

Podcasting reinvigorating newsrooms in Africa

Podcasting has reinvigorated newsrooms in Africa, taking root on the continent and branching out and gaining traction - with significant innovations and interesting trends relevant to news organisations wanting to reach younger audiences.



Source: © Adeniji Aabdullah [Pexels](#) Podcasting can reinvigorate newsrooms, and it is doing just that in Africa

In this article published by the [World Association of News Publishers](#), Lucinda Jordaan talks to Molly Jensen and James Smart, who are guest speakers at the 2023 Digital Media Africa conference taking place today and tomorrow.

About five years ago, podcasting was still relatively novel in Africa. In 2019, only 22% of South Africans had heard of podcasting, according to an Edison Research study; this, compared to 77% of US citizens at the time. And a 2021 study in Kenya found that up to 60% didn't know what a podcast was.

That was then. Cue 2023.

“In 2023, there has been a strong trend of live shows, selling merch and a larger interest in advertising on podcasts across the continent in multiple countries,” notes Molly Jensen, CEO of Afripods, a pan-African podcast hosting platform based in Nairobi, Kenya.

“We have seen podcasters get their content syndicated on radio, and radio stations begin to share their content as podcasts in multiple markets. We have been positioned in an exciting growth period and I think that Africa has a huge

opportunity when it comes to digital audio.”

Jensen also points to research done by Africa Podfest, in partnership with Baraza Media Lab, over the past few years on the African podcasting industry, specifically focused on Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa.

“To date, those three markets are the most well-researched and understood when it comes to podcast listener behaviour, as well as podcast creator data.

“The most recent report showed that 68% of podcasts in Kenya will be listened to on smartphones by 2025 (Africa Podfest/Baraza). In South Africa, we know that 25% of people over 15 listen to a podcast every day (Edison Infinite Dial).”



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Nic Newman 14 Jun 2023



Tuning in to younger audiences – with younger creators

Reuters has been tracking monthly podcast use in 20 countries since 2018, and according to their latest [Digital News Report 2023](#), low barriers to entry in podcasting have also enabled younger voices to be heard, bringing a fresh, more informal tone, and often adding video to the mix.

James Smart, managing editor of Newsroom Production for the Kenya-based Nation Media Group – and former podcast editor for *The Nation* – believes that, despite a myriad challenges, podcasting has allowed young content creators to bypass barriers to entry.

“What’s crucial, and you can see this across the markets, whether you are in West Africa, South Africa or Central Africa, is that young people are attracted to stories that are very personal and authentic; whether that story is about career growth, their cities, their history... it has to have those elements: be authentic, have a personal touch, and be something they can relate to.”

The format is also very important, adds Smart. “As the podcast landscape is evolving, especially for us, we see young people wanting to be the ones telling their own stories, dropping the ‘officialness’ of other mediums, and breaking normal media rules: that the story should start at the beginning, or that there are taboo topics that we cannot discuss.

“They want to discuss what is of importance in their life today – relationships, mental health, the economy, technology... their presentation, and how they want to curate their own experiences in podcasting, are proving successful in terms of what is working in podcasting in Africa today.”

Women lead the wave of change

While audience analytics and demographics vary from market to market, women are at the forefront of the medium – as audiences, creators, and leaders, notes Jensen.

“Countless women creators have been leading the forefront when it comes to podcasting here, and it is exciting to see them break barriers on the continent.

“For instance, [Legally Clueless](#), a podcast from Adelle Onyango, was the first podcast in Kenya syndicated on radio.

“The first podcasting magazine on the continent, [The Podcast Sessions](#), the [oXoFest](#) in Benin, and [Africa Podfest](#) in Kenya were all founded and are run by women.”

Then, of course, there's Afripods, headed by Jensen.

"Podcasting gives creators the opportunity to leverage their voice – and women's voices have historically been stifled on the continent, which has translated to women having more visibility and representation in this media format."



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Jon Savage 9 Feb 2023



The challenge of distribution and monetisation

Distribution – and consequently, monetisation – "is not where it should be yet," acknowledges Smart – leading content creators and producers to charter new paths to reach and attract audiences.

"Over the past two years, they've been adding visuals to audio, and cutting short videos, to boost visibility and make it easier to market and share on other platforms, such as YouTube and via Whatsapp," adds Smart.

"What we've seen is that traditional advertisers are now looking at untraditional ways to generate value, or look to new opportunities that involve new media," notes Jensen.

"For instance, podcasting is still very much in its early stages on the continent and advertisers are still learning how to quantify the value of a highly niched group of people and their audiences.

"There is a level of risk involved from leadership to get comfortable in trying something new and I think that advertisers are starting to become more comfortable doing so to digitally transform their companies into the next age of cultural relevance to maximise value for them from the emerging creative economy.

"That said, we are seeing advertisers work directly with podcast creators and companies like Afripods are working to pay creators for their content on hosted platforms."

Creators aren't waiting for advertisers to come to the table, though: live events are becoming popular, with 'community building' campaigns to raise awareness, says Smart. "Creators hold live events at cinemas and theatres, and these are marketed within their communities, and essentially prepaid by their followers."



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"It would be impossible for any newsroom to survive for very long if they don't consider audience expectations and its evolution; many audiences expect stories to come to them in the way that podcasts come to them," notes Smart.

"For example, a crime story is straightforward; it's a typical news story. On a podcast, it has to be different, with a central character, and a storyline complete with crime figures, etc.

"We've done the same thing the same way for a long period of time; we should explore these new ways to communicate and impart information. I don't think people are turning away from journalism – I think they think that journalism is not responding to them."

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