SOCIAL MEDIA AND BBC ARABIC: A CASE STUDY OF NUQTAT HEWAR

RESEARCH REPORT

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1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This research on uses of social media at the BBC Arabic, particularly the interactive programme Nuqtat Hewar, was carried out between 15 November 2011 and 31 January 2012. Funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council and the Centre for Research on Socio-Cultural Change, it involved a unique collaboration between The Open University and the BBC Arabic Service. It also draws on the insights and findings of extensive prior empirical research on BBC Arabic that was conducted as part of a wider research project on the BBC World Service (2007-2010), directed by Professor Marie Gillespie.[1]

The research team consisted of:

Professor Marie Gillespie: Principle Investigator, The Open University

Nesrine Abdel-Sattar: Co-ordinator of the project's three research strands. Doctoral research student, Oxford University

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Research Rationale

The immediate aim of the research was to examine the adoption of social media by BBC Arabic (BBCA) through one of its flagship interactive programmes, Talking Point, or Nuqtat Hewar (N7). The broader aim was to assess the potential of social media for widening online participation in political debate and opening up new possibilities for intercultural dialogue. We used an in-depth case study approach adopting a series of quantitative and qualitative measures and established methods and mechanisms for triangulating and verifying our findings. Full details of our methodology can be found in the appendix. The choice of N7 was straightforward. It is one of the few programmes at BBCA that employs social media and the web to engage users in debates on current Middle East and global issues. It also integrates User Generated Content (UGC) within the programme's format. Moreover, it is a tri-platform production – radio, online and TV. This makes it more representative of BBCA's wider administrative, technical and

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managerial and strategic policies than any other programme. The case study approach allowed us to examine the processes involved as well as the opportunities and challenges of adopting social media in international news organisations.

The research and this report have two key objectives:

a. To analyse current social media opportunities provided by BBCA for users, and to offer an assessment of the extent to which the facilities provided enhance interactivity and engagement among audiences;

b. To make practical recommendations, based on our observations and empirical findings, that contribute to the development of the policies, practices and resources required to extend the engagement, impact and reach of BBCA programmes in the region and in the global Arabic-speaking diasporas.

More specifically, the research exercise sought to find out:

- what social media platforms and services Nuqtat Hewar (from now on abbreviated to N7) provides for users and audiences in order to engage them and enable them to participate in the production of N7;

- how these platforms operate and the key practices and routines that enable or constrain their performance;

- how these platforms are perceived and experienced by the users.

For an explanation of unfamiliar terms used in these recommendations, please refer to the Glossary at the end of the report.

1.1 GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

- A team of 13 staff[2] manage N7, with three members devoting part of their time to monitoring and moderating social media (SM) content on the three key SM outlets of the programme: Twitter, Facebook and G+. The programme relies primarily on its Have Your Say (HYS) webpage, which has been a strong arm to its content since its inception on radio in March 2003.

- The one-and-half hour programme is broadcast 5 days a week (Mon-Fri) on TV and radio simultaneously for an hour, followed by half an hour on radio only. The format includes live interactions with key guests, phone calls from the audience (largely

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[2] At the time of the study, Nuqtat Hewar team had 11 staff dedicated to the programme, in addition to a number of casual workers who helped with setting up phone-calls and programme preparation. The key staff included: one editor, five producers (SBJs and BJs), 3 presenters and 4 broadcasting assistants (BAs). At the end of the research period, there was an additional presenter on the team. All of the presenters worked on other BBCA programmes.

prepared in advance), and a dedicated 'interactivity' segment that incorporates a selection of users' web and SM responses on the given topic. Moreover, interactions on SMS and Twitter are also moderated live in the gallery and used whenever possible.

- To initiate key debates, the programme posts a few debate topics every week on its dedicated Have Your Say (HYS) webpage on BBCA website. Facebook, G+ and Twitter accounts are also utilised, albeit at varying degrees, to elicit users' feedback on the chosen topic(s) of debate.

- The majority of UGC on the debate questions are found on the BBCA website (HYS section), followed by the N7 Facebook page. Twitter and G+ remain very limited in users' interactions.

1.1.1 BBC ARABIC'S ONLINE STRATEGY?

- Despite BBCA's ambitious plans to use social media to attract and engage more users, there is a wide gap between their plans and the reality of social media adoption. There is also no formally agreed social media strategy with a coherent vision that all staff can own and feel inspired by.

- The meanings of the term 'user engagement' and how it is measured (quantitatively) and evaluated (qualitatively) vary among production staff, senior editors, management, and the publicity and marketing teams. Devising a social media strategy with a vision that will inspire staff and identify common goals is urgently needed. This, in turn, will help shape achievable targets, as well as more diverse means and measures for evaluating success (and avoid an over-reliance on statistical measures).

- The social media strategy needs to address the organisational and structural constraints outlined in this report - including factors particular to N7 and those applicable more generally to the newsroom - that are impeding social media development and causing the BBCWS to lag behind its competitors in its efforts to engage audiences.

- The obstacles to effective social media use across the service are commonly seen as a result of limited resources. This is only partly true. With a judicious redeployment of resources, some inherent constraints within the organisation could be easily overcome. This would allow the BBCA to play a much bigger role within the BBC and counter its actual and perceived isolation within the organisation.

- There are many examples of the successful adoption of social media across the WS (especially in the Russian, Persian, Mundo and Vietnamese language services) that could provide a wealth of peer-knowledge on which BBCA could draw more effectively.

- The research team observed some lack of sharing, exchange and co-operation among the different sections of BBCA, as well as gaps and inconsistencies in social media training, especially among senior staff. These pose obstacles to developing a coherent social media strategy. (see section 5 for more details)

- As in many international broadcasting organisations, TV and radio production have high status relative to online and social media. Taking on and rotating social media roles need to be encouraged, validated and rewarded with promotion, career opportunities and placements. Deploying social media can involve risks and challenges to the BBC's professional journalism ethos. Creative, cutting edge uses of social media should be encouraged (as was the case with BBCA's Greenwich 7:10 experiment) and worries about the risks to professionalism minimised via the updating of guidelines and ongoing training. This is a delicate but important balancing act to achieve.

1.1.2 DESIGN & TECHNICAL ISSUES

- Despite recent improvements since 2011, the current design of N7 web and Facebook pages could be more attractive and user-friendly. The fonts used on the BBCA website, for example, are not typical of the universal Arabic format that is more reader-friendly[3]. Improving the general layout would help users navigate across BBCA content.

- Increasing the cross-promotion of N7 and its pages (visually and hyper-textually) across the BBCA platforms and pages would not only enhance the overall navigability of content but also increase N7's visibility and encourage greater user interactivity and participation with the programme.

- Technical difficulties hinder the versatility and speed of incorporating social media and UGC to N7. Almost one in every three episodes of N7 witnessed a technical problem that hindered the production of the episode. This does little to impress audiences who are used to higher production values.

- Matching the current BBC Arabic technical tools to a level equivalent to those used in similar tri-platform interactive programmes at BBCWS would improve SM production and increase UGC. Some of these tools (e.g. live ticker, Twitter Module) are already in use in some language services but are not yet fully exploited by BBCA. Section 4.2 explains in more detail the different technical challenges and suggests ways of addressing them. These technical challenges hinder the potential of social media for engaging existing audiences and attracting new users, since they impede real-time (e.g. live) participation by the users.

- The need for a thematically- or chronologically-organised online archive - one that enables easy access to past N7 episodes and HYS topics – is of paramount importance.

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[3] Please see more details on design features in section 4

It was extremely difficult, and sometimes not possible, for the research team to access prior debates online. Moreover, content analysis of the users' postings on 'Free Space' revealed that users repeatedly suggested topics already discussed within the same period. Such repetition can be explained in part by the difficulty in accessing N7 past archives. The absence of a list of topics-per-episode and a relevant date on the website and the FB page inhibits sustained user engagement. This lack of access to archival information may frustrate users, and eventually impede participation. It also reflects poorly on the programme and the larger BBCA website. Currently, the English Have Your Say website has a thematic and chronologic listing of episodes, a model which could be replicated at BBCA.

- Making N7 episodes available online would extend and enrich debates on the topics raised and increase participation. Episodes should be regularly and systematically uploaded onto the website in order to allow the debate to continue beyond the live airing of the show. Extending debate beyond the TV screen is a fundamental pre-requisite of interactive programmes aimed at intercultural dialogue across time zones.

- The multiple Facebook pages of N7 (currently 5 redundant links) affect the overall image of BBCA and of N7. Users who happen to 'like' the wrong N7 page on FB might not know that it is actually inactive. This could lead to losing potential users online. Such duplication could be easily remedied if, for example, a simple search on Facebook was conducted by the N7 team, followed by removal of all inactive pages, and promotion of the actual active one. Similarly, N7 page on the BBCA website featured 5 defunct, untitled and undated links to episodes, as well as duplicate visual links of N7 FB and Twitter accounts, throughout the research period.

- The format and structure of the all BBCA Facebook pages (tabbed pages) do not follow a minimum level of standardisation. Tools, features and layout need to be universal across all programme pages to ensure consistent BBCA branding. The main BBCA Facebook page also needs to cross-promote the different BBCA programmes' content to ensure higher visibility and user-participation. This is especially necessary for BBCA flagship programmes such as N7.

1.1.3 ORGANISATIONAL ISSUES

- In general, some excellent good practice was observed during the research period, including: staff adaptability, versatility, flexibility and excellent problem-solving skills in tackling the fast-pace production of a daily 90-minute interactive programme. Moreover, handling technical malfunctions or last-minute changes revealed high levels of creative thinking and collaboration that enabled timely SM production. The remarkable achievements of the N7 team in meeting such daily challenges are to be congratulated.

- However, some structural issues in the organisation affect working conditions, and, as a consequence, constrain the potential of N7 – for instance, the centralising

tendencies of the wider BBC work against the relative autonomy, risk-taking and creativity required for cutting-edge social media innovation.

- Tensions observed between staff and senior management do not foster working relations of trust and cooperation: important ingredients for social media and tri-platform production.

- There are also perceived and actual inter-personal, cultural and national tensions that negatively affect the work atmosphere and production practices. One aspect of this is a national compartmentalisation of platforms, and sometimes within the same programme. Although this is not a deliberate or intentional skewing of nationalities and roles on the part of BBCA, it leads to a perception that some nationalities dominate the workplace.

- Tensions around the politics of representing the Middle East, both off-screen and on-screen, are inevitable in Pan-Arabic news organisations. These tensions can either be mobilised for creative or exploited leading to negative outcomes. Management and senior editors have a vital and leading role to play in pre-empting tensions before they become corrosive of good working relations.

- Priority should be given among management staff to ensuring and safeguarding a working culture in which staff, at all levels, are treated as creative individuals. Their skills, talents and successes should be acknowledged and rewarded according to clear performance targets that are in tune with a social media strategy that inspires staff with a shared vision.

- Despite the highly astute, professional and editorial sense of the N7 team, some staff members feel that cultural differences place pressure on editorial choices, particularly when it comes to the selection of Middle Eastern countries and topics of debate. Complaints about the over-representation of certain countries, for example Egypt, often arise, and this, in turn, is then attributed to the dominance of Egyptians across BBCA. It is important that such perceptions are confronted, explained and if found to be accurate, tackled appropriately.

- Despite the general success of the programme in covering debate topics that are popular on the website, our analyses of website content revealed that some users expressed disappointment about what they see as the relegation of some Arab countries or issues from the debates. Despite the news-driven editorial policy, it is uncommon to cover the same country more than twice a week, due to that perceived tension.

- There are significant disparities in resources (perceived and actual) between the BBC's domestic and foreign language services (LS) despite the fact that BBCA, and N7 in particular, are relatively well-resourced compared to other LS. These perceived disparities are seen to impede the effective use of social media and affect the loyalty and motivation of LS staff. As a result, the quality of the BBC's uses of social media is very uneven, which could potentially jeopardise the BBC brand.

- There are differences in opinion across BBCA regarding the resources required to support innovative uses of social media. The research team observed that the number of staff working on the Web team and social media is very low compared to other large Arabic news organisations. Al Jazeera, for instance, deploys an army of nearly 90 dedicated staff members on its Arabic website alone, in addition to a team of 20 dedicated to social media. This puts BBCA at a distinct competitive disadvantage and in an area that it should be able to exert a competitive advantage given the wider context of progress in social media across the BBC.

- A shortage of staff in general and/or incomplete teams due to regular and/or intermittent sick leave among staff, put constant time pressures on both the Web and N7 teams. Time pressures and heavy workloads requiring rapid and versatile multi-tasking have been repeatedly highlighted as two of the key impediments to effective and creative use of social media in the newsroom.

- Work-related stress: It was observed that the N7 team members, especially the BAs, often work late to complete their day's work. As a result, the newsroom team often look stressed and appear to be overworked and drained. One major cause of the time pressure identified by staff was the decision to increase the N7 programme from three to five times a week after January 2011 without a suitable increase in staffing and resources.

- Gender and age disparities are conspicuously evident at the BBCA. Across the newsroom, all editorial managers are over 40 and male. Often, the most social media-savvy staff are BA's under the age of 35. This has implications for the relatively low level of decision-making power that young, particularly female, BA's have and their capacity to suggest and experiment with innovative ideas.

1.1.4 TRI-PLATFORM: NUQTAT HEWAR (N7)

- Nuqtat Hewar (N7) started on radio and online in 2003. The structure of N7 programme follows a format that facilitates a live debate between TV guest speakers, phone callers and online contributions by users. The presenter attempts to moderate this debate with pre-aggregated UGC (webcams, comments on web, FB and Twitter). This format breaks the monotony of a traditional 'guests' debate programming, allowing a wider debate sphere that integrates contributions across tri-platforms and different times (e.g. UGC beyond the live airing time).

- By the beginning of 2011, the programme introduced a 'brief' on users' SM contributions to its existing 'interactivity' segment of the programme.

- The current structure at BBCA (TV, including News and Programmes, Radio and Online) inhibits the possibilities for interactivity. Placing a multiplatform interactive programme (that engages users in a live debate) under a separate entity from the traditional TV productions (e.g. news, documentary, guest programmes) poses an unnecessary dichotomy that might need revisiting. 'Interactivity' and users engagement with audiences should be seen as integral strategic aims to all

programming (and platforms) at the BBCA, rather than a separate department. This is especially as N7 is essentially a 'news-driven' programme that primarily relies on news and guests in its format.

- In terms of users' online contributions, the 'Free Space' forum in the Have Your Say (HYS) section flags issues not tackled in Arabic media more widely – it currently seems under used but is a very good way to get ahead of the game and trigger innovative debates that feel the pulse of audiences. For example, suggestions on Free Space included a proposal to debate the different ways that Gaddafi and Saddam Hussein died and the different responses they received.

- Despite being an interactive programme, actual possibilities for 'real-time' live participation are limited. The live feature of the debate remains confined to phone calls and guest speakers, and while live SMS and Twitter contributions are facilitated, they remain very minimal. All other forms of participation in the programme are pre-aggregated and pre-moderated (e.g. SM and web contributions). Increasing real-time interactions, especially capitalising on SM, will encourage viewers/users live engagement, enhance viewership and add appeal to the programme.

- Only users who actually provide phone numbers, for instance, can be contacted by the team to take part in the programme. But there is nothing on the website that advertises the importance of providing a phone number in the registration details to the users. Clarity and promotion of the 'parameters' for selecting users to the programme debate are essential to ensure no good contributions are missed because of lack of users contacts. (see p23-24 and figure 1 for more details)

- The team often pick the best Tweets from a pre-set list of Twitter influencers: active bloggers, politicians and intellectual celebrities. This list of '100 most influencing Arab users' therefore only includes the most 'outspoken' users and the already 'vocal' participants. It might be worth considering widening the base of participation through effective topic searching measures.

- English content submitted by users – whether on SM platforms of N7 or HYS webpage – automatically gets deleted by the team. As many of BBC Arabic users are from diaspora and are bi- or tri- lingual, this could alienate a potentially loyal niche market. A focus on Middle Eastern issues might no longer be appropriate in an age of digital diasporas where diaspora and regional audiences interact and new forms of intercultural dialogue take place. Current research also indicates that SM users are increasingly expressing themselves multi-lingually.

- As a result, more 'proficient' users - ones who have the capacity to speak or are technically--savvy- are selected over others. During the observation period, it was evident that 'proficient' users are often 'returning users'. This limits the range of participants and the nature of the participation.

1.1.5 EVALUATING THE GLOBAL CONVERSATION

- N7 is BBCA's primary and most successful programme for fostering a global conversation and encouraging debate and deliberation. Dialogue between Arab citizens in the Middle East regions and diasporas is enabled through the skilful mediation of the programme presenters who challenge arguments and reflect and aggregate user generated content (UGC).

- The gender break down of each episode illustrates an average of 2 females per episode. This low figure is reflected as well when examining the gender participation across platforms, which indicates extremely poor participation among women in the programme's FB and HYS pages.

- There is a lack of national diversity within each episode: each episode features mainly participants from the same country or countries being discussed, be they residents of those countries or diaspora.

- Males in the 25-35 age group dominate the debates across the various BBCA platforms.

- Facebook, unlike those on the moderated HYS, reflected more polarised opinions, usage of colloquial language, irrelevant posts, some instances of disrespect amongst users (mostly on the BBCA FB page), and sometimes lacked in depth.

- Twitter provides a platform that could expand the user base and participation substantially. However our research shows it barely featured on the N7 programme (this has improved since the research period).

- The quality of the debate on the BBCA HYS forum is of high standard, both in terms of the logic of arguments made, evidence marshalled, and the language/discourse used, setting an excellent example for other participants wanting to join in. (active moderation and filtering of the forum could partially explain the high-quality end product – comments that do not conform to the BBC guidelines on participation are not published)

- Topics chosen for debate (on HYS and eventually on N7) are mostly driven by the BBCA's news headlines[4] rather than users' demands that are found on Free Space, even though the Free Space encourages users to 'submit your requests for topics to be discussed'.

- The predominant focus on Arab-Spring topics may need to change. It leads to neglect of other topics and countries, such as the Maghreb region. Real or perceived bias

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[4] To test this, each debate topic put up on HYS was cross-checked with the main **BBCA website** as well as the **Free Space** platform, for the period between 20 Nov. and 15 January. Details of the breakdown can be found in the report.

towards certain countries in the programme's coverage was a complaint voiced by users several times on the Free Space platform.

- There is no way of telling whether the phone participants called in themselves, or were contacted because of their views on HYS, Facebook or even Twitter. This makes N7 sometimes appear similar to other news programmes on BBC Arabic and other news channels, and undermines its self-promotion as a tri-platform show aimed at engaging citizens' voices via a range of channels.

- Only 15% of contributions in the episode come from SM platforms.

- The filtering and moderation of comments are dictated by the guidelines but often also strongly shaped by individual judgments based on the editorial experience of staff.

- There has been no specific SM or Web monitoring training provided to the team.

- A vigorous system of moderation is in place on Jive. At the time of the research, it was observed that decisions were based on the personal, professional judgement of the staff member in charge. There was an implicit rule to reject comments that reflected extreme or highly dogmatic religious views in the interests of fostering a balanced, mature, well-reasoned debate. While this is understandable, this strategy closes down potentially important views and limits the debates. .

