is combined with negative personal attitudes towards social media it can lead managers and journalists astray by causing them to interpret audience needs and the changing media landscape wrongly.

Another big factor is limited resources. Like any media company, most broadcasting companies have also had to face the harsh reality of dwindling resources in the past couple of years, partly due to the downturn in the economy, partly due to the increasing demands of a multi-platform, 24/7 news world and the changing demands of the public. As Andrew Caspari states, "It's always as important to think about what you are going to stop doing as

it is to think what you're going to start doing."<sup>88</sup> Limited resources can mean cutting the number of interviews in a programme or the time spent preparing a story; while this might mean a big change of how things used to be done, those resources might be better used elsewhere. It is up to the managers and programme teams to carefully plan how limited resources could best be allocated according to the needs and objectives of each programme. Relying on the benevolence of staff will not carry them very far, or at least not for very long.

What should be easier to change but can often be a harder problem to solve are the attitudes of senior management or the journalists themselves. Many experienced journalists started their careers when there was no Facebook or YouTube, not always even word processors. Many are overwhelmed by the constant stream of new gadgets they have to learn to use. For some, social media itself seem frivolous; they pride themselves on not being on Facebook and cannot make the distinction between personal tastes and the needs of the audience. The generation gap may be even greater for senior management, who need speed training in order to be able to offer guidance and create new strategies for a younger and more tech-savvy staff. The radio programmes studied in this paper have all had the advantage of having management that has accepted the change and as well as having skilful and enthusiastic staff that have embraced their new strategies.

As we all know, hiding your head in the sand will only go so far. To be fair, most media companies have realised the need to change. Many are still 'throwing spaghetti on the wall' and seeing if something will stick. Or, in the words of Clay Shirky: "Nothing will work, but something might", as quoted by Madhav Chinnappa, Head of Strategic partnerships at Google News<sup>89</sup>. However, some success stories are already emerging among the old, legacy media, proving that if there is vision, there is a way. This research does not by any means purport to have all the answers, or even having any clear answers at all; what I hope to have achieved is to encourage radio journalists and managers to think, be active, and find their own solutions.

This research has provided me with invaluable insight into the future scenarios for radio and other media. Far from being old and boring, radio seems to possess all the potential needed to adapt itself to the new technological devices being innovated as well as the changing media habits all the new choices bring. The future of radio depends mainly on how open minded and creative the radio industry itself decides to be.

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<sup>88</sup> Interview, London, June 3, 2013

<sup>89</sup> Reuters Institute Media & Business Seminar, Oxford, May 31<sup>st</sup>, 2013

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There have been innumerable studies on the effects of new and social media on legacy media, but few on their implications for radio. [Anne Achte](#), an editor at Finland's state broadcaster, YLE, has filled the gap with her comprehensive study.



Anne writes that:

“Changing media use in the last 10 years has forced all legacy media to contemplate whether they are still delivering content the way the audience wants. Radio listenership in the Western world has stayed fairly strong despite the increasing competition for audience attention, but there are already signs radio will also be affected. Is it necessary for radio programmes to adapt to the people’s mixed media use and emerging new digital platforms by adopting social media in their strategies?”

My research focuses on three of the most innovative speech radio programmes in public service companies Britain and the US and the way each of these programmes is utilising new and social media according to their particular needs.

‘Weekend Edition Saturday’ from NPR has built a strong and even personal connection with the presenter and the audience.

‘The Today Programme’ from BBC Radio 4 focuses on a dynamic web page with live interaction through social media that keeps the audience informed and entertained at the same time.

‘Talking Point’ from BBC Arabic in the BBC World Service builds on their huge audience reach to keep their listeners interactive and loyal.

Notably however, even the most innovative speech radio programmes are still in the early stages of fully incorporating social media in their strategy. All digital media experts interviewed in this research agree that radio needs to start taking action or risk becoming irrelevant. In the future radio will most probably not only include audio but also pictures, video and text, customised to the audience needs on new mobile technological devices.”

***“Every radio manager should read it.”***

***James Painter***

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