



Spotlight on the Mobile Telecommunications Industry in Africa

Angola

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## Mobile Africa - Text Messages (SMS) as the best feedback tool for Radio Broadcast

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TOP POLYPHONIC  
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## Text Messages (SMS) as the best feedback tool for Radio Broadcast by David Ajao

2005-12-15 00:00:00

In Yoruba language (south-western Nigeria), radio is referred to as "asoromagbesi"; meaning, the one that talks without getting a feedback. Rightfully so. The Yoruba people used to be right be in describing a radio as such, because a few decades ago, one could only listen to radio, one could not give an instantaneous feedback. Not any more. Those days are gone, for good. Today, one does not only listen to radio, one can only participate in the discourse via telephone, fax, email, SMS, and of course, the good old letter-writing.

The focus of this website is on mobile communication technology and thus, the focus of this write-up is on Text Messages as a viable tool for radio broadcast. I am picking on radio because it had the widest and highest reach in many African countries. I believe that SMS is in fact the best tool for radio stations to receive feedback, during a live broadcast. Why? My reasons are explained below:

### Instant

The producer during a live broadcast can instantly receive the feedback sent by listeners, and read them out, in the course of the programme. Other electronic communications means also share this instantaneous feature. Letter writing takes weeks, (if not months) to reach its destination, and as such has been mostly phased-out, and reserved for receiving competitions entries.

### Brevity

This is what I consider one of the greatest features of SMS as a feedback tool. A typical SMS cannot exceed 160 characters though recent mobile phones allow up to 480 characters. With this restriction, listeners are obliged to compress their messages and be very brief with whatever they have to say. Since the radio presenter has less information to read-out from each listener, the diverse opinion of many more people can be aired.

### Screening

This is another very powerful feature of the good old SMS. The producer has the prerogative on whether to read-out each message or not. Since the messages are read-through before they are aired, they can thus not read messages that are not focused on the points being discussed, messages that contain insults, not decent, derogatory, defamatory and so on.

### Collation

With SMS, the feedback received from listeners can be passed through a computer system, printed out and

-  Rudebox
-  Irreplaceable
-  Everytime We Touch
-  I Don't Feel Li...
-  From Paris to B...
-  We Ride
-  Unfaithful
-  Superfreak
-  Promiscuous Girl
-  The Youngest Wa...

saved for future analysis. A classic example is opinion polls, where listeners are asked to simply vote on YES or NO questions. It's much easier to collate such responses and store them for future use.

#### Affordability

SMS is very affordable for most subscribers. A typical message can go for as low as 500 cedis (about 6 US cents). Thus, a wider number of people do not have to make long-distance calls, just to contribute to a radio discussion.

#### SMS vs. Telephone

SMS beats telephone hands down. Telephones have been used for many years, for feedback on live radio broadcasts, but have so many limitations. Many people tend to abuse the use of telephone to air insults, obscenity and so on. By the time the producer cuts off the one at the other end of the phone, the damage would have already been done. During the late end of 2004, when Ghana was preparing for its presidential/parliamentary elections, many called for a temporary ban on phone-in radio programmes, due to the tension that rises from the vindictiveness of many callers. With SMS, the presenter can choose not to read messages that are seen to be too insulting.

Though radio stations can also invest in a delay mechanism where-by listeners' phone messages are delayed and screened before being aired, this is expensive for most African radio stations and a bit tedious & complicated.

Also, fewer people are able to share their opinion by telephone. Only one person can be aired at a time. Some people take too much time, and even get offended when asked to hang-up for others to contribute. When an individual is online, the telephone is engaged, and the hundreds of others trying to get through cannot do so, as they only hear a busy tone.

These are the few points why I think SMS are a better way for receiving feedback during live radio broadcasts.

Currently, most of the FM radio stations in Accra use some easy-to-remember numbers for listeners to send their messages. All the cellular networks in Ghana have provided such special numbers for the use of the radio stations. Numbers like 997, 919, 905 are identified with Joy FM, Vibe FM and Radio Gold, respectively.

While many would still use telephone, SMS would play a bigger role when its advantages sink into the minds of those in charge.

**David Ajao**, a web developer with [Web4Africa](#) writes from Accra – Ghana.

## Comments

### Account Director

"SMS Grooming delivers voting and other messages directly to host applications, improving performance and reducing SMSC loadin. SMS Grooming enables voting messages and other person-to-machine messages to be delivered directly, bypassing the SMSC. This dramatically reduces SMSC loading – thereby reducing costs – and it increases throughput, enabling the operator and service providers to generate more revenue. Messages to voting or other applications are filtered ('groomed'), and are delivered directly to the host via an SMS Interface Gateway that provides an intelligent, multi-standard interface. The SMS Interface Gateway supports a message store as an option. For separate types of traffic, operators can configure whether or not the message should be stored if the host system or the connection is off-line. SMS Grooming provides a critical step towards fulfilling the potential of SMS Voting – massive message volumes can be handled, and by using the Transaction Management model, every participant knows immediately that their vote or competition entry has been received and registered. Revenues and audience satisfaction are both maximised. In one case, an operator deployed Telsis Intelligent SMS Routing with SMS Grooming and immediately saw its national ranking (for the number of SMS Voting messages handled) improve from fifth to second. Contact Telsis to discuss more. "

**Martin Smyth** from Fareham, UK

### Account Director - Telsis

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