1.1.6 AUDIENCES AND USERS

- IARP research showed that the website grew significantly with the outbreak of the consecutive Arab revolts (during the first half of 2011). The curve then declined to the normal level of half-a-million-visitors threshold.

- Our research confirmed that BBCA online platforms traffic also peaked during crisis events (e.g. Egyptian parliamentary elections). While, these crisis-lead peaks are typical of most news organisations, the 'crisis-led' growth could suggest that audiences use the BBC as a 'fact checker', especially during times of uncertainty. Several users on N7 online and social media platforms expressed trust in BBCA's balance and effort to verify facts.

- Traffic on N7 debates online peaked on topics not covered or poorly covered on other news services like Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya. For instance, debates on events in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia (both mostly involving Shia dissidents) and Yemen (the issue of the Houthis and the separatists in Southern Yemen) yielded huge participation and praise of the BBCA for bringing up these topics, on both N7 FB and HYS pages. This is a comparative advantage for the BBC, especially if the BBCA maintains its reputed impartial and balanced tackling of these topics.

- Nonetheless, it was observed that online peaks often regress after the crisis-news phase. For instance, online users have relatively weak ties with the service: they practice the least form of engagement on BBCA social media pages, which is expressing 'like' rather than sharing or commenting on a post. There is a potential for growth as the fans of the BBCA Facebook page have a large circle of friends, hence, an opportunity to spread the reach of BBCA and N7 content to 21,738,725 more users (*friends of fans*).

- A striking gender difference appears in the distribution of the BBCA SM users. Over three quarters of the BBCA users of the different analysed platforms are males. Similarly, the majority of N7 Facebook fans were males. Gender inequalities in online participation have wider structural causes and are reflected more widely on the Internet. Nevertheless this is a real cause for concern for BBC Arabic.

- Males voices between 25 – 34 years of age dominate the BBCA and N7 digital platforms. On Twitter 79% of the users are males.

- In terms of age, 64% of the Facebook fans range from 21 to 35 years. Similarly, younger females join Facebook as the majority of the very small number of female fans on both BBCA and N7 FB pages are between 18 and 24 years old. This presents a potential audience to target on social media.

- A sizable majority of users throughout the BBCA online platforms come from Egypt and Saudi Arabia. On the BBCA website, over one third of users came from Egypt and Saudi Arabia (17.5% and 17.7% respectively). Similarly, on BBCA FB, over 92,000 of fans came from Egypt, followed by over 22,000 from Saudi. Finally, on N7 FB page, the largest number of fans came from Egypt (9,688) followed by Saudi Arabia (3,783), then Syria (3,726). (see Chapter 8 on 'Users' for more details)

- The Maghreb countries were generally under-represented despite an active participation from Tunisia on the BBCA FB page, where over 11,000 fans came from Tunisia, ranking third after Saudi Arabia and Egypt. On N7 FB page, however, Tunisia and Algeria are absent from the top ten, and Morocco ranks seventh with only 1,488 fans.

- With regard to Twitter, users from Egypt and Gulf countries took the lead on tweets related to the BBCA, as 19%, 15% and 10% of tweets came from Bahrain, Egypt and Kuwait, respectively. This representation is partly driven by the news during that period, which coincided with the Egyptian parliamentary elections, protests in Bahrain, and changes to the Kuwaiti parliament. These figures echo recent research on Twitter in the Arab world that showed Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait were amongst the top Twitter countries[5].

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[5] The Arab Social Media Report (2012) Dubai School of Government.

- A proportion of BBCA social media users are diaspora Arabs, though the team have no exact figures on their numbers[6]. In their personal FB profiles, almost one quarter of BBCA Facebook fans mentioned English as their language of communication, while many included countries outside the Arab world as places of residence. In this regard, USA is among the top five countries where BBCA Facebook fans reported living, while 12% of tweets came from Arabic diaspora in the UK.

- Although the majority of N7 Facebook fans stated they resided in the Arab world (on their personal profile pages), a number of users, especially active ones, on HYS (main BBCA website) indicated living in a non-Arab country, mainly in the West.

- It is acknowledged that the data on Diaspora might not be accurate, given that such information is based on self-reporting, which we cannot verify. For instance, a Lebanese residing in the UK might still indicate Beirut as his city of residence on his Facebook profile. The majority of Egyptian expatriates also reside in Gulf countries. Therefore, it is possible that many Arab users participate from Arab countries that are not their countries of origin, especially as Gulf countries enjoy a very high Internet penetration rate.

1.2 KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

The full set of recommendations is detailed in Chapter 9. For the purpose of this summary, however, we list the major recommendations that need to be considered at senior and editorial levels within the BBC Arabic, and among the editorial team. Despite the comprehensive research that we have undertaken, it is possible that some of our recommendations may already have become normal practice, especially after the recent developments in BBC Arabic's social media strategy.

We recommend that BBC Arabic consider:

- Positioning interactivity of users and audience at the centre of production, regardless of which platform or media content is being produced, is imperative. Interactivity and user engagement should be embraced as part of the total newsroom culture and its daily routines.

- Ensuring that the teams are fully staffed with dedicated roles assigned to social media and interactivity to ensure more efficient and timely SM production.

- Re-scheduling N7 programme to a later time (17:00 or 18:00 GMT), in order to suit Middle Eastern prime time hours.

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[6] Our prior research in 2009 estimated that over 45% of online users were from diasporas and that Arab diaspora as well as female users could be a clear target audience for BBCA to reach. See Andersson, Gillespie and Mackay (2010) 'Mapping Digital Diasporas at BBC World Service: Users and Uses of BBC Arabic and Persian Websites in Special Issue: The BBC World Service and the Middle East. Guest editors Sreberny, A. Gillespie, M and Baumann, G. in *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication* Vol 3 No 2

- Revising the N7 schedule to three instead of five times a week in order to dedicate more time for planning and boost the interactivity aspect of the programme. Alternatively, N7 could excel with at least two full-time staff dedicated to social media alone.

- Introducing a more bottom-up approach to solving any structural and staff conflicts that hinder the convergence of the newsroom and the related SM production. This can be achieved by involving staff in a collective strategic planning exercise to openly discuss structural and cultural issues that hinder synergies and cross-platform productions.

- Providing training to staff on best practices for 'moderating' debate online, and on SM. In particular, enhancing social media skills among all levels of staff (especially senior staff) via systematic regular training to keep abreast of SM technologies and innovations.

- Improving the archiving and indexing systems of the website to allow easier search and access to N7 episodes. Users should be able to easily find older debates or news by keyword of topic theme, country and date of airing of the episodes.

- Adapting and integrating all BBCA online services and applications to multiple platforms and devices. This includes developing 'light' versions and dedicated apps for smart phones and tablet PCs; and ensuring all web or SM content is integrated with all operating systems. (The new user-friendly smartphone app for BBCA, developed in the months following our research, is a very positive move in this direction)

- Cross-promoting all BBCA flagship programmes (such as N7) on the main BBCA Facebook page in order to increase traffic on the website and engagement in these programmes.

- Addressing women audiences with themed events and topics that interest or concern them and/or mobilising a major initiative to represent female voices on the TV show more frequently might help bridge the evident gender chasm in the dialogue. However, this is by no means a foregone conclusion. BBCA might consider a Women's Hour programme made by, for and about women – and of course including male contributions.

- Reaching out to the wider 'silent' majority of Arab users, especially among women and 45+ users. A greater understanding of the changing nature of media consumption and uses of new technologies among women and older groups in the region and diasporas is required in order to better serve their needs. Research and outreach to women and family groups might assist this process.

- Considering allowing bilingual contributions online in order to cater for the large BBCA audience in Diaspora and incentivise some of the younger generations to participate

- Improving the quality of debate through investing time and human resources in monitoring, selecting and moderating debate on the website and in social media. Particular attention should be dedicated to Facebook and Twitter, and updating the list of 'influential users' should be done on a periodic (e.g. monthly) basis.

2 INTRODUCTION

This report presents the findings of research that examined the vision and realities of interactive social media use at the BBC Arabic (BBCA). Over a period of two and a half months (15 November 2011 - 31 January 2012) a team of six researchers investigated how the BBCA has embraced social media, with particular attention to *Nuqtat Hewar* – its flagship tri-platform interactive political debate programme since 2003.

Through an in-depth case study of Nuqtat Hewar (N7), the study maps SM and interactive services and highlights the key challenges that constrain the full exploitation of the SM potential for audience engagement.

The research and this report are firmly set in the context of the BBC's strategy and policy and in light of the significant resource, governance, technological and journalistic challenges that the BBC World Service (WS) faces currently.

The report aims to contribute constructively to BBC objectives and aspirations, namely, realising BBCA values and increasing reach and visibility among Arab audiences in the Middle East regions and among Arab-speaking diasporas. It also intends to support the role of the wider BBC WS in fostering a 'global conversation'.

2.1 THE RESEARCH: AIMS, METHODS AND ETHICS

The project involved a unique research partnership between The Open University and the BBC World Service, funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council as part of its Public Policy and placement Fellowship schemes.

The main aim of the research is to evaluate current uses of social media at the World Service, identify good practice, and suggest ways of enhancing the impact of social media. We worked closely with Marketing, Communications and Audiences.

The Arabic Service, in particular, was selected as a key site of research because it is in the vanguard of creating tri-media output and has a strong record of using social media successfully, especially via its interactive 'Talking Point'/ Nuqtat Hewar (N7) programme.

The research team consisted of 6 academic researchers, including 4 Arabic media specialists. This research operates independently within a public policy remit to increase the impact of social media in promoting intercultural dialogue and participatory debate, as defined by the 'global conversation'.

Two questions drove the research:

- How does BBC Arabic use social media to encourage debate and dialogue across national, religious, ethnic, and cultural boundaries?

- How does/can BBC Arabic make best use of interactive media to engage audiences/users in participatory debate following the 'Arab Spring' - especially 'critical events' from the Tunisian and Egyptian elections through to the first anniversary of the Egyptian Revolution on 25 January?

In addressing these questions, the research had to examine the dynamics of programme production inside the newsroom. For instance, it looked at the different organisational, business, technological and staff conceptions that shape decisions and implementation of social media. It also looked at the users: who they are and how they behave on BBCA and N7 social media platforms; and at the dialogue they engage in.

The project had, thus, three strands of research that evolved iteratively:

Strand A: Context of Production: The Interactive Newsroom

Method: participant observation and interviews

Strand B: Users and Uses

Method: social media monitoring data analysis

Strand C: Evaluating 'the Global Conversation'

Method: discourse and content analysis of debates/conversations

More details of our research methods can be found in the appendix

These strands were designed to complement each other to answer the overarching research questions. To that end, the project team worked on a common in-depth case study, Nuqtat Hewar, to deepen and integrate the analysis of each strand.

This triangulated methodology has a number of advantages over research that focuses either on production or on users or on content separately. It allows for a much more articulated approach that can take on board how the role and function of interactive social media within the BBC Arabic Service are imagined and put into practice by journalists and audiences in the wider context of the BBC WS, and its relationship with the UK government's Foreign and Commonwealth Office. There are clear tensions between the ideals and practices of social media and it is very important to bear these tensions in mind in order to make the most effective uses of these new, potentially democracy-enhancing tools. But we start from the premise that the role of interactivity and participatory journalism needs to be questioned rather than assumed.

The team analysed patterns of social media production and consumption, and the nature and style of debates that take place via BBC Arabic platforms. We explored the dynamics of content production, editorial strategies, and issues of agency within the technological and interactive and decision-making processes during a defined period (Nov 2011- Jan 2012).

The aim was to understand the different factors, including social and cultural factors, that affect social media production - whether social media produce 'phatic chatter', monologue and/or dialogue. We set out to assess whether User Generated Content and social media content is 'incorporated' into conventional media in ways that challenge existing news frameworks.

Our wider concerns centre around whether online debate opens up the promise of the Internet for freedom of expression and freedom of information - greater participation for users in political debates/activities which contribute to processes of democratisation.

Research Ethics and values

- The research team has complied at all times with The Open University's Code of Research Ethics. As with all qualitative and especially ethnographically-informed research, we have respected the confidentiality of the research participants who offered their views on a number of relevant issues. Quotations taken from interviews are therefore presented anonymously, in accordance with academic convention and ethical codes. The views and perceptions expressed in the report are those of the interviewees. In complex international organisations like the BBC World Service, there are invariably alternative views and perspectives on the same issue. Nevertheless, individual quotations were selected because they represented a patterned rather than an isolated response and were considered to represent a commonly held view among the production teams. The findings and recommendations are those of the research team and are not attributable to any individual member of staff.

- The research focused on the context of production and the production staff of N7. We also consulted and interviewed a wider range of staff in the Arabic Service to situate and triangulate our findings. We have tried to deal with sensitive cultural, national and religious issues delicately and candidly. Inevitably, tensions arise in any complex international organisation between staff and management. We have included an outline of these perceived tensions in our report as they are part of the context in which social media initiatives take place, and as such, they are relevant.

- We did not interview senior management or consult them during the research period. However, at least six members of the management team at BBCA have offered feedback on a previous draft of the report (June 2012). We have considered the feedback in detail and responded to the issues they raised particularly about issues of representativeness. It should be noted that this is not a quantitative research project and, therefore, concerns about representative samples of staff interviewed are not an issue. Given the small number of staffed involved, we had to take great care to assure their anonymity. However, the research does claim, accurately, to represent the range of voices and working experiences of N7's production staff. It does not seek to generalise its findings beyond the parameters of the research set out above. We are satisfied that the report meets all the standards of scientific rigour associated with the values for judging qualitative research: veracity, validity and reliability.

- Given the time elapsed between delivery of the first report (June 2012), and the extensive process of feedback and dialogue with management, there have already been some changes to staffing and production practices as we deliver the final report (November 2012). These do not detract from the fact that the case study approach allows for processes and practices to be studied that do not change so speedily, so we are confident that report retains its relevance and currency.

2.2 THE GLOBAL CONVERSATION

One of the key public purposes of the BBC World Service is to engage overseas publics in a 'global conversation' that will have public diplomacy benefits and outcomes. The WS's Operating Agreement with the BBC Trust requires that the WS:

> should connect and engage audiences by facilitating a 'global conversation' - an informed and intelligent dialogue which transcends international borders and cultural divides; by giving communities around the world opportunities to create, publish, and share their own views and stories; and, thereby, enabling people to make sense of increasingly complex regional and global events and developmentsi

Our research set out to understand how BBC Arabic manages 'the global conversation' – how it uses social media to encourage debate and dialogue across national, religious, ethnic, and cultural boundaries. In particular, we recognised that the 'Arab Spring' presented possibly unprecedented opportunities for BBC Arabic to mobilise interactive media to engage audiences/users in debate

The media landscape is changing rapidly, presenting international broadcasters with many challenges. In the Middle East and Africa, mobile data traffic will grow 36-fold from 2011 to 2016[7]. Moreover, the Internet traffic data will grow 9-fold by 2015, with Internet video traffic reaching 82% of all consumer Internet traffic in the same year.

Mobile data traffic will also grow 63-fold from 2010 to 2015 in the region. Globally, there will be 15 billion networked devices in 2015, up from 7 billion in 2010 – or an average of two devices owned per person. This will include smart phones, but also tablet PCs, eReaders, music digital devices (wireless iPods, etc), laptops, PCs, digital cameras and other devices that are connected to the Internet.

A growing body of research suggests that consumers integrate traditional with online media consumption rather than abandon older forms of media[8]. This is particularly true for TV and radio. Users are likely to access BBC Programmes both on TV and online. This also means that users – be they in the Middle East or worldwide - will expect to watch, interact and record BBC programmes from multiple devices, and most probably simultaneously.

This research report hopes to shed light on current good practices and ways of augmenting the impact of social media.

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[7] Cisco Visual Networking Index (2011) http://www.cisco.com/web/solutions/sp/vni/vni_mobile_forecast_highlights/index.html

[8] (Boczkowski & Peer, 2011; Mitchelstein & Boczkowski, 2010)

2.3   STRATEGIES FOR ENGAGING USERS

How does BBC Arabic imagine and address its audiences and for what or whose purposes? And why would Arabic speakers in the Middle East or diasporas come to the BBC Arabic in the first place? These questions have a fundamental bearing on how BBCA staff address their audiences and engage them online and offline.

The current business model in which the FCO fund the WS means that although the WS/BBCA does not engage directly or formally in public or cultural diplomacy projects, one of its key public purposes is to engage overseas publics in a 'global conversation' (especially online), which will have public diplomacy benefits and outcomes. As Lord Carter's Review on Public Diplomacy put it, WS outputs have 'positive public diplomacy gains for the country associated with that brand'. This is a fundamental fact of the BBCA's raison d'etre, however it is interpreted by staff.

The FCO's digital diplomacy strategy, or "solving foreign policy problems using the Internet", is a dialogic form of 'new public diplomacy' involving diplomats and policymakers in not just speaking to overseas publics but also listening to them[ii]. The capacity of overseas publics to 'talk back' to both the WS (and the FCO) raises specific challenges that need to be managed – not least framing, moderating and adjudicating and responding to debates and users.

Empowering users and audiences to engage in a global conversation is a laudable aim but notions of engagement and 'empowerment' need to be more clearly defined: to speak is not to be heard, nor to be taken into account. Yet it is also true that being able to express or vent opinion, in some contexts, may be regarded as a 'public good' in itself. There is a need for greater understanding the expectations that online users/publics bring to 'having their say', and the consequence of participation, or lack of it, especially among women, in different contexts and language services and what this means for 'freedom of expression' and the global public sphere.

For the WS, measuring the impact and value of the 'global conversation' is crucial. However, current methods for measuring impact and value need to be refined and developed to take on board not just the quantitative dimensions but also the quality of debate to assess whether there is a genuine dialogue. Our research does just this.

2.4   THE CHALLENGES OF SOCIAL MEDIA TO BBC JOURNALISM

Related to the above point is a fundamental question about the extent of user engagement the BBCWS and the wider BBC are keen to promote. The BBC – like many media organisations - is still grappling with finding the right balance between two roles: one as a news provider, with its own legal accountability and journalistic values; and another as a platform that engages (and often builds on) user-generated content. There is a wide spectrum of user engagement that stretches from limited comments on a BBC news story to enabling users' blogging and other UGC, which become central features of output. This balance is no mean feat to achieve from a legal, editorial and business perspective.

The FCO may regard the BBCA as a public diplomacy partner, but the everyday realities of managing the service is that it operates much like any other commercial international

broadcaster. Hence, social media may be seen more as adding colour and flavour to output rather than engaging users in high-quality debate that may contribute to bridging intercultural understandings across national, ethnic or religious divisions or between the Anglo and Arab media spheres. The competing demands of public service and commercial imperatives often create tensions for staff. Social media bring these tensions out in new ways.

