Chapter 4: News and Information Access and Sharing

In addition to regular use and access to media, we are also interested in what people self-report as the major sources of information that is important to them. With a better view of not only how much access to information Tanzanians have, but also what information sources they rely on and trust the most, development practitioners can craft effective strategies that are better suited to the local context of their beneficiaries.

Throughout Africa, the rise in access to mobile phones also represents a potential boost for access to broadcast media – either by people listening to the radio on their cell phones or by sharing information heard on mass media throughout their personal networks via SMS. Both these forms of information access/sharing remain nascent and underdeveloped in Tanzania, despite the fact that 62 percent of respondents said they have household access to a mobile phone. This method of media access creates the potential for greater information sharing, especially among those in rural and impoverished locations, who traditionally have had more limited access to anything besides a radio set. Media development professionals must focus on tapping into this mobile media potential and increasing trust in information received through it by Tanzanians.

4.1 Access to News Sources

Eighty-three percent of Tanzanians said they get news and information from radio, making it the leader of both media and non-media sources. Radio is the top source for every age group and income group we tracked, as well as both males and females, and rural and urban dwellers. Friends and family are the other major source of information from which Tanzanians across all demographic groups get their information.
As incomes rise, Tanzanians’ range of information sources expands. We compared Tanzanians’ weekly sources of information and found that some income disparities exist. Among the four income tiers (with Tier 1 being the lowest and Tier 4 the highest), we found that Tanzanians with high incomes access information regularly from a wider variety of sources than their counterparts with lower incomes (see Figure 18). For example, the proportion of Tanzanians who get information regularly from television was only 40 percent for Tier 3 income respondents and 82 percent for Tier 4 respondents.

Access to technology, particularly mobile phones, provides higher-income Tanzanians with a wider array of information sources. Eighty-seven percent of Tier 4 respondents said they have household access to a mobile phone, and 61 percent of them said they regularly receive information via SMS text messages. In addition, those in urban areas are almost twice as likely as their rural counterparts (51 percent versus 29 percent) to use SMS as a weekly source of information.¹

Newspapers and SMS messages – both of which, in principle, require a level of literacy – rank at the bottom of sources of news and information used regularly by Tanzanians. However, it is worth noting that SMS messages outrank newspapers as a source, even though newspapers have been available for a much longer period of time than SMS.

The data underscore the rapidly growing importance of mobile-based information for Tanzanians, as well as the potential mobile phones present to reach communities that do not have ready access to print or other types of media.

**SMS Texting: A Potential, Yet Not Trusted Tool**

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¹ Urban Mobile Phone Access – 82 percent, Rural Mobile Phone Access – 54 percent
Sixty-two percent of respondents said they have household access to a mobile phone, but only 35 percent said they use SMS text for news and information weekly (see Figure 19). The fairly widespread access to a mobile phone suggests great potential for increased information targeting via SMS.

**Figure 19**

![Tanzania: Mobile Phone Access, SMS Use for News and Its Trustworthiness](chart)

Figure 19 also shows that very few Tanzanians trust SMS as a credible source of information, implying that the lack of SMS use as an information source may to some extent be a trust issue.

In addition, even though 19 percent of all Tanzanians were receiving SMS news updates from their mobile phone operators, only 1 percent had ever forwarded this received information through SMS to their friends or family.

**Use and Trust Do Not Always Run Parallel**

While a given information source may be widely used, it does not mean that the source is highly trusted, and hence widely heeded by those receiving information from it. For example, 66 percent of Tanzanians said they get information regularly from friends and family, but only a third of this group said they completely trust friends and family as a source. Conversely, more people trust television as a source than those who said they regularly got information from it. About the same proportion of people who got information from newspapers also trusted that information.

Among all information sources, **radio, television and (somewhat surprisingly) government are the most highly trusted sources of information for Tanzanians** (see Figure 20).
Note that the internet and SMS-text messaging garner about the same proportion of Tanzanians rating them as “very trustworthy” sources. However, internet use rates are substantially lower than SMS use rates. Thus, although the internet is not widely used, it is held in relatively high esteem.