For example, currently, the BBC Facebook guidelines stress that the preference is BBC-only posting. As the guidelines state, '…normally only we should post on our Facebook pages. Fan postings might be a good idea in some circumstances, but it can be risky because of the potential for bringing the BBC into disrepute' (BBC News Facebook Guidance, 2011). While it is very good that the BBC encourages close monitoring of its Facebook pages in order to preserve its image, integrity and quality of engagement, more resources could be employed to ensure a wider fan/users posting. Encouraging fans/users to post on these pages should be the norm rather than the exception. This will not only increase the visibility of BBC Arabic content but also enhance the loyalty to its brand. (Currently, fans of BBCA FB pages can only comment on BBCA-made posts. As such, they are unable to start debates or raise topics of their interest, which carries many, as our research found, to digress and post irrelevant comments to certain debates, as it is the only way to bring attention to their topics of choice. Such digressions naturally interrupt the dialogue. For example, fans commented on events in Southern Yemen or the Sudan under posts about Egypt or Syria, as there were no posts on Yemen or Sudan during that period)

However, allowing free posting is not an easy task. It would entail revising the amount of human and time resources needed to be dedicated to post-moderation of content in order to regularly maintain the Facebook pages, and ensure that the quality of debate and engagement are on a par with BBC's standards.

3   BBC ARABIC'S ONLINE STRATEGY

It would appear that BBCA has no formal social media strategy. However in early 2012, a draft online strategy was circulated with the stated aim of strengthening BBCA's online services. Starting from the recognition that only about 3% of those who get their news from BBCA visit their website, it aimed at raising the profile of online within the service[9]. The document suggested that there was a need for changes in staffing and rotas (particularly a rota system that would ensure adequate online and social media staff would be available to cover all key moments in the news and programme production cycle), training and recruitment, editorial standards, newsgathering, and partners. Changes in social media were, according to the draft document, required if BBCA were to keep up with its competitors. Moreover, it stated if BBCA was to have a chance of meeting its online targets, more suitable and timely targets would also be required[10].

 Our subsequent research concurred with the major recommendations set out in the draft online strategy document. It seems that the proposed strategy was not formally adopted or ratified. Also, there remain significant obstacles to implementing its vision. Shortage of staff is one factor hampering implementation. BBCA remains understaffed following the departure of some 40 staff in the last year (some to Sky Arabic and to other competitors of BBCA). Recruitment delays (some due to security issues in Cairo) mean that it may take up to 6 months to get suitable staff in place and train them and for them to become fully productive. At a time when BBCA should be able to compete successfully with its competitors, this lack of staffing delays implementing the online strategy and seriously hampers its efforts to engage audiences; and, as a result, BBCA risks losing its audiences.

Difficulties in cooperating and sharing material among the different sections of BBCA are another factor. Co-operation between the N7 and the online team has become difficult in part due to structural shifts, e.g. when N7 came under 'Programmes' and the team was split. As a result, the online team was weakened. At the time of research, the online team had no dedicated interactivity or social media staff to drive user engagement and enable BBCA to meet its targets. This, in turn, constrained the workflow between the online and the N7 teams and affected the dynamics of UGC and social media content that cross-cut the two platforms.

Moreover, gaps and inconsistencies in training for online and social media, especially among senior staff, and differences between BBCA Online strategy and the wider Digital strategy of the Global News Division, constrain implementation. A recent training audit carried out by BBCA revealed serious gaps in and lack of consistent training among BBCA staff[11]. This was done after the research period and across the whole of the World Service, and followed by an Online Skills Audit. Both helped in shaping the draft online strategy. Many senior

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[9] The research team was given a copy of the draft social media strategy document by a member of staff (from which the 3% figure is taken). The strategy document was not dated and the authors were not identified. It is unclear what became of this proposed strategy. A copy is available on request.

[10] It was pointed out that while BBCA could meet its Unique Users targets, new measurement targets that only focus on direct referrals to desktop site, were very challenging to meet within the limited time frame set.

[11] The training audit document was given to the research team and is available on request.

members of BBCA are still in the early stages of learning how to use social media and what it means for journalism. Senior staff require fast-track training in order to drive the strategy and provide editorial leadership.

The success of any online and social media strategy depends on dedicated staff. Its successes at present depend too much on the good will of staff. There are also very positive moves afoot to publish an online interactive Online Journalism Production Training Manual that brings together the best of all the diverse documents together in one place with a useful glossary – a clear, accessible, one-stop shop that can be used by all. Such initiatives need to be encouraged.

4 TECHNICAL AND DESIGN FEATURES

4.1 DESIGN & VISIBILITY OF NUQTAT HEWAR WEBPAGE

4.1.1 INTERFACE DESIGN: USER-FRIENDLINESS & VERSATILITY

The design and layout of the Arabic website must follow the general WS design, apparently for economic reasons and to ensure consistency in branding, but this has not always yielded an attractive design outcome for audiences. For instance, since 2001, the Arabic and Persian website used the similar fonts of Tahoma and Times New Romans[12], which were not reader-friendly compared to common Arabic web fonts. The current *Nassim* bold font used in main headings is very uncomfortable for a regular Arabic reader. Only recently were these websites equipped with web fonts enabling (experienced) readers to have certain control over their font from their browsers. When asked why this font was chosen, one of the team members explained: 'They wanted to save cost, so they picked the font that could be used for both Arabic and Persian languages' (Personal Interview, 22 November 2011). While standardising BBC pages is necessary, a few customisations to suit the needs of Arabic readers are essential.

Below are a few observations and suggested design measures that could help increase user-friendliness and visibility of N7 pages for the target Arabic audiences:

- The current visibility of Nuqtat Hewar programme on the BBCA frontpage (www.bbc.co.uk/Arabic/) is only through the tab on the top banner[13] (Radio & Television), in addition to the panel (with a photo) of the programme at the bottom of the page. It is a little difficult to find Nuqtat Hewar debates, users' contributions, and the episodes (videos).

- Given that N7 is a flagship programme for BBCA, it might be worth considering promoting N7 debates and logo (as well as other flagship programmes) on the main BBCA homepage.

- Once on the debate of the day page (HYS)[14], links to the main debates of Nuqtat Hewar page are not visible (see figure 1). Links must be visible in at least three separate spots (minimum two visual graphical hyperlinks and one textual hyperlink) on the debate page, in order to facilitate users navigation to the main page. The graphical icon linking to the N7 main page must be placed in the upper half of every sub-page (see Figure 1).

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[12] http://alefba.us/typography/arabic-persian-webfonts/

[13] The main URL to the N7 programme is http://www.bbc.co.uk/arabic/interactivity/

[14] The thread page of the day topic/debate (have your say) of شارك برأيك http://newsforums.bbc.co.uk/ws/ar/thread.jspa?forumID=14849

- Similar news websites offer users a space to share their caricatures, photos and blogs on a certain topic. It would be useful to consider introducing other graphic/visual user-contributions, such as pictures and caricatures submitted by users on a given HYS or N7 debate, as well as linking video contributions to the programme. This is also an editorial issue concerning the programme format that could be considered.

Figure 1 Design suggestions for promoting N7 and raising users awareness

- Also, currently, the thread page displays only the debate topic and ways to participate. Adding graphic links to N7 live programme streaming and other information (possibly in the empty left-hand column of the page) will increase visibility of N7 and users awareness about how they can participate.

- It is important to also develop clear attractive visuals to guide users on how to participate. As **Error! Reference source not found.** displays, currently, the only way to learn about how to engage is through the hyperlinks on the left-hand column of the HYS webpage. Other 'Have Your Say' programmes do that more successfully. For instance, 'World Have Your Say' page[15] clearly promotes participation on its pages: there is large a display of the phone numbers for SMS and calling, and clear explanation on how to participate.

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[15] World Have Your Say page : ww.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p002w559

- As suggested in **Error! Reference source not found.**, it is particularly critical to display clear guides on 'how to increase one's chances of joining the TV debate', and have that added to the left-hand column of every debate page, as well as key troubleshooting information and Q&As. This can be through a simple graphic that is visible across all N7 threads. Users need to be especially aware that registering online and providing their contact details will increase their chances of being selected to participate in the N7 TV programme (calling in or sending a web contribution). Currently, many users do not provide their contact details; hence miss being contacted by the N7 team to participate in the show, even if they provide quality comments online. Having said that, it is very commendable that the BBCA in April 2012 enabled user contribution to the HYS debates on the website without the need for prior registration. This will increase comments as users who do not wish register (and reveal their info) or do not have time to do so can still take part in the online debates.

- Currently, there is no listing of the videos and past episodes of N7. This is an issue that relates not only to user-friendliness of the design but the wider site archiving and indexing customisation (discussed further in the 'Technical issues' section, 4.2). Dedicating a link (and special sub-page) to the list of episodes by date or topic will greatly enhance access to and participation in the debates (beyond the airing time). A good indexing and archiving model to follow is that of 'World Have Your Say'[16].

- Another important issue has to do with the consistency of social media pages of both BBCA and N7. Although the BBC Facebook guidelines indicate that all BBC accounts should look and feel consistent (and instructions on how to achieve this are shared on jportal[17], BBC's internal network), it is currently not the case with BBCA FB pages (such as BBCA main page, N7 page, etc). The BBC Arabic Facebook pages considerably vary in quality, and some are not on a par with the BBC expected standards, although BBC guides expect all BBC Facebook pages to be of 'high quality, consistent, and complimentary'[18]; Therefore, it is recommended that BBCA FB page and its sub-FB pages follow a policy that ensures consistency of key standards, while retaining autonomy of each page.

4.1.2 CONTENT MANAGEMENT SYSTEM FLUIDITY

The back-end design of the BBC content management systems and infrastructure, despite their advanced capacities, are still not enabling a fluid flow of information across platforms. For instance, recorded episodes of N7, whether radio or TV, are not automatically synchronised with the available video links of past episodes on the website. Moreover, the

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[16] All episodes and videos listed chronologically on World Have Your Say at www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p002w559/broadcasts

[17] http://jportal.bbc.co.uk/sites/teams/newswire/socialmediaguidelines/SOCIALNETWORKPROTOCOLS_BBCNEWS.doc

[18] BBC Facebook Guides

TopCat2 system does not allow more than one person to edit the page at the same time (unless they do over-right, and the other person will lose all changes). This is a feature easily available now in tools like Google Docs.

Another point in case is the BBC Arabic website archiving and indexing feature. The staff repeatedly complained it was difficult to find HYS topics of debate once the debate elapsed, making it difficult to respond to senior management queries (during the period of research, staff manually recorded and tracked the IDs and URLs of past episodes and HYS debates on an Excel sheet). Old topics of debate 'reside' somewhere on the site but are extremely difficult to find. This difficulty in locating past episodes and debate topics online was a major obstacle that affected the work of the research team.

It might be worth considering fine-tuning the TopCat2 content management system to allow visibility of old (archived) HYS debates. This can be complemented by a link to a sub-page dedicated to 'history' or links to all textual and video content related to previous episodes and debates. This would particularly be helpful to trace debates that were not covered in the N7 programme. To enhance user-friendliness in this area, indexing episodes will require staff training on appropriate tagging and categorising of data, as well as better coding to enhance the searchability of data.

Another technical issue relates to difficulty for users to upload videos. Despite the availability of a UGC-uploader on the BBC Arabic N7 page, staff agreed that users sometimes faced difficulty in uploading their webcam recordings to the site. Often, it is not possible to email videos to BBC email accounts given their large size. This technical issue seems to be one of the reasons why webcam contributions on the show are relatively scarce compared to 'textual' and telephone contributions. Using third party sources – including Media Fire, DropBox, Megauploads or even YouTube - could be a cost-effective solution to help users upload their videos. However, current BBC policies regarding the use of third-party services are a constraint, despite the fact that tri-platform programmes initially depend on Social media tools.

Monitoring users' behaviour and interactions on the site is another issue. Content management tools, such as 'Jive', are very old and often do not provide enough analysis on users. Fortunately, the system was recently changed.

In terms of particular social media adoption, the current system at N7 only enables filtering of SM interactions through the ENPS system. During the live programme, live tweets and SMS interactions are manually fed by the co-producer during the live airing of the episodes. Similarly, 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. Although currently tweets to and on the programme are limited, this is expected to change, and better tools need to be adopted to enable faster and more controlled streaming and moderation of live UGC. It is worth noting that these digital tools - that enable live streaming of SM content directly on the TV screen – are already being used by several programmes at the BBC English.

4.1.3 PROMOTION & DISTRIBUTION OF CONTENT

As noted earlier, the design and layout of the N7 pages are important to increase the visibility of and interactions with the programme.

Similarly important is promoting the pages across different BBC Arabic pages in order to enhance interactivity with the programme. At present, the programme is cross-promoted only on three pages of the BBC Arabic website: the front page,, the 'Middle East' page, and the 'World' page. It might be worth increasing promotion of N7 and similar programmes across all pages of BBC Arabic, especially that many of the topics the programme addresses are of common interest.

Moreover, since N7 is an interactive tri-platform programme, it is imperative that the content of the programme is adaptable to all remote and digital devices. This includes Tablet PCs such as iPad, but particularly smartphone devices—where many users use as a main platform to post tweets and Facebook messages. Users might also wish to upload their audio or video snippets via MMS, or other means, but the current system does not enable that.

Other competitors like Al Jazeera have already deployed a dedicated live-streaming and other news apps to distribute their news and programme content on multiple and mobile devices. Even some Arabic print newspapers have now introduced innovative tools to distribute their content on multiple devices. By contrast, up to the end of the research period, the BBC N7 and BBCA larger website still did not have a 'light' version of the site compatible with mobile phones.

(Update: Since the end of the research the BBCA made a very positive step in updating and developing the BBCA mobile phone app, which currently allows users to take part in the HYS debates via a number of means (Twitter, Email, FB, and Google+) directly through their phone, as well as offers a lighter and better categorised version of the website)

Distribution of content should also take place on the N7 page itself, through providing links to previous episodes in an organised and easily accessible fashion to users. N7 can capitalise on its current YouTube channel and Facebook page and provide timely updated versions of its episodes.

From observation and interviews, it seems that some of these distribution challenges have to do with the website design. In addition, there are underlying constraints that often impede the fast updating and distribution of content across social media and other platforms. These include the lack of clear distribution of roles across-platforms, especially as some of these tasks are time-consuming and require additional hours on top of the existing workload. 'We have never dealt with video; there should be an 'entity' responsible of video [uploading]', says one staff member. Another staff explains why the section of 'Your Videos' (مشاركتكم بالفديو) is not regularly updated:

> *This [section] was a compilation of the webcams that we use in N7. There was a common practice, that after each episode we would take those numbers of these [users] webcams from the system and send to the 'video unit' who aggregate all the webcams in one clip with their [e.g. users'] names in a different format that what is presented during the live N7. And after that we would upload on the TopCat2 [content management] system. But*

this was when we had only three episodes per week for the programme; but after it has become five episodes a week, they have a high workload so by the time we finish the episode and send them [the videos], they upload a day or two later. [Personal Interview, 21 November 2012]

Hence, this practice has stopped due to the extreme time limitations and the limited staff available. Staff have to grapple with preparation for the next day's episode, and do not have sufficient post-production time to reflect on successes and failures. When observed in November 2011, the 'Your videos' section on the site had been last updated with users' webcam recordings on 20 May 2011.

Similarly, YouTube uploads of the programme are mostly updated on an ad-hoc basis. Often, some enthusiastic staff members would voluntarily take time beyond their working hours to upload some episodes on the N7 YouTube channel. But uploading one episode on YouTube or the BBC's own system could take up to one hour. Since moving the programme from three to five weekly episodes staff reported that they feel under constant time pressure, which affects post-production work. Management disagree with this finding but our observations suggest otherwise.

There is little cross-promotion of BBCA news and programmes, even within the BBCA platforms. For example, advertising HYS topics on BBCA FB page is sporadic, despite their popularity. Promotion of BBCA news on SM platforms, such as FB, is also limited.

To advertise its news and programmes, the BBCA needs to make better use of social media. For example, on 19 March 2012, one researcher counted 53 news feeds from Al Jazeera on her FB homepage and only 4 from BBCA within 24 hours (she is a fan of both pages on FB). The research team realises that overwhelming audiences/fans with news (as in the above example of Al Jazeera) could be counterproductive, and even intrusive, but a middle ground should be sought to make the most of SM.

4.1.4 USERS SKILLS & AWARNESS

The current N7 page provides some valuable basic information for users on how to participate online. For instance, information on how users can post comments and share videos is short and clear.

However, once again, sufficient promotion of the different means of taking part in the debates and the programme can be done through highlighting these links on several sub-pages of the programme. For instance, the phone numbers to text or call the programme, as well as the Facebook and Twitter accounts, should be visibly promoted on the webpages and the Facebook page of N7. Moreover, users need to be aware of the process of selection to participate in the programme, as part of the transparency of the programme. For instance, there should be clear indication that providing your contact details on the website (by registration) would enable BBCA to contact you to participate live in the programme. Also, the current Q&As should be fine-tuned to help users understand the technical and stylistic requirements for participation and avoid having their contributions eliminated. This information should be provided on the different SM accounts of N7, and regularly re-announced on Facebook and Twitter.

4.2 TECHNICAL AND TECHNOLOGY ISSUES

The BBC Arabic digital and online systems are massive and enable a wide array of convergence across the three platforms with relative ease. This is thanks to a large IT infrastructure enabled by the wider BBC and a stable technical support service. Nevertheless, there are a number of technical and digital services that could improve at BBC Arabic in general and N7 in particular, and which could enhance the quality of production.

From a wider digital perspective, BBC Arabic could improve its interactivity speed and quality if there are more technical capacities. For instance, live conferencing or Skyping is still limited at N7, although it is being used regularly by many news organisations. Moreover, almost one in every three episodes witnessed a technical problem that hindered the production of the episode, and often resulted in missing one of the sections or contributions for that episode. While technical and digital malfunctions before and during airing of programmes are not uncommon in many news organisations, their frequency at BBCA are worth flagging. In addition, issues of slowness in updating the content management systems or accessing the portals were observed in the newsroom. One staff member expressed what several of the team felt: '90% of our problems is technical' (Personal Interview, 26 January 2012).

As noted earlier, interviews and observation showed that users often experience problems in uploading their Webcam contributions through the current video uploader. Also, the *Dalet system* often takes a long time to upload/download or edit videos, making it challenging to upload episodes on FB or the website.

Despite the technological advancements of the BBCA, it was observed that the speed of Internet in the newsroom is not very fast, especially in the website that often relies on a web-based CMS. Uploading one recorded episode of N7 online - which requires very high-speed Internet as one episode could take up to 5GB - usually takes over an hour and half, according to staff. This might be a challenge in the future as growing audiences are increasingly expecting content to be available online and on-demand,. Not being able to watch an old episode online will not only frustrate users but also risk impacting the overall visibility and engagement with the programme on social media outlets. This is particularly true as research tells us that referrals - referring extracted programme videos from social media or the website – are becoming among the key factors of media content visibility.

The issue of technological and digital capacity is largely related to budget and resources dedicated to the WS, but also to bureaucracy and difficulty to address technical problems in a timely manner. For instance, changing any technical setting of the programme often requires a long process of paper work and approvals, including justifications for any budget allocation. Moreover, interactions of overseas guests via satellite need to be booked in advance, which might prevent the easy to deal with last minute interactions by guests.

Providing technical facilities, such as extra cameras and overseas DTL satellite connections, are rarely an issue today at other rival news organisations, such as Al Jazeera.

Lastly, BBC needs to revisit the issue of outsourcing 3rd party service providers as a strategic decision. Outsourcing some of its technical services to available 3rd party service providers can alleviate cost and save time, in times of bad crunches and limited resources. What can be outsourced and what cannot is a strategic decision several similar international organisations are currently considering, in light of the fast pace of technological changes and the growing capacities of open-software and 3rd party services that provide secure and reliable options. A spectrum of options could be studied and negotiated with these parties, and the size of BBC organisation could position it to sign bilateral agreements with these parties.

5 ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE AND CULTURE AT BBC ARABIC

The approach adopted in this research draws on the 'social shaping of technology' analytical perspective. Scholars working in this field (Bcozkowski, 2010, 2012; Domingo, 2011) have demonstrated how the culture, routines and practices of an organisation shape decisions about online news production and the adoption of new technologies. A growing number of empirical academic studies of online newsrooms have found that organisational factors powerfully shape the success of social media. These factors include: management structures, policies, vision and strategy, professional ethos and values, staff autonomy and creativity, and attitudes to the workplace.

A number of key factors that shape social media production were, thus, observed in the BBCA newsroom, and through extensive and intensive interviews with the BBCA online and N7 teams (see 'Methods' section for more details). These factors contextualise the conditions under which any interactive and tri-platform programme operate, and either enable or constrain its work.

5.1 GOOD PRACTICE

Many areas of good SM practice were observed. The constant linkage and exchange of knowledge with the central Social Media unit, which is a driving force behind the awareness and adoption of social media at BBCWS, was one. Collaboration with senior SM strategist and the N7 team has resulted in significant improvements since 2011. This constant exchange of knowledge is vital in a fast-paced technology, like that of social media. Continuing this practice will buttress the vitality of interactivity across all platforms at BBCA.

The conglomeration of all BBC services in one building offers great opportunities for synergies across BBC domains of news production and for cross-learning and collaboration. For instance, the Persian and Arabic 'Have Your Say' staff successfully collaborated on co-producing a debate about Iran and the Arab World. Exchange of knowledge between N7 staff and the Russian and Turkish Service was also noted. Capitalising on such shared spaces would ensure better and more direct communication amongst staff. It would facilitate faster and more immediate coverage of news across the three platforms. Nevertheless, the relative isolation of the BBCA from the wider BBC was noted by the research team. Promoting more dynamic interaction, exchange and cross-fertilisation between the BBCA and the wider BBC should be a priority. This would help to avoid any perceived or actual isolation of BBCA from the wider BBC.

Inside the BBCA itself, communication and editorial 'convergence' were observed to be much more effective and apparent across physically adjacent platforms. For instance, a fast exchange of information was observed at times between radio, TV and online teams, given that they are physically adjacent. Often a 'shout' across the room is faster than all the

technology. Enabling similar and better communication between N7 and the online team would ensure consistent and faster exchange of multimedia material and social media content.

The morning multi-platform editorial meeting is also an effective practice to that end, as it helps set the stage for the day and facilitates content convergence and editorial management across BBCA platforms.

With financial and technical resources becoming scarcer across the BBC, the multi-skilled BBC Arabic teams have managed to innovate and make the best use of limited technical and human resources available. Capitalising on the existing talents, experiences and skills of current staff helps improve the overall synergy and productivity across platforms. Building on this practice, while ensuring staff are well rewarded for over-time work and constant forms of (emotional) appreciation would motivate staff to give to the organisation.

Highly positive personal initiatives and innovations, particularly to overcome shortage of resources, were observed by the research team. One good example is the initiation of the role of social media coordinator by the editor of N7.

Adaptability and flexibility and excellent problem-solving skills were observed: during the observation period, handling technical malfunctions or last-minute changes demonstrated high levels of creative thinking and collaboration. This reflects a good calibre of journalists and skilled staff who need to be encouraged and rewarded by senior management.

5.2 STRUCTURAL CONFLICTS

As with all complex international organisations, there are inevitably numerous constraints as well as opportunities in the sphere of new media. The report cannot ignore inherent structural conflicts in the organisation around working conditions and pay because this background context affects the way in which social media are adopted. In 2011, over 40 of the total 240 staff members left BBCA to other news organisations, including Sky News Arabic. During September 2011, the BBCA had its longest strike in BBC history, when staff refrained from working for six days, due to problems with rotas.

Both our prior research (2007-10) and this current project on BBCA suggest that on-going tensions between staff and senior management (some of which have a long history and pre-date the current management and organisational structure) are impacting negatively on staff morale and productivity in general. As a tri-platform production that engages multiple parties, such tensions as were observed inevitably slow decision-making and the successful adoption of social media.

There are also some perceived cultural and national tensions within the newsroom. One aspect of this is a perception among some staff, both observed and revealed in their testimonies, that there is a national compartmentalisation of platforms, sometimes even within the same programme. An analysis and discussion of the organisational chart with

staff at the time of research would suggest that different platforms and programmes are dominated by particular nationalities[19]. For instance, during the period of research, the online team was dominated by Iraqis and Egyptians, who constituted three quarter of that team alone. Similarly, the N7 team had 5 Egyptians out of 8 full-time staff members.

The causes of this skewed national representation can be attributed to a number of factors, including prior recruitment practices and/or a coincidence among staff of these nationalities with relevant skills and aptitudes. We are not suggesting that this is intentional or deliberate. Senior management argue that job application procedures do not require the candidate to specify their nationality, and that BBC 'equal opportunity' policies are strictly adhered to in BBCA. Nonetheless, interviews with BBCA staff members and observations found that a sense of balkanisation is seen by some to create subtle cultural and even religious tensions that are felt once the day-to-day work unfolds. For instance, some staff asserted that tensions and rivalry exist across BBCA between, for example, Lebanese and Egyptians, and that this negatively affects team communication and co-operation. Others referred to a split between conservative religious (be it Muslims or Christians) and secular staff. Such tensions, it is claimed, reveal themselves at the editorial level as, for example, in the case of a recent programme on pornography (May 2012) that divided opinion among staff and audiences alike about form and content. Although management contest the above characterisation as inaccurate, arguing vociferously that professionalism trumps any such tensions, staff perceptions of national, cultural, social and power relations in the BBCA service have consequences for working relations and practices, including how social media are adopted, and they need to be tackled.

Perceived national and cultural conflicts often translate into tensions about editorial choices. For example, tensions were observed about which countries and topics to cover in the N7 episodes, and complaints among staff were noted about the over-representation of certain countries, like Egypt, or, at the time of writing and quite understandably, Syria. The editorial pressure to balance the journalistic and editorial values of 'newsworthiness', and the need to ensure equal representation of all Arab countries, is not uncommon in other Pan-Arab news organisations studied by researchers of the team. It is often rewarding for the audience because it reflects a level of consciousness and reflexivity about the politics of representation that is sensitive and sensitising. However, striking that balance is no mean feat, especially with widely dispersed audiences not just in the Arab World but also now increasingly in diaspora. While some level of cultural and national tension is inevitable, the task for management in the future is to assess at what point such conflicts affect negatively the culture and productivity of the newsroom. Tackling such perceptions of conflict would open up a productive route for BBCA's management and help to ensure a healthy cultural dynamic across the newsroom that will ease the already intense time pressures under which staff operate.

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[19] The organisational chart is available on request.

5.3 PERCEIVED DISPARITIES IN RESOURCES

There are significant disparities in resources (perceived and actual) between BBC Domestic Service, BBCWS English, and among the foreign Language Services (LS). This is the case despite BBCA being relatively very well resourced compared with other LS. These disparities are seen to slow down the effective adoption of social media and affect the loyalty and motivation of LS staff. As a result, the quality of the BBC's uses of social media is very uneven; a matter that could jeopardise the BBC brand.

Tri-platform programmes at English LS, such as Have Your Say and World Have Your Say, and other more advanced domestic TV productions, like Strictly Come Dancing, have shown an impressive adoption of social media to engage audiences. This success reflects clear investment in financial, technological and human resources. The equivalent budgets and human resources for BBCA and other LS are far less, as indicated in the Annual Review budget sections of 2010/2011 and 2011/2012. Differences in available equipment, technologies, staff development, salaries and benefits, compared to the domestic BBC, cause resentment. These disparities create for some a sense of inequality that leads to low motivation and triggers further tension amongst BBCA staff. While it is understandable that BBC on the whole is facing critical cuts, the BBC WS could make better use of its 'global' network and increase its funding by adopting innovative business models that capitalise on partnerships and judicious use of advertisements, whilst maintaining the BBC's editorial independence.

The relatively limited numbers of staff working in the Web team, compared to other large news organisation, inhibits progress. BBCA's capacity is still far from what other competitors invests in SM. Al Jazeera, for instance, allocates nearly 90 staff to its Arabic website alone, in addition to a team of 20 dedicated to social media.

Limited staffing puts pressure on both the Web and N7 teams. Time pressure and heavy multi-tasking workload have been repeatedly highlighted as two of the key impediments to many of the practices inside the newsroom.

Work-related stress: It was observed that the N7 team members, especially the BAs, often work after 7:00 pm. As a result, the newsroom team always look stressed, overworked and drained.

One main cause of time pressure is the decision to present the N7 programme five times a week. Before January 2011, N7 only delivered three episodes per week.

The centralised system of the BBC means that every step and action must pass through a chain of approvals, and this often delays work. The BBC's very top-down structure often means change and adoption of new ideas is a rather difficult and long process. There is also a widespread sense of decision-making being imposed by senior management rather than negotiated collectively.

While it is understandably vital to maintain a standard centralised management of news format and design, where to draw the line between a central versus a federal editorial control is a critical strategic decision BBC WS need to consider.

The ambiguity around the organisational structure, and the lack of clarity about the specific divisions and platforms and their relationship to each other, pose a serious constraint on workflow patterns.

The research team observed a tendency to shift staff around in a rather ad hoc manner. Sometimes this was carried out in order to plug gaps in personnel (e.g. due to sick leave), while at other times, some staff complained, they were shifted without a clearly stated rationale rather than according to a negotiated career trajectory pathway or upward career ladder.

5.4 GENDER AND AGE DISPARITIES

Gender and age disparities are conspicuously evident at the BBCA. Across the newsroom, all editorial managers are over 40 years of age and male. Almost all the SBJs and most of the BJs are males, as are both the online and the N7 teams more generally. Similarly, with the exception of one female presenter (out of five) at N7, the females in the team work in technical or subservient support jobs - only one female at N7 works as a BJ, albeit part-time. Several females are hired on a casual basis as call takers. This disparity is not observed among the English staff members who work in BBCA. For instance, for several days the technical director of the programme was a female.

Career trajectories: Most junior staff struggle to make it to SBJs, despite their capacities. Several under 35-year-old staff are BAs. This often has implications on the level of decision-making power they have.

Younger members of staff feel intense pressure from senior management to improve production quality, while at the same time witness stagnation among older staff and resistance to change. Consequently, improvement becomes very difficult, and this adds to the pressure.

Older and very senior staff members are the least familiar with new technologies, such as user data analysis tools. With a few exceptions, the majority of over 40s at BBCA do not have a Twitter account, while some do not use Facebook. People who are younger (often in their late 20s) are much savvier with SM and the latest ICTs, yet their ideas and ability to create positive change are often neglected.

6 EVALUATING THE GLOBAL CONVERSATION: PLURALITY, DIVERSITY AND RECIPROCITY

6.1 PLATFORMS AND PROGRAMMES

The BBC uses the term 'platform' to signify the 'medium'; e.g. TV, radio or Internet. In practice, however, one distribution platform could include the use of more than one medium. For instance, the Internet platform at BBC is divided into Web and social media.

PRODUCTION PLATFORM	PRODUCTION/DISTRIBUTION MEDIA	CONSUMPTION PLATFORMS	USER INTERACTIVITY
Text/Print	SMS alerts	Mobile phones, smartphones	SMS
Internet (textual, audio-visual)	Website, Social Media (FB, Twitter, Youtube, G+, Digg, etc.), live blogging	Desktop PCs, PC Tablets (iPad,..etc); Smartphones, other digital devices	Phone, mobile/smart phones, Internet (social media, website, and a variety of communication technologies/software/tools)
Radio (audio)	Radio, Digital Radio, Internet/Online	Radio + all of the above	
TV (audio-visual)	Satellite/cable TV, Internet/Online	TV + all of the above	

Table 1 The Production versus the Consumption of Content at BBC

With the exponential growth rate of technology, the lines between platforms are sometimes blurred, as the same media (TV, text, radio) can be consumed and interacted with through a variety of ways. For instance, a user can place a call to a programme through Skype on his computer or smart phone. Another can post a Facebook comment on a debate in a BBC programme that automatically gets fed into her Twitter status. Someone can be listening to the radio from his car radio, another from his iPod. The variety of platforms and the communication technologies, tools and software that enable the audience consumption and interactivity on those platforms are increasingly converging content. Moreover, they are enabling audiences to interact with the same medium (e.g, TV, radio, print) through a variety of ways, instantly, and sometimes simultaneously. This posits a question: What does 'interactivity' mean within this reality? And can interactivity be bound by only one medium or one platform?

Many news organisations in the Arab world offer a service of 'live chat' between journalists and the audience (e.g. Almasry Alyoum online news). Live SMS texting on Arab TV screens has also been there for a few years now. Similarly, BBC's own English services have implemented live streaming of users' social media (such as Facebook and Twitter)

interactions on its live programmes – where moderated posts by users in social media are directly displayed on the screen.

Nonetheless, the current structure of divisions at BBCA remains: TV (News, Programmes), Radio and Online. Although the rationale of allowing purely interactive programme formats (as in engaging users in live debate) to have a separate entity from the traditional formats of TV productions (e.g. news, documentary, guest programmes), the division poses an unnecessary dichotomy that might need revisiting: a new mind-shift that would position at the heart of those three platforms. The mind-set to cope with growing convergence of content and interactivity should position the user/audience at the centre of production, rather than the tool. In other words, regardless of which platform or medium are used to produce content and make it available, what is important is allowing users to engage with that content as much and in as many means as possible.

It is worth noting that even though the term 'social media' was first coined to signify social networks, such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Myspace, LinkedIn and other spaces for social interactions, the term has now expanded into wider social interaction networks. This can stretch into mass-messaging services like Whatsapp and Blackberry messaging (BBM) through which users can share not only text but multimedia with many persons simultaneously. Similarly, the use of SMS and MMS service, which was previously a one-to-one medium, is now used for mass and fast exchange of information among groups. It is, hence, worth considering expanding the definition of 'social media' at BBC Arabic into any 'social interactions' to or with the BBC programmes or content. This can include, for instance, direct SMSing and tweeting to programmes like N7 and Open Agenda.

Free Space (FS) on the BBC Arabic website is the platform that would ideally be the inception point for the life cycle of any given topic for debate on the Have Your Say space. On this platform users are invited to 'take part in selecting topics' they 'wish to be discussed on HYS page and N7 programme'.

Free Space flags issues not tackled in media more widely. It offers a good way of getting ahead of the game and if used more extensively could trigger innovative debates, not tackled by competitors- debates that feel the pulse of audiences. For example, a number of potentially exciting suggestions for debate included: debating the different ways that Gaddafi and Saddam Hussein died; the role of media in the Arab uprisings (questions of (im)partiality); the role of ICTs in the uprisings; whether ignorance about democracy [in the case of Egypt particularly] is what gave rise to the Islamists. A comparative examination of the requests made on FS with the topics selected for debate on HYS that are mostly related to the BBC headlines indicate that users are not listened to enough on Free Space. This is also evident from Strand A (analysis of the newsroom) that makes little, if any, reference to the platform.

Have Your Say (HYS) is the main interactive platform on the BBCA website. It hosts topics chosen for discussion by the BBCA team, ideally from the previous platform (Free Space), and the users' comments on these topics; i.e. the debates around current affairs and headlines.

N7 Facebook Page: The main SM platform for the N7 TV show.

BBCA Facebook page: The main SM platform for BBCA website that sometimes receives N7 postings/ promotions.

Twitter: very limited use by BBCA and accordingly by users.

6.1.1 EDITORIAL CONSISTENCY ACROSS PLATFORMS

There is some lack of consistency across the platforms in terms of guidelines and editorial values. Postings on the pre-moderated HYS platform are all in standard Arabic, mostly of high quality and free of profanity and disrespect. On the other hand, profanity, use of colloquial language, and emotional and antagonistic interactions among users were not uncommon on the BBCA FB page. N7 FB page stands in the middle: users' comments are mostly respectful as the N7 team seem active in moderating the platform, but, unlike HYS, comments not in Arabic characters or in colloquial language are sometimes allowed on the page. Consistency across these platforms in terms of profanity and hate speech or incitement (many examples of these found on BBCA FB page) is essential firstly to uphold the brand of the BBC and secondly to improve the quality of participation.

6.1.2 TRIPLATFORMS AND INTERACTIVITY

Following the Arab Spring citizens/users expect to be able to express their views and have a voice and a choice. Now many news organisations in the Arab world offer a service of 'live chat' between journalists and the audience (e.g. Almasry Alyoum online news). Live SMS texting on Arab TV screens have also been there for a few years now. Similarly, BBC's English Language services have implemented live streaming of users' social media (such as Facebook and twitter) interactions on its live show programmes – where moderated posts by users on SM get directly displayed on the screen.

The current tri-partite structure at BBCA (TV -including News and Programmes, Radio and Online), curbs possibilities for interactivity. The rationale for allowing purely interactive programme formats (as in engaging users in live debate) to have a separate entity from the traditional formats of TV productions (e.g. news, documentary, guest programmes), poses an unnecessary dichotomy that might need revisiting.

6.2 FORMAT AND STRUCTURE OF NUQTAT HEWAR

As a tri-platform programme, Nuqtat Hewar (N7) format relies on the integration between the TV, radio and online platforms. This convergence takes place at the editorial content level as well as the technical level at the production preparation and the distribution stages. The editorial process takes place as the programme relies heavily on breaking news fed from TV, radio and web reporters to shape the agenda of the day. Technically, the current BBCA content management system - such as TopCat2, Jive, and Delit - allow the exchange and management of content swiftly across the different platforms.

In addition to the existing platforms at BBCA, and since it originally started online back in 2003, N7 prides itself on its adoption of social media, as well as its own webpage, to identify

new stories even before they make news, find out what interests audiences and tease out trending debates going online. The dedicated N7 page on BBCA website called 'Have Your Say' (شارك برأيك), offers a strong platform to elicit users opinions' on suggested debate topics by N7.

The structure of the programme is often shaped by the angle chosen for the debate (e.g. the question of the debate r), available guests, and available content from users – whether from SM or HYS page. However, it often follows a general standard format.

In theory, the following tools/media are offered for audience/users to interact with the programme:

- Interact on HYS webpage by commenting or using the 'recommend' button to support others' comments

- Interact on HYS webpage Polls (on one selected topic every day)

- Interact on N7 FB page

- Interact on BBCA FB page (though debate topics are sporadically posted there)

- Interact on Twitter to the hashtag and account of N7 before or during the programme (mainly during)

- Call the programme during the live airing on TV or Radio

- SMS the programme during the live airing on TV or Radio

But not all of these interactions get moderated or used at the same time.