Figure 20

Tanzania: Trustworthiness of News and Information Sources
Percent age of respondents who said they find the following sources "very trustworthy"

- Radio: 70%
- Television: 55%
- Government: 36%
- Friends and Family: 22%
- Newspapers: 18%
- SMS Text Messaging: 18%
- Posters and Billboards: 17%
- Internet: 16%
- Brochures and Pamphlets: 14%


4.2 Sharing News and Information

In order to determine how information is shared between Tanzanians, the AudienceScapes survey asked these questions: “How often do you discuss news and information with other people in your community?” and “How often would you say people ask you for your opinion or advice on major news stories?”

The survey results show that close to 60 percent of Tanzanians discuss news and information with others in their community at least weekly, and 44 percent are asked for their opinion on major news stories weekly (Figures 21-22).
Figure 21

**Tanzania: Discussing News and Information With the Community**
Percentage of respondents who said they discuss news and information within their community daily or weekly

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>General Population</th>
<th>Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Figure 22

**Tanzania: How Often Do People Ask You For Opinion/Advice on Major News Stories**
Percentage of respondents who said people ask them for opinion or advice on news stories daily or weekly

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>General Population</th>
<th>Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very Often (Daily)</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often (Weekly)</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the AudienceScapes framework, we use this information to define opinion leaders – those to whom others turn most for information and perspectives on various issues. Development strategists sometimes focus communication and information-sharing efforts on influential members of a group, under the assumption that such people (opinion leaders) will have a disproportionate impact on the views and attitudes of the group as a whole.

In the past, we have noticed that opinion leaders tend to be demographically distinct: for instance, they tend to be more male than female and older than average. But respondents in Tanzania who discuss news and give advice (daily or weekly) were not very distinct demographically; they tend to mirror the general population in terms of distribution across regions, ages and tiers of income, gender and location (urban or rural).

Rather than relying on opinion leaders to disseminate information, development practitioners may have more success in influencing behavior by better understanding Tanzania’s information-sharing environment.

The majority of Tanzanians said they get information from the radio and from their own friends and family. They don’t trust their friends and family, however, as much as they trust radio and television, and to some extent the government. Access to television is low, although radio is spread universally, and commands reach and access that is unparalleled by any other form of media.

Tanzanians also have high access to mobile phones, but haven’t become accustomed to the technology to trust it greatly (see Figures 19-20). Tapping into the unused potential of SMS, NGOs can ensure more effective campaigns by combining mass media with personal communication and outreach. For those working in the field of media development, this untapped potential of mobile phones also presents an opportunity to expand information access.

After studying information dissemination across Africa, Prof. Steven Livingston from George Washington University’s Elliot School of International Affairs and the School of Media and Public Affairs observed the importance of trusted social networks in sharing news heard from a mass media source. He suggests that

“….combining mass media with interpersonal communication is the most effective way of transferring effective messages -- and generating behavioral change. While only a fraction of the target population may hear the original message [on the radio], if the content is relevant, a wave of others will subsequently hear the message via personal networks.”

In order to maximize dissemination of information, development practitioners should combine radio broadcasts with interpersonal communication among established word-of-mouth networks (friends and family) through SMS.

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2 For more information on Prof Livingston’s work see: http://africacenter.org/2011/02/africas-evolving-infosystems-a-pathway-to-stability-and-development/
For instance, radio broadcasts could be combined with contests that encourage listeners to SMS their friends and family to listen in as well. Weekly winners could be those who recommended the show the most. Radio broadcasts could also be accompanied by contests that encourage listeners to talk to friends and family members and suggest strategies back to the show.

This approach takes into consideration the following: Tanzanians have high access to (radio), they regularly receive information from their friends and family, and they have high access to mobile phones, which they still don’t use effectively for sharing information.

If information broadcast on the radio is then further disseminated via SMS to friends and family, it has the potential to reach more people and lends the information transmitted more credibility because it is conveyed by a trusted social contact.

As incomes rise, Tanzanians’ range of information sources expands. To reach elites in Tanzania, especially those at the highest income tier, a combination of television broadcasts and mobile phones are possible avenues.