The diagram below examines how each of these audience and user interactions with the programme are managed.
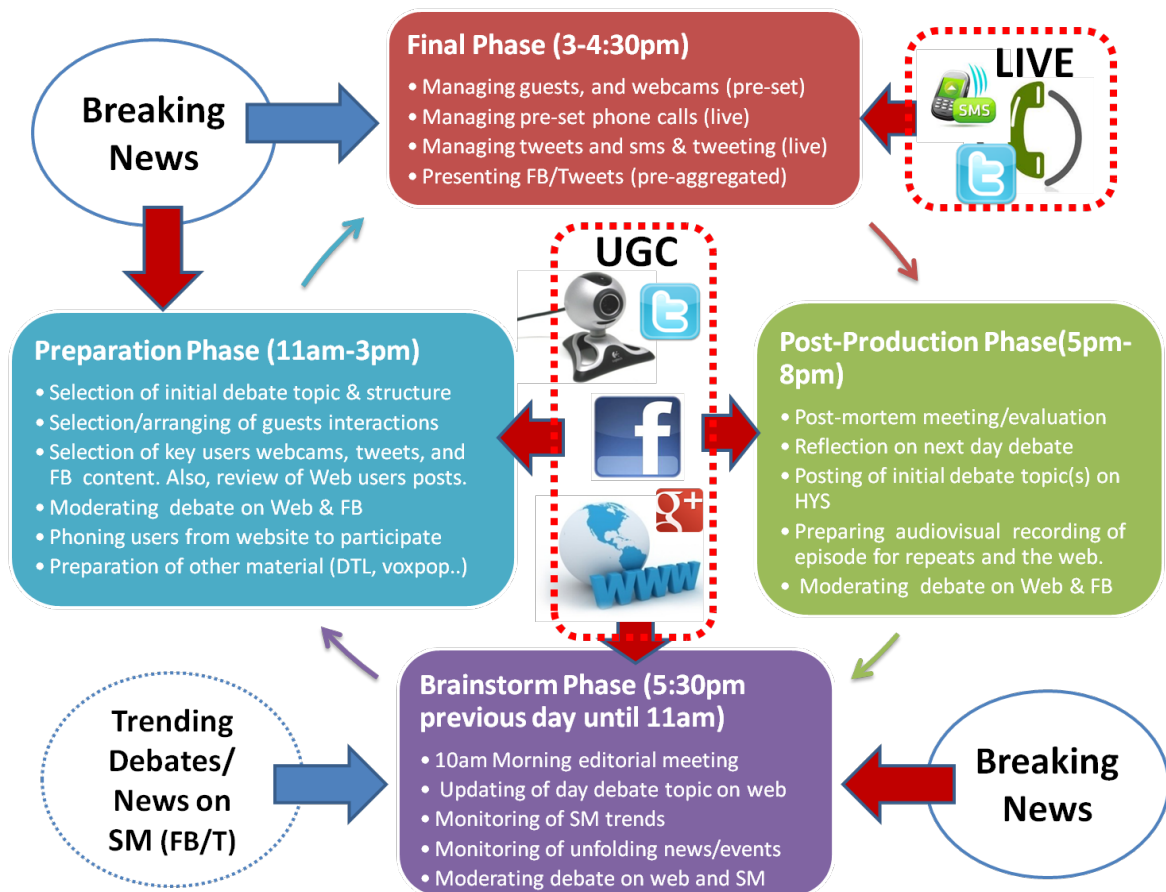
Figure 2 The news cycle of Nuqtat Hewar programme

There are other less prominent channels of interaction, such as:

- Posting comments, suggestions or complaints on the 'Free Space'(مساحة حرة) forum

- Sending suggestions or comments to N7 email

- Uploading pictures and videos on N7 webpage

- Interacting with other dedicated Panels like 'Dailies and Blogs' يوميات ومدونات (currently a mix of BBC N7 journalists' own reporting and some anonymous blogging)

6.3 MODERATION OF DEBATE: GATEKEEPING PRACTICES

Moderation of comments and other UGC happens almost around the clock on the webpage and FB page of N7. The team of N7 manage users' interactions, including those on social media networks, at different periods throughout the day. The moderation process ends by either approving the comment, rejecting it, or making minor fine-tuning linguistic or proof-reading corrections (that often do not touch editorially on the actual opinion expressed).

Once this process takes place on Jive, the final approved interactions are published on the site.

This exercise often happens throughout the working hours (around 8:30am to 8pm), although sometimes with high traffic topics the team extends it further. However, there are no set intervals or periods agreed for the HYS moderation and often, the content is reviewed on an ad-hoc basis by one or more person. The relative fluidity of roles within the N7 team, especially with the relative shortage of staff, often means anyone available could be moderating at any point in time. The moderation of N7 FB page happens in the same fashion, although often it is the BAs who take charge of this content clean-up.

Moderation of users' interactions also takes place during the actual airing of the episode on TV and on Radio. Part of this moderation happens before the live episode begins, as the phone producer directly contacts some of the users who have commented on the HYS page and asks them to participate during the programme. The second part happens 'live' during the program.

It is important to point here the distinction between regular moderation of users' debate, and 'live' moderation. Not all live interactions get moderated at the same time. For instance, only the live Twitter feeds, SMS, or phone calls get moderated live during the TV programme. In other words, the content of this live debate appears only during the TV show. Additionally, other users' interactions get selected, aggregated and packaged for the programme prior to the airing time.

Moderation of Users' Debate on N7

Users LIVE Interactions	Internet 9am-20pm	TV Airing 3-4 pm GMT	Radio Airing 4-4:30 pm GMT	Repeats (radio/tv)
HYS Webpage (incl. webcams)	✓	X	X	X
N7 FB page	✓	X	X	X
N7@ # on Twitter	✓ ?	✓	X	X
Google+	✓	X	X	X
SMS	X	✓	✓	X
Phone	X	✓	✓	X

Figure 3 Team moderation of users' live interactions in N7

* Some of the phone callers during the episode are pre-arranged.
** Tweets coming from N7 often happen an hour or two before and during the live broadcasting of the programme.

The content is mostly pre-arranged, rather than moderated as it happens live. This means that some users' interactions on that particular debate miss the chance of being represented on the programme while it is being aired. However, they still can continue the debate online on HYS or FB pages, as long as that debate topic is 'open' on the site (i.e. not archived or closed).

Similarly, once the programmes gets repeated[20], all forms of live interaction are cut, and the audience becomes a passive consumer of the broadcast episode – albeit is able to interact online through the HYS page, Twitter and FB pages.

This poses an important implication on the quality and nature of engagement of the audiences. While the team does a tremendous job – aggregating all users' interactions on SM to distil them into the live show – the true 'live' feature of the debate remains restrained. This is because most incoming phone calls are actually initiated by the team, rather by random callers, and FB interactions unfolding during the programme are excluded. Also, once the programme goes off-air, the level of moderation on that topic becomes minimal on the Internet, and absent on the other media (SMS, phone, etc).

A number of factors shape these editorial decisions behind the selection of topics or content from users. The criteria often include the media values and media logic particular to most

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[20] N7 programme is repeated three times after its original live airing: at 11pm same day and 2am and 9am the following day.

news organisations, but also technical, political, structural, and cultural factors particular to the BBC Arabic newsroom.

The gatekeeping in N7 takes two forms and is done over different layers of filtering. The following are some of the criteria observed that shape N7 editorial choices. They are divided into the choice of debate topic, and the choice of users content or interactions (whether webcam video interactions, poll, pictures or comments). Both these choices influence the quality of debate at the programme and the overall users' engagement with N7, as will be discussed in the following sections.

6.3.1 SELECTION OF DEBATE TOPIC

The first gatekeeping is the choice of topic of debate. This is influenced primarily by breaking news, in addition to the content shared by users on SM and the website. For instance, a number of times after a topic had been already chosen, and due to overnight development in Egypt or Syria, the topic got changed at the morning meeting.

Another observed factor that shaped selection is the 'cultural' tension inside Nuqtat Hewar newsroom. The team consists of many Arab nationalities - including Yemeni, Iraqi, Moroccan, Syrian and Emirati staff, but predominantly Egyptians. To that, there is a constant subtle 'blame' on the senior editorial team for 'over-covering' Egypt at the expense of other Arab countries. Moreover, from observation and interviews, this level of national 'consciousness' constantly puts pressure on the topic choices made for each episode. The cultural tension is not particular to N7, but stretches to all the BBC Arabic services, as different teams are dominated by certain Arab nationalities.

The tension has a flip side. The N7 team sees itself with a 'Pan-Arab' obligation being part of BBC Arabic. The team often mentioned that they have 'a responsibility' to cover the entire Arab world, even if some countries are less news-dominant than others. This 'Pan-Arab' feeling has strong influence on the editorial decisions taken every day.

The editorial 'sense' of the team often stems from tacit knowledge derived from experience with past episodes, and a general conception about what Arab audiences want. One staff member explains:

> *We know the topics [that interest people] by experience after nine years of work. For instance, any topic that involves Shii and Sunni [Muslims], democracy /dictatorship, or an issue about women. The common known mélange of 'Religion, politics and sex', but with details. There are topics, unfortunately, that are not popular like scientific topics, because there is not much interest in scientific research. Also, there are a lot of financial and other pressures on Arab citizens. For instance an Iraqi in Baghdad would not be interested to discuss sending a new rocket to Mars, when slaughtering is taking place next door between sunni and shii in his neighbourhood. (Personal Interview, 22 November 2011)*

Perhaps the most striking factor noted to shape the choice of topics was the impact of the actual political events in the Arab world. The Arab uprisings have dramatically changed the way they do the programme. The political events overshadowed any other topics previously

covered by N7 prior to 2011. 'They provided a hot topic, everyone wants to talk about', (Personal Interview, 23 November 2012).

There is immense interest among Arab audiences to debate the political situation in their respective countries and express themselves. Analysis of the Free Space data between 15 November and 30 December 2011 showed that 168 out of 210 topics suggested by users were of a political nature (interestingly, the second most popular topic was media values and the role of media in critical events). To that end, the majority of debate topics selected during 2011 and early 2012 focused on political issues pertinent to the Arab revolutions and their ramifications.

As the political situation in the region relatively settles, the N7 team will face the challenge of finding new and interesting topics for debate to keep the viewing rates increasing.

6.3.2 SELECTION OF USERS & THEIR CONTENT

The second gatekeeping practice is about the choice of which users and their content contribute to the episode. This process takes place at two fronts: online and offline.

Online gatekeeping takes place through moderating the users' interactions on HYS page. In theory, any full-time staff (Editor, Senior SBJs, BJs and BAs) can moderate the debate; tasks are usually assigned by rota on the team. In effect, however, only three key BAs usually handle most of the monitoring and moderating of debates.

Reviewing comments on HYS website and N7 Facebook page – explained as 'pre-moderation' on the BBCA website – happens throughout the day but particularly before the programme is aired. The process of moderation is often done on an ad-hoc basis and does not follow a particular schedule. Below are a few aspects that shape the filtering of users and their content.

The selection of users who will participate in the live phone calling or webcam contribution is done offline. The assigned phone producer (BJs or BAs level) selects the best comments or videos posted on the HYS webpage. The users with the best filtered HYS comments are then contacted via phone to ask them to submit a 1-2 min webcam recording of their opinion, or to arrange for their phone calling during the episode. As for the SM comments, the interactivity producer for the day often summarises the key prominent views in a sheet to present during the episode. Users who submit their comments on N7 FB are rarely contacted to contribute live on the show.

With Twitter, the N7 team selection process is determined by the status of the tweeter as influential. The SM team selects by name the Twitter accounts to follow. The team often picks the best tweets from a pre-set list of "influencers", active bloggers, politicians and intellectual celebrities. This list of 100 most influencer Arab users has been primarily developed by the SM market team and was modified during the Egyptian parliamentary elections. Before the episode, one of the BA's, often the SM coordinator, surfs these Twitter accounts and, depending the topic of debate, selects the six to ten most relevant tweets. This process seems to successfully include the most 'outspoken' users.

Drawing Twitter content primarily from people deemed 'influential' poses questions about the politics of representation on the Twitter platform. Research shows that only 7% of

twitter users contribute 90% of the entire content on twitter. There seems to be a self-fulfilling prophecy that loud (or vocal) users increasingly gain voice power in mainstream media. If BBC prides itself on being a champion of 'users engagement', its programmes must go the extra length to listen to the less-vocal opinions on SM. Priority should be given to the plurality of opinion rather than the importance of speaker (however 'influential' is defined), when it comes to SM and web interactions. More opportunity must be given to new comers to the programme.

Current SM Influencers on N7 Debate

Suggested SM Influencers on N7 Debate
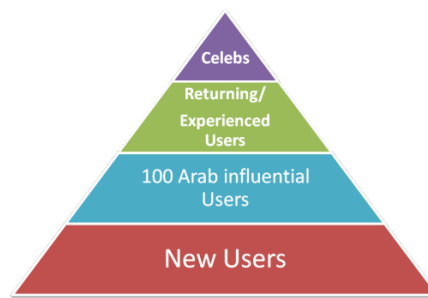
Figure 4 Influential users (web/SM) on N7

6.3.3 USERS INFORMATION

Another important factor that determines the chances of any comment to contribute to the content of the episode is availability of information on its author. In other words, selection of users (to contribute in the live episode) largely depends on the personal information and contact details they provide when registering on the website. Only users who actually provide phone numbers, for instance, can be contacted by the team to take part in the programme. Nevertheless, there is nothing on the website that advertises that to the users. What is interesting is due to the political volatility in the region, some users prefer not to disclose details about themselves (for security reasons, or in fear of reprisal from some governments, like Syria or Bahrain). This results in their comments being left out.

It is worth noting that such level of filtering does not occur with SM interactions (over Facebook or Twitter). The interactivity producer often aggregates all the views presented about a given topic on the N7 FB page, and directly mentions those with key debate views during the episode, normally without crediting users (e.g. by mentioning their names). Tweets and SMS's, in turn, are often selected during the live episode, and only follow the BBC editorial guidelines (of no libel, defamation, insults, racism..etc). But then again, tweets and SMS interactions on a given day are very low, and the majority of comments take place on the HYS webpage.

6.4 LANGUAGE & DIASPORA

Non-Arabic language content (most often in English) submitted by users – whether on SM platforms of N7 or HYS webpage – normally gets deleted by the team. Several of the Facebook comments that were seen deleted had been very relevant to the debate, but were in English. This seems counterproductive given that some of the staff mentioned they knew many of their audiences were living in the Arab diaspora or expatriates living abroad. BBC in-house research also reveals that many users of the languages services are bi- and tri-lingual and commute across BBCA and Global News services. When asked about the reason, the team mentioned that only Arabic language was admitted in the editorial policy, as they imagined their audience as primarily Arabic speaking.

It is worth bearing in mind that while many Arab diaspora perfectly understand Arabic, they find it easier to express themselves in English. By excluding English comments the team might be alienating an array of Arab users who consume BBCA in their diasporas and for whom English is a lingua franca.

6.5 USERS APTITUDE

Another important factor is the users' proficiency and aptitude level. How callers to the programme are chosen is a case in point. Often the team contact by phone users with 'good' comments – ones that are perceived by the team as adding value, diversity and balance to the debate – in order to further contribute during the episode through a phone or webcam interaction. Yet, it was observed that not everyone who expresses himself/herself well in writing is as articulate in speech. On a number of occasions the team had to exclude potential contributors (users) after a phone-call with them prior to the programme showed they would not be suitable for live interaction. Similarly, some of the webcam interactions could get excluded because they do not meet the minimum technical and technological standards. The team mentioned that many users have difficulty uploading their webcam recordings due to technical difficulties and know-how.

As a result, the more 'proficient' users - ones who have the capacity to speak or are technically savvy - are selected over others. During the observation period, it was evident that 'proficient' users are often 'returning users' in the programme. In one particular incident during the episode of 25 January 2012, the two webcam interactions were from two returning users. The recurring frequency of the same users raises a question about the diversity and plurality of dialogue.

7 EVALUATING THE GLOBAL CONVERSATIONS: QUALITY OF DEBATE ON NUQTAT HEWAR

In the Have Your Say debates and eventually the N7 show, there are two ways in which UGC is used. The first are the suggestions on the Free Space, which if selected would dictate the debate topic. Within the sampled data on Free Space (205 postings between 21 November and 30 December 2011 and 100 posts in January 2012), the very few instances in which users' suggestions were considered as debate questions were when they coincided with breaking news. Hence, the question about 'whether Islamists had high-jacked the Egyptian revolution' posted on 5 December by a female Sudanese was selected because it was a 'hot' and current topic – an alliance of Islamists and Salafists had just won the majority of seats in parliament. Similarly, the topic about the withdrawal of Al-Baradie from the presidential elections requested by users 7 times between 15 and 16 January and selected for discussion on N7 was also a major headline within those days. Therefore, it was found that a major tipping point is the relevance of the suggestion to current affairs, as well as the way it is articulated. The demand that suggestions are compatible with current affairs indicates that users' suggestions will always be second best. If they do not match current headlines, they are in most cases ignored.

The second type is UGC on the HYS debate questions, some of which get selected for the N7 TV show. Thorough examination and cross-checking of participations that appear on the show with the show's online platforms have indicated considerable bias towards the website's HYS platform (the pre-moderated platform on the main BBCA website). Most of the people who phoned-in or had their contributions read out on the show had already posted their comments on HYS. FB contributions (on N7 FB page) when mentioned were usually aggregated. So, the first tipping point for selection seems to be having one's comment on HYS rather than any other platform.

On the HYS space, though the website encourages users to make use of the 'recommend' button (similar to 'like' on FB) to support a comment and boost its likelihood of getting selected on the show, our research has shown that the number of recommendations a comment receives does not necessarily affect its selection. Many comments that had multiple recommendations and abided by the guidelines of the BBCA (clear argument, good language, relevant to question, etc.) were not selected on the N7 show.

Another major tipping point is the relevance of the participant's nationality to the subject being debated – a clear bias and negative criteria. From examination of the episodes we know that a criterion that seems to disqualify a comment is the nationality of its poster: a participant from Syria commenting online on a question on Egypt is very unlikely to have his/her comment on the topic selected on the N7 show.

7.1 DIVERSITY

The sample selection of episodes (7 in total) in this research focused mainly on the Egyptian Elections, and the process of political development in Egypt post 25th January 2011. 2 episodes however were added to examine more the nature of dialogue: one on the events in Syria, and the other on the rise of Islamist parties in Tunisia and Egypt. In examining the

diversity of opinions presented in each episode (i.e. the nationalities of the participants in relation to the topic/country in question), the figures show a dominance of participants of the country in question (both home and diaspora), in episodes that debated events in a certain country, rather than a more general topic. Analysis of 5 episodes cross-checked with their relevant online contributions showed that 79% of contributors selected on the show were nationals of the country being discussed, 6% diaspora (of that same country), while only 3% were nationals of countries different to that being discussed. For example, in the episode of the 25th January 2012, which was dedicated to the first anniversary of the Egyptian Revolution, out of the 28 participants in the episode, 27 were Egyptians: 20 from inside Egypt, and 7 in diaspora. One participant was from Sudan. In the episode of the 14th December 2011, which was dedicated to the Syrian events, 18 participants out of the total 25 were from Syria.

7.2 PLURALITY, RECIPROCITY AND TONE

The nature of how debates evolve online and on the programme was also analysed in the research based on a sample of episodes. The research attempted to identify how users and audiences dialogue on N7 programme, whether online or on the programme. Are they talking to each other or past each other? Are views diverse and plural? And is there reciprocity or responsiveness to different viewpoints entertained by the 'other'?

It was observed that the plurality of viewpoints and reciprocity among participants were often dependant on the presenter's style of debate and engagement in the episode. The episodes' questions in the sample selected for this research developed organically to cover different themes and topics that surround the topic. It is important to note that the participants themselves are often given ample time to express their views regarding the topic in question.

The research also reveals different styles of presenting in N7 episodes that directly affect reciprocity and tone of the episode: a challenging and provocative style and a calmer and more direct one, depending on the presenter for each episode. In the sample selection of episodes, 5 out of 7 saw dynamic debates among participants, and lively interactions between guests hosted on the programme and participants (audience). The other two were steered in a way that allowed participants to voice their opinions, without actual engagement among the different callers/guests on the show. The tone is dependent mainly on the presenter, and in the selection sample, and specifically the five that were indeed provocative and challenging, the presenter was instrumental in creating a debate among participants and getting them to respond to each other, linking their participations (between callers and between callers and guests), as well as challenging their expressed views.

In the other 2 episodes, presenters both maintained a calm approach to the participants' input in the programme. Both allowed ample time for active participants to voice their opinions, and did not create active engagement among the callers. Instead, they allowed for smooth transitions from one input to another. The tone of both presenters was not provocative, but inquisitive.

This difference(s) in presenting styles is actually a positive point and breaks any potential redundancy N7 could encounter. This creates an interesting dynamic of the show that is not restricted to one pattern but offers different approaches that could suit everyone's taste.

8 WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT AUDIENCES AND USERS

The political momentum of the Arab uprisings has brought new users to the BBCA digital platforms. With some Arab satellite news channels seen as siding with or against certain regimes and/or oppositions, audiences came to the BBCA seeking impartial information and political guidance. The BBC is seen as a trusted news provider at times of crisis.

The BBC should build long-term relationships with newcomers as well as returning audiences

BBCA digital platforms saw growth in users during the research period. This growth peaked with breaking news, such as the Egyptian Parliamentary elections Nov-Dec 2011 and the first anniversary of the Egyptian Revolution on 25 January, 2012.

8.1 THE ARAB UPRISING AND THE POTENTIAL FOR GROWTH

With the Arab uprisings, eagerness for multiple sources of news and information rose. The successive revolts, the uncertainty they brought and the aspirations and opportunities they created made people of the Arab world hungry for news. This section is primarily based on results of the International Audience Research Programme (IARP) conducted by the Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG). [21] We report on findings from a BBG IARP research in order to set the context for this section on audiences.

The BBG IARP study shows that the BBC Arabic TV almost doubled its audiences in all markets that saw protests and beyond. Audiences turned to the BBCA during these turbulent times seeking impartial news and trusted information. Jordan saw the greatest increase in the TV audiences during the first half of 2011 (13.6%), followed by Saudi Arabia and Egypt (both saw audiences increase by 12.4%) where the greatest share of BBCA TV audiences comes from the latter.

The usual pattern of growth during breaking news time emerged. Iraq had the biggest share of audiences watching the BBCA TV before Egypt moved to the lead in the wake of the Arab uprisings. This exponential growth is due to the highly visual nature (the spectacular activism) of the 'Arab Spring'.

Radio was stagnant with regards to audience growth, except for Lebanon, which, although lost a margin of its BBCA TV audiences during the uprisings, witnessed increase in radio listeners by 50 per cent. This is arguably due to the availability of BBCA on FM in Lebanon. In other Arab countries, listening to radio is habitual and not driven by crises. Audience share did not rise despite the availability of the service on FM.

Growth of the BBCA website was also 'crisis-led'. Audiences resorted to the website as a reliable source of news and a platform for dialogue during these times. Data from the BBG IARP research show that the website grew significantly with the outbreak of consecutive

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[21] This audience update outlines results from Independent surveys conducted as part of the International Audience Research Programme (IARP) conducted by the Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG). The results are representative of the adult (15+) population of a number of Arab markets (Egypt, Iraq, Saudi, Lebanon, Morocco, Jordan).

Arab revolts (during the first half of 2011), then the curve declined to the normal level of half-a-million-visitors threshold.

8.2 SOCIAL MEDIA GROWTH

The BBCA website saw a clear peak around the election time, as shown from the number of 'weekly unique visitors' (Figure 1). The website received a total of 8,400,395 'weekly unique visitors' during the research time (15 November to 25 January). Weekly visits to the website mounted on the first week of the Egyptian Parliamentary elections (20– 27 November 2011) to reach about 900,000 visitors. It then fluctuated at the normal lower rate.

However, there is a potential for growth as the site received average weekly visits during the research time that are significantly higher than the number of unique users who visited the website after the hype that accompanied the early days of the Arab uprising (0.9 vs. 0.6 million visitors), according to the aforementioned BBG IARP research.

The Unique User visit number[22] of the BBCA Network corroborates this finding. More than one third BBCA website visitors were visiting the site for the first time during the researched period. The number of visitors who returned to the site is by far less than the number of new comers. Yet, this is not very surprising, and in fact, typical of all websites. About 13% of
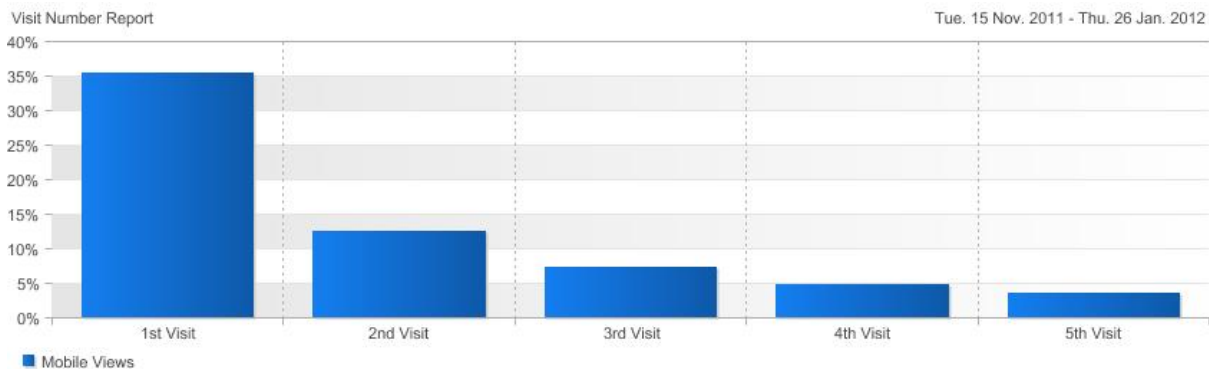
Figure 5 The visit number of BBCA website visitors

the users paid the website a second visit during the research time, 8% visited the site for the third time, and users who visited the site for fourth time represented only 5% of the BBCA website visitors during the research time, as shown in the figure **Error! Reference source not found.**.

BBCA FB page also saw growth on all levels of Page performance**.** All Page growth indicators were increasing, as shown in**Error! Reference source not found.**. The number of fans of the Page (*total likes*) increased by 0.68% during the research time, reaching a quarter million

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[22] 'The visit number' report helps gauging visitor loyalty by tracking the number of times each visitor visits the site. During the selected period, whether more of the visits were from visitors that came to the site for the first time or the 20th time could be determined through this indicator.

fans. The second circle of diffusion (*friends of fans*) increased by 1.04%, which creates additional opportunities for Page growth.

There is a potential for growth as the fans of the Page have a large circle of friends, hence, an opportunity to spread the word to 21,738,725 users in this circle (*friends of fans*). Yet, it should also be noted that the circles of diffusion were reverting, as the interaction on the Page became more demanding. Only 30% of those 'fans' (78,430 users) actually saw the content of the Page and a far less proportion (3,365 users) interacted with these posts by creating stories about them either by liking, sharing and/or commenting on the post (*talking about it*). However, these forms of practices saw higher levels of growth as the active engagement with the content increased by 8.5% and the viewership of the Page content increased by 24.8%.

FB Indicator	Definition	Total No for BBCA FB	% Change in BBCA FB	Total No for N7 FB	% Change in N7 FB
Likes	The number of unique users who like the Page.	225,202	+0.7 %	36,448	**+0.5 %**
Friends of Fans	The number of unique users who are friends of fans of the Page (including current fans).	21,738,725	+1 %	5,832,885	**+1.7 %**
People Talking about this	The number of unique users who have created a story about the Page.	3,365	+8.4 %	958	**-13.8 %**
Weekly Reach	The number of unique users who have seen any content associated with the Page. (including any adverts or sponsored stories pointing to the Page in the last seven days)	78,430	+24.8 %	**12,231**	**-11.5 %**

Table 2 The performance of BBCA and N7 Facebook pages in the period 15 November 2011 to 25 January 2012

N7 FB Page also grew during the research time in terms of the number of fans (0.5%) and, by extension, the number of friends of fans (1.7%). While the growing number of 'fans' increases the potential for reaching wider circles of 'friends of fans', hence achieving more popularity for the Page, the Page saw a decline in forms of users' active participation. The first circle of reach (*weekly total reach*) saw a decrease by 13.8%, suggesting that people increasingly 'like' the Page but they, or a margin of them, do not actually view the content of the Page. A decrease in interaction with the Page posts (11.5%) went in tandem with the decline in the level of 'post reach' as users would not interact with the content unless they viewed/read it.

It is worth noting that while the numbers of 'fans' and 'friends of fans' of BBCA FB page outweighed the counterpart numbers of N7FB page, the latter had a slightly higher potential for growth (1.66%) than the former (1.04%). This potential is ascribed to the fact that people who like N7 FB Page bring along a wider circle of friends (the second layer of diffusion) than those invited by the fans of BBCA FB page. However, users of BBCA FB page were more actively engaged with the content of the page (by liking, sharing and/or commenting) than users of N7 FB page, as previously discussed.

On Twitter, users' activities were incentivised by breaking news events. Tweets of the BBCA have culminated in 70,972 beats during the 73 days of the analysis. The debate escalated during breaking news time. As shown in figure 5[23], two clear peaks occurred. The first around the commencement of the first round of the Egyptian Parliamentary Elections (24 – 26 November). This period saw an average activity of 1390 beat/day. Beats of the BBCA also peaked around the time of the first anniversary of the Egyptian Revolution (20 – 22 January) when tweets mounted to an average of 1619 beat/day.
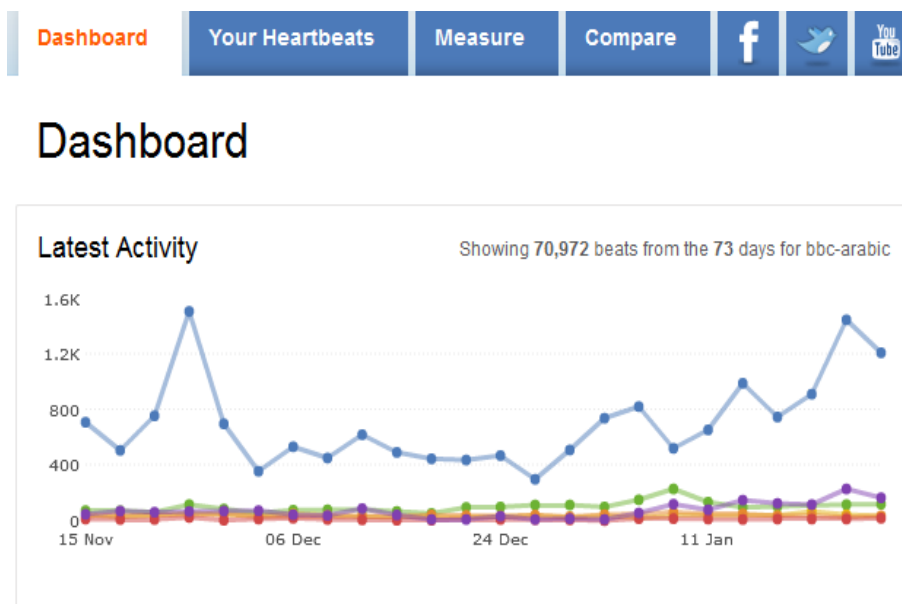
Figure 6 Beats for BBCA on Twitter from 15 Nov 11 to 25 Jan 2012

However, the moderate numbers of users and uses of social networking sites belie the impact these platforms could have through the networking mode of diffusion. Active users, even if small in number, could amplify the impact of the medium through further disseminating its content.

The 'crisis-led' pattern of growth is ascribed to the fact that audiences use the BBC as a 'fact checker', especially during times of uncertainty. This implies that the usage of the service peaks as audiences of other rival services jump in to verify the content they view elsewhere.

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[23] Graph generated by Sysomos Heartbeat , March 2012.

8.2.1 GENDER & AGE OF BBCA SM PLATFORMS

This section deals with BBCA and N7 Facebook fans' self-reported personal information as it appears on their profiles during the period of study. Through analysing this data, issues and themes around diversity of users, inclusion and exclusion of audiences and places that feed into the dialogue are highlighted.

In terms of gender, there is considerable dominance of male users over female across the various BBCA platforms, with over three quarters of the users registered as males. Similarly, 79% of BBCA Twitter users are males.

Users/Fans of the BBCA FB page tend to be slightly older than most social media users. For instance, one third of male users of the BBCA FB page were in the 25–34 age group, and only 23% in the 18-24 age group during the research period.

The majority of female users of BBCA FB page were almost equally distributed between the age groups (18–24) and (25-34), with percentages of 9.8 % and 8.2 %, respectively. Older females barely featured in the debates (especially online). Less than 1% of females in the 45–54 age group and nearly half that number for over 55-year-olds took part in BBCA FB debates.

Fans of N7 FB page followed the same age and gender distribution pattern as those of the BBCA FB page. Certain countries like Algeria and Morocco seem quieter on Facebook. This could possibly be attributed to the under-coverage of the Maghreb region in debate topics, compared to other countries – a complaint voiced on a number of occasions by users online:

> *'Why does your channel neglect the Maghreb region? There should be programmes that discuss the situation in Maghreb countries, particularly against the backdrop of the Arab Spring and the new political systems in Tunisia and Libya.' (Mohammed Moro, Morocco, Free Space, 24-11-2011)*

> *'"Five Moroccans set themselves on fire" (in protest of the economic situation). I had hoped to hear about this incident on your channel in the 11:00 am news today, but apparently it didn't even warrant a mention in the news ticker. This indicates that the BBC is very selective in its choice of news and not "the first to report it", as it claims. It's noteworthy other satellite channels thoroughly covered the incident through video and commentary." (Abu Walid, Jordan, Free Space, 20-01-2012)*

Also, restricting debates and comments to Arabic language might exclude some users of the younger age group or in the diasporas from participation.
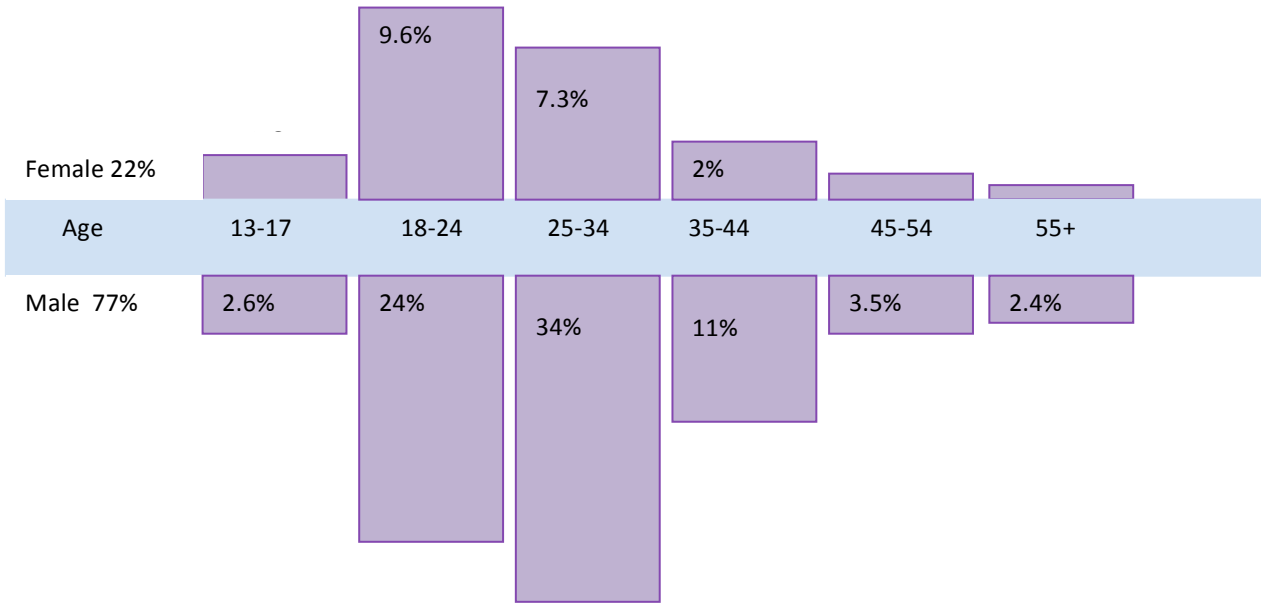
	Age	13-17	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55+
Female 22%			9.6%	7.3%	2%		
Male 77%		2.6%	24%	34%	11%	3.5%	2.4%

Figure 5 FB users distribution by age and gender

8.2.2 'IN-ARABIC' CONVERSATION

The conversation on BBCA online platforms is in Arabic language, which is expected given that the BBCA caters for a Pan-Arab audience. An aggregate percentage of 67% of the BBCA website users mentioned Arabic as their language of communication (Arabic + Arabic UAE), while a significant minority of 23.9% mentioned English. French came in third place with 1.7% of users indicating it as their preferred language of interaction. On Twitter, a vast majority of 82% of tweets about the BBCA were made in Arabic.

Nevertheless, on the BBCA FB page some users indicated their preference of the English language over Arabic. 127,138 users had English as their language of interaction on their profile language settings, while only 82,887 users had Arabic. Although these language settings do not necessarily mean users use English to interact on Facebook, they give some indication that many users are bilingual.

These numbers were slightly different with N7 FB fans. The number of fans who indicated Arabic as their default language was 19,074, compared to 16, 276 who chose English (US + UK) as their language of communication.

8.2.3 VOICES FROM THE ARAB REGION AND DIASPORAS

Audiences' voices weighed differently on the analysed platforms in terms of geographical distribution. A sizable majority of users throughout the BBCA digital platforms came from Egypt and Saudi Arabia. On the BBCA website, more than one third of the total website visitors (11,654,797) during the research period were either from Saudi Arabia or Egypt (17.7% and 17.5% respectively). Conversely, the majority of the contributions on BBCA and N7 FB Pages came from Egypt followed by Saudi Arabia.

Users of N7 FB are more geographically diverse, in terms of Arab countries, not diasporas. Contributions from Bahrain and Yemen appeared on the Page and participants from Sudan were distinctively represented in the conversation (3,166 users mentioned Sudan as their country and 2,843 users mentioned Khartoum as their city).

Moreover, although Tunisia hardly appeared on the actual BBCA website (0.7% of the visitors) or Twitter, it ranked third among the countries represented on BBCA FB page.

Twitter appeared to be more popular among users from the Gulf region. Bahrainis' voices were the most dominant on Twitter during the research time (19%). The thickest buzzes in BBCA-related tweets were created around themes of Bahrain. Egypt followed with 15% of the tweets, then came tweets from the UK (12%). Participations from Kuwait also appeared on Twitter (10%) and to a far less extent on the the BBCA website (2.9% of the visitors) but were almost invisible in conversations on FB.

Morocco and Algeria were either underrepresented or off the radar in the BBCA digital space. More attention needs to be paid to listening to voices from these geographical spots. Incentives could include presenting content that interests audiences of those countries and gratifies their needs and, perhaps, taking on board contributions in languages other than Arabic.

BBCA FB Page				N7 FB Page			
Countries	Users	Cities	Users	Countries	Users	Cities	Users
Egypt	92,342	Cairo	43,294	Egypt	9,688	Cairo	5,418
Saudi Arabia	22,522	Giza	32,324	Saudi Arabia	3,783	Khartoum	2,843
Tunisia	11,323	Riyadh	14,404	Syria	3,726	Damascus	2,369
USA	10,620	Tunis	11,247	Sudan	3,166	Riyadh	1,991
Sudan	10,161	Khartoum	9,901	Yemen	2,055	Manamah	1,750
Morocco	7,544	Alexandria	9,840	Bahrain	2,042	Alexandria	1,258
Syria	7,434	Damascus	7,438	Morocco	1,488	Amman	1,194

Table 3 Users' geo-segmentation by country and city on BBCA network and N7 FB Pages

Users from diasporas are also present on BBCA online platforms. For example, of all BBCA website users, 6.9% reported (in their profiles) living in the USA, 3.8% in the UK, and 3.7% in Canada. In addition, a limited number of users came from Sweden (1.3%) and Australia (1.2%). Representations from the USA appeared on BBCA FB page with a total of 10,620 fans, while 12% of tweets were made by users in the UK.

The fact that the editorial team of the programme only includes participations that are made in Arabic language and only host guests and participants who can contribute in Arabic in the actual show could explain this audience distribution. Accordingly, audiences in diasporas might feel excluded from the dialogue on these platforms and hence, refrain from joining the discourse. Proportional representation, and participations, in the debate are inevitably affected by the language determinant.

8.2.4 PREFERRED TYPES OF NEWS

Hard and Soft News

On the BBCA website, most visitors returned to the site during breaking news. **Error! Reference source not found.**[24] shows that the website had the largest number of 'returning visitors' (423,447) on the first day of the Parliamentary Elections in Egypt (28 November 2011). This suggests that the BBC is perceived as a reliable impartial source of information

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[24] Graph generated by SiteCatalyst using Report Accelerator, March 2012.

especially during hard times. The curve declined afterwards to the normal level. The challenge is to invest in such opportunities to link users to the website and build loyalty to the service more broadly and constantly.
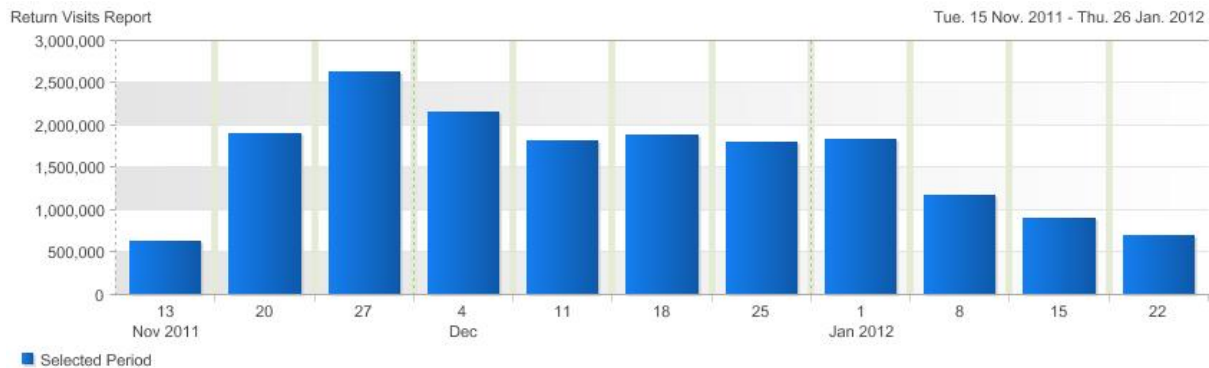

Figure 6 Return visits to the BBCA website

Analysing the key topics in the conversations about the BBCA on Twitter, or what is termed 'entities'[25] on the Sysomos social media monitoring and measurement tool, showed the hegemony of the 'Arab Spring'-related themes. The breaking-news-driven usage pattern was replicated. Themes around Egypt, Syria and the Middle East were among the most dominant topics in the debate.

It is also worth noting that Al Jazeera was one of the main themes in the conversations which, when coupled with the finding that conversations about the unrest in Bahrain were the most evolving on Twitter, signifies a very important potential area of growth for the BBCA. BBC is an onlooker that could to reach more audiences with a 'non-agendised' media and build stronger relations in the long term with the audiences if more attention is paid to underrepresented countries in the debate.

Audiences in certain parts of the Arab region were found to turn to the BBCA platforms to vent their anger and make their voices heard especially when other platforms are shut or prejudiced. Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya, the most prominent rivals of the BBCA respectively, tend to adopt a lower-profile approach to political issues that might harm its relations with other countries or conflict with its interests in the region.[26]

Beyond the 'Arab Spring' news, users of BBCA digital platforms were inclined to expose themselves to diverse content. This raises an opportunity for service growth and a potential for more diverse cultural dialogue.

Following are examples of the most viewed 'soft news' headlines and posts on the analysed platforms:

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[25] An extraction of key entities and concepts associated with the dialogue surrounding the query.

[26] Ayish M., 2011, 'Television Broadcasting in the Arab World' in N Mellor; M Ayesh & K Rinnawi (eds) *Arab media: Globalisation and Emerging media Industries*, pp. 85 – 102.

On the BBCA website, soft news were among the most viewed headlines:

- The personal photographer of Mubarak and his double life (5.7% of the Page views).

- Saudi Arabia: Allowing women to replace men in running lingerie shops (3.1% of the Page views).

The dialogue on BBCA FB Page was more diverse. Non-breaking news stories went, in some occasions, beyond the borders of the region. This diversity of the conversation could be ascribed to the Page connection with the BBCA website that offers a different and wide variety of topics which would feed into discussions on the interactive FB page (when such topics are selected by the BBC staff for posting on the page). Examples of the most engaging non-breaking posts included:

- 15/11/2011: Egyptian football player Ahmed Hassan: 178 international games and quest for new records.

- 16/11/2011: Al-Zawahry in a new recording: Ben-Laden was kind and sensitive.

- 27/12/2011: Honda destroys flood-damaged cars.

- 13/1/2012: Wilders freedom Party, known for its hostility to Islam, describes the scene of the Queen of Netherlands wearing the Hijab in Muscat as "a sad scene".

- 7/1/2012: Israel vows to respond to Saudi 'hacker'.

On N7 FB page, posts of soft news stories went viral on the page:

- 5/1/2011: N7 hosts Tawakul Karman.

- 15/11/2011: Aliaa Magda El-Mahdi controversial issue. Other Arab girls said they intend to act similarly. How far can a person go in practicing his/her personal freedom? And how much is free speech allowed?

Media Values and BBC Competitors

On Twitter, themes of non-breaking news stories also were amongst the 'key conversations'[27] on the platform. Users were interested in discussing issues about BBC's rivals, media values, the attributes of the BBCA and the diverse content it conveys which goes beyond the borders of the Arab region and the Middle East. The following extracts exemplify the most 'tweeted' topics in the course of our research:

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[27] The Key Conversations report extracts sentences that are most indicative of the buzz and discussion themes taking place for any particular search or query. The larger and bolder the font the more representative a sentence is in capturing the buzz for a search.

Who would have thought that a country no-one had heard of was going to create a news channel that was going to change the face of news in the middle east and around the globe?

The BBC Arabic service provided people with news not only from their countries, or the middle east but from around the world and it tried to take on both sides of the argument as much as it could.

Despite the positive perception that the BBCA is an impartial service that provides 'quality' news from around the world, it has proven insufficient in keeping audiences hooked to the service in the long term.

BBCA audiences preferred hard news stories the most and came to BBCA 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 BBCA.

The 'Arab Spring' has created an opportunity for constant growth, however, investing in users' preferences to present a richer media experience that goes beyond turbulent times would better help in building long-term connections with the audiences

8.2.5 RICH MEDIA CONTENT: A VIDEO WORTH A THOUSAND POSTS

Rich media proved to draw audience attention to BBCA. Perceiving BBCA as being distant from events was among reasons for an evident emotional chasm between the audiences and BBCA.[1]

Visualising the content could be a panacea for this service-audience emotional connection deficiency and would help setting long-term connections with BBCA.

Rufus Weston, Senior Manager, Digital Insights in BBC discusses how convergence might drive more traffic to the service:
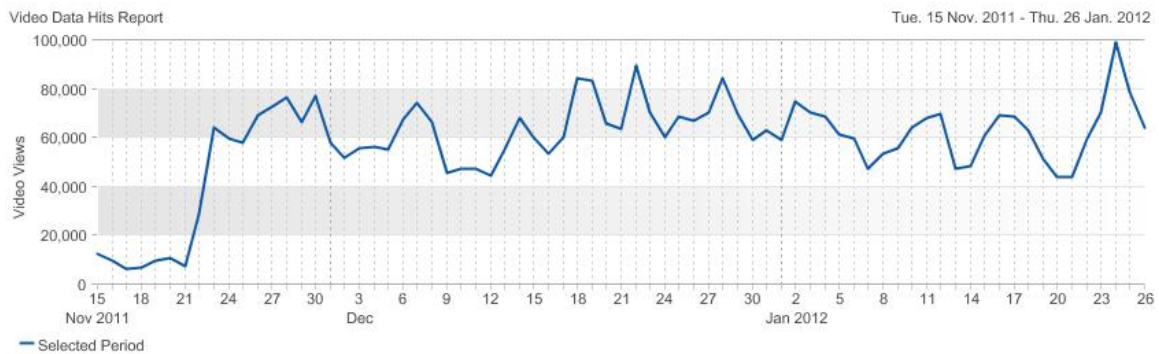
Figure 7 Video data hits on BBCA website (Nov2011-Jan2012)

> *It is also about having multiple different formats; Twitter streams, FB comments, correspondent dispatches, even if they are just Twitter dispatches, video as well. Having all that in a single page means that people are much more likely to come back to us, especially when there is another breaking news event because they think we do it so well. There is another part to it which is about giving people a broader sense of the sorts of news items which may not be on our breaking news day; so for example, exposing people to more life style content; other content that they will find interesting.*

A clear preference of watching video content on the BBCA website was evident during the research period. This preference peaked during critical times. The highest peak of video hits occurred on the eve of the first anniversary of the Egyptian revolution (24 January 2012), when 98,830 video took place..

As revealed from the 'Page Views' report in SiteCatalyst, watching the BBCA TV online drew 5.2% of the traffic to the website, while 2.0% of the visitors headed to the 'Radio and Television' page to listen to the BBCA live radio. This suggests that the Internet is providing users with an alternative platform that brings together a variety of traditional and new forms of communication, hence, helps reach more audiences whose only access to international channels might be the Internet. This also stresses the importance of the Internet and new media in providing audiences with a rich comprehensive, and, most importantly, convenient media experience.

Interestingly, the mobile version of the BBCA website has drawn the second highest traffic to the website (10.6 % of the visits vs. 29.3 % visiting the BBCA main page). This finding stresses the importance of updating the content constantly to serve the eager to know 'on the go' audiences.

On Facebook, visual posts (images and video links) were the most appealing and engaging to users. For example:

- On BBCA FB page, 50% of the most viewed posts (organic reach) were video links.

- On N7 FB page (5/1/2012), photos of Tawakul Karman with N7 team after hosting her in the TV show made the 'most viewed' posts on the page during the research period.

- On N7 FB Page (11/11/2011), a picture of one of N7 TV show presenters was the second most viral reaching post on the page during the research period.

Visual content was found to be the most preferable form of media messages by BBCA users during period of research. Delivering visual content helps build stronger connections with audiences (i.e. posting photos of TV presenters) and adds needed liveliness to the service.

'Seeing is believing': events of the Arab uprisings were highly visual, which explains the preference of visual content that peaked during these events. Visual content raises the credibility of the service during times of uncertainty.

8.2.6 USERS' PRACTICES

Throughout the analysed platforms, users' practices (sometimes led by editorial policies and inefficient promotion) tend to limit the potential these platforms could have for reaching wider audiences and enriching the dialogue.

Users practise the least-demanding form of engagement on Facebook (liking posts) and refrain from frequently visiting interactive pages on BBCA website.

Failing users' expectations provoked negative sentiments. Sensitive issues and frictions caused by the Arab uprisings and news stories with religious connotations also aroused negative feedback.

Users' rate of visiting and re-visiting the BBCA website suggests that they are not emotionally engaged with the service and that loyalty relations need to be established with the audiences.

8.2.6.1 **Forms of participation**

Users practice the least demanding form of participation and tend to engage in the most convenient way – the least time- and effort-consuming - throughout the analysed platforms. For example, the number of *'likes'* for posts exceeded the number of *'comments'* on them, on both N7 and BBCA FB pages.

Commenting on page posts adds liveliness to the page and enhances the dialogue, while sharing posts expands the reach of the page content and promotes the page to a wider circle of users.

The following example (Table 4) shows the stark difference between different levels of practice and how the spread wave contracts due to users' poor participation. Users' limited participation, depicted in the Table, delineates the inverse fashion of expansion that is shaped due to users' practices. The number of users decreases as the interaction with the content becomes more demanding. The way users interact with the content is responsible either for charging a networking fashion of expansion, which in turn increases the size of the fan base of the service (as the green arrows indicate), or contracting the space if the content is not further circulated (as the red arrows indicate).

The post (BBCA FB)	Truth commission: torture was deliberately practised against detainees in Bahrain		
The activity	Organic reach (the number of unique users who see the posts in their News Feed or on the Wall)	Talking about this (the number of unique users who created stories about the post)	Viral reach (the number of unique users who saw the post in a story created by a friend)
The density	33030	72	30

Table 4 Shrinking circles of engagement on BBCA FB

This minimal level of engagement limits social media potential for driving more traffic to the BBCA. The website has attracted a moderate number of fans especially when compared with its competitors (e.g. Al Jazeera page on Facebook has 2.1 million fans compared to 225.202 fans of BBCA). However the potential for growth is a strong one as the number of 'fans' of the BBCA FB pages is on the rise. This increase raises the potential for enlarging the circles of 'friends of fans' who compose a possible second wave of distribution and increase the service popularity as a by-product. Building this fan base is essential to improve the service performance. As Rufus Weston, Senior Manager of Digital Insights at the BBC, explains:

> *The sites that engaged most with SM themselves had the greatest uplift, so Turkish and Mundo which have a very strong SM presence received three times the uplift than Arabic and other sites. So even when you do something which is perfect for SM, if you are not already engaging in the right way, if you have not already built-up this FB fans and if you have not already established a relationship with them, it does not matter that you are doing something that is useful or interesting or fantastically 'viral' because you have not done base work beforehand and you can see that in performance.*

On the BBCA website, the interactive forum HYS received only 1.4% of the traffic that fed into the website during the research period compared to other 'more crowded' pages and sections of the website (i.e. 26.4% of the traffic poured into the BBCA main page). This indicates the proportional weak interactivity on the page and a tendency towards preferring lurking to positive engagement in times when audiences are expected to be more eager to debate their thoughts and echo their aspirations.

Audience passivity could be a genuine feature of users or, rather, could be extrinsically steered by editorial policies and practices. HYS page, for example, holds discussions about pre-selected topics on the side of the BBC, which might not interest visitors or gratify their needs. Although there is an allocated section for visitors' suggestions (Free Space), this section only allows suggesting topics, not discussing them. Users' suggestions on Free Space do not seem to play a big role in the selection process of topics for debate, which raises issues of source credibility and reliability. It could be also that HYS space is not well

promoted to the website visitors. Additionally, audience perception of the page as a platform through which they can air their voices could reflect on their tendency to spell out their voices on it.

8.2.7 USERS' NEGATIVE SENTIMENTS

Posts on both analysed FB pages (BBCA and N7) received a moderate number of negative feedbacks compared to the unique number of users who saw the posts. In most cases, the stories that provoked negative feedback were either those which conveyed content that clashed with the norms and values embraced in the Arab world, or those which covered sensitive issues like Arab-Arab contentions or authoritative practices usually denied by Arab regimes.

For example, the post that received the highest number of negative sentiments on the BBCA FB page throughout the analysed period was a link to a news story about a Pakistani actress who sued an Indian magazine for publishing a naked photo of her. The story is coupled with a photo of the actress showing her naked body, which was probably considered offensive to many conservative Arab audiences. The story incentivised 69 negative comments by users and generated 60 negative comments out of the 23307 unique users who saw the post. Negative sentiments were also provoked by a news story about torturing detainees in Bahrain, posted on BBCA FB Page on 23 November 2011.

Such controversial issues could be seen, on the one hand, as a good opportunity for the BBCA to provide audiences with facts, impartial analysis, and, most importantly, a reliable platform to vent their grievances and spell out their oppressed opinions. The BBCA's main rival, Al Jazeera, seems to avoid interfering with such sensitive cases in the Gulf region, in order not to harm the Qatari relations with the Gulf countries. For example, Al Jazeera channel has been criticised for turning a blind eye to the situation in Bahrain, or at least for framing the Bahraini demonstrations as a mere sectarian conflict and acts of terrorism[28] rather than a legitimate struggle for reform and social justice. On the other hand, such cases create an excellent opportunity for the BBCA to fill the gaps with its long known non-agendised service that much of the Arab audiences would strive for, especially in turbulent times of uncertainty.

On N7 FB page, the only post that received proportionally significant negative feedback during the analysed period (15 November 2011 to 25 January 2012) had to do with credibility and professionalism. An apology by the N7 team for not hosting Yemeni female activist and 2011 Nobel Peace Prize winner Tawakul Karman in the N7 episode of 17 December 2011, as scheduled, caused disappointment among users. However, it is worth noting that N7 team was keen to make it up to their audiences and hosted Karman on 5 January 2012 instead. Photos of her taken with members of the N7 team and posted on N7 FB page had the greatest reach during the analysed period.

As a picture is worth a thousand words, the post of the day was proof of credibility and an incentive for watching the show. This wide reach of the post shows that the audience were

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[28] http://www.aljazeera.net/news/pages/957ba557-7a68-4b2d-ba65-aa489c9bec48 Access on April 2012

interested in the topic, and explains why they were disappointed when it was initially withdrawn. Finally, it stresses the importance of addressing audiences with visual content as discussed in section (3.2).

The following table shows the topics on both BBCA and N7 FB page that received the most negative comments from users, during the period of research.

Date of posting	Post type	Content	
5/12/2011	Link shared from BBCA website (Page: world news) coupled with a photo	A Pakistani actress sues an Indian magazine for publishing a naked picture of her	☹
23/11/2011	Link shared from BBCA website (Page: Middle East)	Truth commission: torture was deliberately practised against detainees in Bahrain	☹
17/12/2011	Post on N7 FB Page	Due to circumstances beyond our control, Tawakul Karman will not be our host in today's episode as announced earlier. Please accept our apologies.	☹

Table 5 The most negatively received content on BBCA and N7 FB Pages

8.2.8 USERS' ENGAGEMENT WITH BBCA: SHORT-TERM EMOTIONAL CONNECTION

Finally, yet importantly, web metrics on 'the number of days between repeat visits from the site visitors' *(return frequency)* and 'the length of time visitors spend viewing the site as a whole during each visit' *(time spent per visit)* offer glimpses of visitors' reaction to the service delivered via this platform and give insights on users' loyalty to BBCA.

The vast majority of the BBCA website visitors (76.8%) repeated their visit within less than one day, then the 'return frequency'[29] to the website decreased as the time passed. Moreover, as shown in (Figure 16)[30], slightly more than half of the website visitors during the analysed period spent less than one minute per visit on the website.

Given the fact that each webpage is made up of an arbitrary number of individual files, this very limited time span most users spent on the website could have two possible

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[29] The number of days between repeat visits from the site visitors.

[30] Graph generated by SiteCatalyst using Report Accelerator, March 2012.

explanations. Either they hit the website accidently, hence left soon after landing on it; or, went there deliberately but on a first glance did not find the website 'visually attractive' and soon browsed away.

A more optimistic view suggests that returning users are more familiar with the website and therefore do no require much time to find what they're looking for before they leave – although 'less than a minute' is still a very short time to get any information.
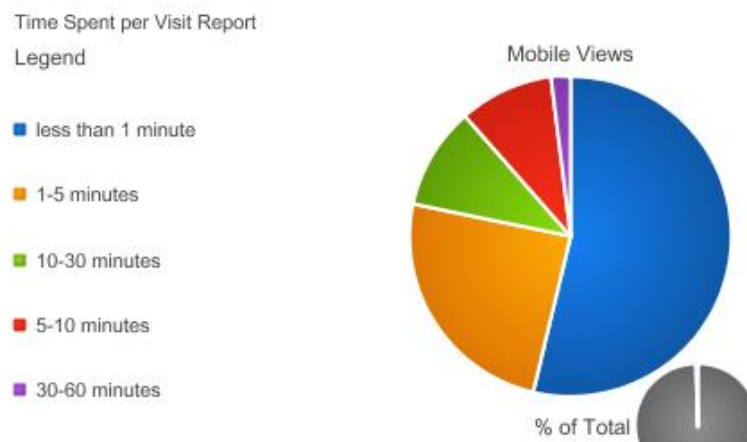

Figure 8 Time spent on the BBCA website per visit

Only 24.5% out of 9,041,746 users of the website spent 1-5 minutes per visit, which could be the least amount of time (among the suggested time categories) needed to read a story or browse the website. More attention needs to be paid to visual and editorial aspects that might have an impact on users' perceptions of the website as an appealing site on which to spend more time. For example, issues of site design, used fonts, ease of use, accuracy, updates, archives, etc. are all expected to reflect on the visitors' loyalty to and engagement with the service in the longer term.

8.2.9 USERS PREFERENCES

Producers' practices could either encourage users' active interaction or alienate them and interrupt the conversation. Based on analysing data on users, insights about producers' practices and their potential impact on the conversation, as evident from the users' activities, are discussed in this section.

8.2.9.1 Posting Consistently:

Enhancing the conversation and increasing active engagement with the content on a Facebook page is associated with the quality and quantity of posting on the page. The interactive nature of SM requires consistent updating of the page 'status' in order to make the audiences feel your presence. Consistency could also trigger more lively interaction on the page and eventually broaden the scale of reach. The editorial team of the BBCA FB page usually post more than one news story per day (quantity). This fashion of performance was found to urge users to interact more actively on the page.

Frequent posting should cover a variety of topics (quality) to better meet users' preferences and add more liveliness to the page. As shown from the table, four out of the most viral-reaching stories on the BBCA website were posted on the same day, which drew more traffic to the platform and created a peak.

Date of posting	Post type	Content
15/11/2011	Link shared from BBCA website (Page: Sports)	Egyptian football player Ahmed Hassan: 178 international games and quest for new records
15/11/2011	Link shared from BBCA website (Page: Middle East)	Spreading hundreds of Libyan armed soldiers to end armed conflicts West of Tripoli
15/11/2011	Link shared from BBCA website (Page: Middle East)	Erdogan: Turkey does not trust the Assad regime any more
15/11/2011	Link shared from BBCA website (Page: Business)	First OPEC summit and calls for stable and just pricing

Table 6 Creating peaks by frequent posting on BBCA FB

As most of the posts on BBCA FB page link users to the website, frequent posting should drive more traffic to the website, although it might interrupt the conversation on the FB page.

Frequent posting was also found to daw traffic to N7 FB page. For example, some of the most viewed and engaging posts were posted on the same day, which proved efficient in creating peaks and re-charging the debate on the page. However, this might give the impression that the most recent-posted topic is the one in-focus, hence undermining and/or interrupting the discussions on the previous posts - posting on the Wall gives the impression that the post is the latest topic of concern.

8.2.9.2   Selectivity: Steering the Dialogue

It is noted that some practices of the BBCA editorial staff could steer the debate in certain directions and highlight certain topics or even particular angles within a news story. In some cases, the editorial team quoted certain parts of a news story to use as a post on the FB page or to introduce a link to the story. This selectivity seems to incentivise users' interaction with the posts. For example, two of the most re-circulated (viral reaching) posts during the research period were ones from news stories published on the main BBCA website. High audience interactivity with these posts could be ascribed to the nature of the content itself. Both posts covered controversial issues and had religious connotations, as shown in the following table:

Date of posting	Post type	Content
12/1/2012	Quote from a news story on the BBCA website (Page: Middle East)	Victoria Nuland, the spokesperson for the US Department of State, said that the meeting was an opportunity to listen to their [Muslim Brotherhood] views and to reinforce our expectations that all big parties will support human rights and women rights, and will fulfil Egypt's international current commitments as well
13/1/2012	Quote from a news story on the BBCA Network (Page: World news)	Wilders' Freedom Party, known for its hostility to Islam, describes the scene of the Queen of Netherlands wearing the Hijab in Muscat as "a sad scene"

Table 7 selective posting on BBCA FB

However, bringing certain views to the fore raises some questions about the criteria of content selection, the reasons behind giving more weight to certain parts of a news story over others, the way this practice might affect the impartiality of the coverage, and the extent to which backgrounds and ideologies of the editorial team might affect the editorial selection process.

For example, a difference is noted between the original headline of a news story as published on the BBCA website and the post that introduces users to the same story on the *BBCA FB page:*

Heated controversy surrounds Queen of Netherlands after she wears Hijab in Muscat

Wilders' Freedom Party, known for its hostility to Islam, describes the scene of the Queen of Netherlands wearing the Hijab in Muscat as "a sad scene".

8.2.9.3   Mode of Address: Dialogue vs. Monologue

The editorial team of the BBCA website use different styles and approaches to address their audiences through posting on the Facebook Page. These modes reflect the extent to which they feel their audience's presence. The ways in which the BBCA address their audiences also have an impact on users' inclination to interact with the content of the page.

All posts that reached more unique users on the BBCA FB page during the analysed period – whether through their News Feed, the BBCA FB Wall (*organic reach*) or through their friends' active interaction with the posted story (*viral reach*) - were links that took the users directly to the BBCA website. These links used the same verbatim of the news story as it appeared on the website. However, introducing those links with direct questions incentivised users to actively interact with the post and respond to the posed questions.

For example, two out of the ten most engaging posts directly asked users questions, and these were among the most engaging posts (users re-circulated the posts by liking, sharing and/or commenting on them), as seen in the table below:

Date of posting	Post type	Content
9/12/2011	Link shared from BBCA website (Page: world news) preceded by a direct question	What 'in your opinion' are the connotations of the Turkish threats? The Turkish foreign minister: we will not stand idle if Syria threatens regional security **978** stories were created about this post
5/1/2012	HYS	What is your opinion? **398** unique users have been reacting to this post (talking about this) **485** stories were created about this post

Table 7 'Direct question' posts on BBCA FB

Dialogue is better practised on the N7 FB page. Compared to the mode of address used on the BBCA FB page, N7 team use friendlier language on the FB page implying a sort of dialogue by directly addressing the users and asking them questions more frequently on the page. But this difference is understandable as the main purpose of the N7 FB page is to get fans' comments/ views about debate questions.

Also, preceding some posts with the presenters' names bridges the page to N7 TV programme and sets an emotional connection between the team and their audiences. However, this link might be interrupted on the TV screen when N7 team pays more attention to HYS users' views at the expense of N7 FB users' opinions which might make the latter feel alienated.

Date of Posting	Post type	Content
15/11/2011	Post (direct question)	Aliaa Magda Al Mahdi controversial issue Other Arab girls said they intend to follow her example… How far can a person go in practicing his/her personal freedom? And how much is free speech allowed? Reach: 5,060
14/11/2011	Post (direct question)	An open invitation for users' suggestions We would like to hear from you. What would you like us to present on this page? Do you have any suggestions? Reach: 4,361
16/11/2011	Post (invitation by Samir Farah)	Samir: The problems in Sudan after the South' independence, and the unity of some opposition parties in one front: Is it possible that the 'change train' reaches Sudan, or the situation is different there with all political and military complications? N7 today…join me at 15:00. Reach: 4,360

Table 8 'Direct question' posts on N7 FB

However, while one-way monologue contradicts the interactive nature of social media and might hinder the utilisation of its platforms to drive more traffic to the website, traffic intensity and rates of interactivity are still higher on the BBCA FB Page compared to N7 FB Page (as discussed in section 1). This could be ascribed to several factors. *Firstly*, the possibility of posting comments on news stories on the website FB page, but not on the website itself, could explain users' tendency to interact on BBCA FB Page. *Secondly*, users' perception of the BBCA Network (and the related FB Page) as a potential pool of selection for participation in N7 TV show (or even perceiving this platform as a more reaching and heard platform) also provides another explanation for users' inclination to interact more actively on the website and related SM platform than on N7 FB page.

This is also butteressd by several findings: (1) The vast majority of posts on the BBCA FB page are links to HYS platform where most prominent participants for the TV show are drawn, (2) The most viral posts on N7 FB page are links to news stories on BBCA HYS platform, and (3) The availability of 'users' information' is one of the filters that the BBCA team apply in their selection of participants for N7 show. The selection process depends on the availability of suffecient personal data that users provide as a prerequisite for posting comments on the website. This might strengthen users' perception of the website as a sampling pool and creates also what has been termed 'the returning users' or the 'friends of the show'. However, the condition of registration might demotivate some users from taking part due to security-related reasons, or simply because they do not want to take the burden of the registration process.

8.3 SOCIAL MEDIA AND OTHER BBCA PLATFORMS

8.3.1 RECIPROCITY AND INTERCONNECTIVITY OF BBCA PLATFORMS:

Social media are fluid spaces of communication where traffic could migrate autonomously from one platform to another. Data on users throughout the analysed platforms show that traffic travels from one platform to another stimulated by editorial practices and/or users preferences. This could sometimes enrich the dialogue, take it to further levels, and amplify the impact by the power of networking and ultimately promote the connected platforms. In other occasions, linking users to other platforms could interrupt the dialogue.

The following diagram represents the suggested interrelation between different analysed platforms as revealed from the analysis.

Using direct links on FB to the BBCA Network creates reciprocal connection between the two platforms and hence, promotes the website and raises the potential for driving more traffic to the service. This could be better achieved when directly addressing the users (asking them questions for example) as well as posting the links as aforementioned. Moreover, sharing video links on the FB pages motivates users to actively engage with the content and share it with their friends and acquaintances, which creates another circle of 'friend of fans' and increases the reach of the service to wider audiences.
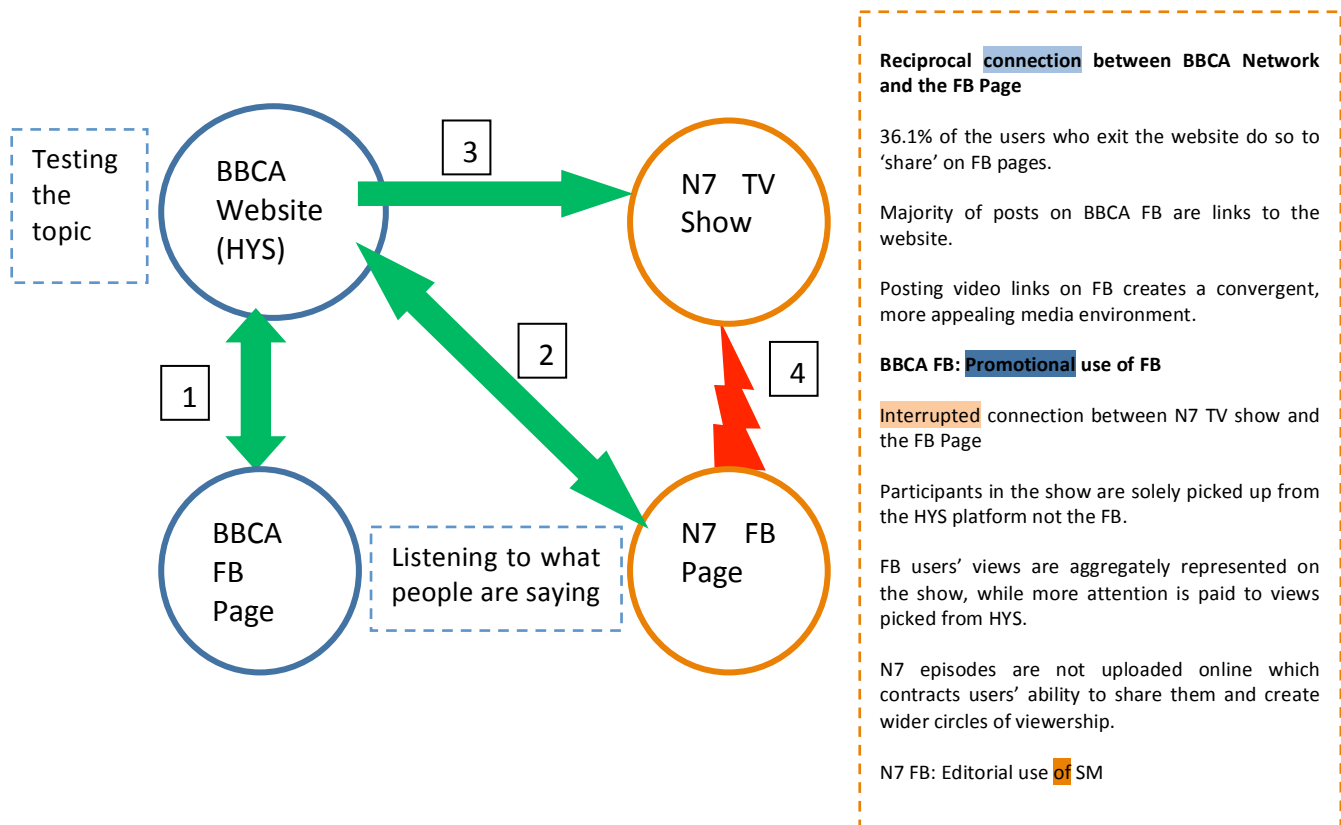
Figure 9 Reciprocal connections between BBCA platforms

As for N7, the most reaching posts on the FB page were those that linked users to HYS interactive platform on the BBCA website. This means that traffic migrates from the N7 FB page to the BBCA website where posted topics on the FB page are further tested for featuring in the show (see figure 11, connections number 2 & 3). Nevertheless, N7 FB page saw a decline in activity (according to activity indicators) during the research period compared to the FB page of the BBCA website. Both the number of unique users who saw the content of the Page (*weekly total reach*) and the number of unique users who created a story about the N7 FB page - whether by liking, commenting on or sharing the content of the page (*Talking about the page*) - were decreasing during the time of the analysis. In terms of traffic commute, the decrease could be due to referring users from one interactive platform to another (FB ⟷ HYS) which might fragment the audiences and disperse the dialogue. While the editorial strategy could draw traffic to the website and increase the HYS selection pool of participants and topics for the TV show, it could also shift participation away from the FB pages. This suggests that while BBCA FB page could be used effeciently for promotional purposes, N7 FB page seems to be better utlised for editorial functions.

The connection between N7 FB page and the actual TV show delineates a weak link between the two platforms (see connection 4 in figure 11). First of all, the FB page does not serve as a selection pool of participants in the show itself. This could demotivate users to actively engage with the content of the page as they feel that their voices are not heard (at least in comparison with HYS and the BBCA website more boadly). Second, the way users' opinions

on N7 FB appear on the show - simply aggregated and annonymously presented towards the end of the show - reinforce this perception.

Social media proved efficient in keeping users of the BBCA website in the BBCA space even when leaving the site. 'Exit links' analysis (the links that visitors click to leave the BBCA site and go to another site) shows that almost 25% of the visitors who exit the BBCA website have done so to 'share' content from the page on their personal Facebook pages. 14% of the users left the site to YouTube, and almost the same proportion (13.9 %) left to the BBCA news page on Facebook. Although leaving the platform, exiting the site to social media platforms suggests that users are still, in fact, connected to the BBCA, using, producing, and re-producing its content, therefore, creating new circles of diffusion (see connections 1 & 2 on Figure 11).

It is worth noting that Twitter connection with the BBCA website is the weakest, as Twitter came at the bottom of the list of SM exit links. Visitors of the BBCA website rarely move from the site to share its content on Twitter. Slightly more than fifth of users (20.3 %) exited the site to the 'moreover' link, which implies users' tendency to read the detailed stories of headlines of their selection on the page.

However, linking to the website from FB (connection 1, Figure 11) is still weak as data on users' activity on the BBCA FB show that the least activity that users practice to interact with the Page post is the *'link clicks'*. This means that users rarely follow the links in the posts. This implies that users have either read the original story on the website (on other platforms), they interact with the story based on prior knowledge of the topic or through the information they got from the phrasing of the post, or that they respond to other users' comments. Noting that most posts on the BBCA FB page are links to news stories published on the BBAC website, which suggests that traffic rarely migrates from Facebook to the website.

8.4 ENRICHING THE DIALOGUE: REFERRERS & PARTNERS

Additional to investing in breaking news times and making the right engagement decisions guided by users' preferences, the 'global conversation' as practised throughout the BBCA online platforms tends to be steered towards and invited from certain places and spaces more than others.

8.4.1 REFERRERS & INFLUENCERS

Other spaces in the digital sphere drove traffic to BBCA platforms and re-circulated its content. Hence, these referrers added density and liveliness to the dialogue as they transferred users to the BBCA. Most users log in to the Arabic service directly. 20 % of the BBCA website visitors came to the website referred from other websites.

The first website that drew traffic to the BBCA site was www.202020.net (2.9% of referrals). This is a general website, mainly in Arabic with no evidence of an English version, that offers several services to its visitors.

The second referrer was the website www.raddadi.com (1.0 % of referrals). Raddadi.com is an Arabic language website that provides its users with several services. Compared to

202020.net, Raddadi.com is less user-friendly and depends less on visual content, which makes it less appealing to users.

www.alokhdood.com came in the third place, with a reference rate of 0.7 %. The site displays a live banner of the BBCA website through which users can navigate the BBCA website. Nevertheless, the content of the BBCA website is not displayed properly on 'alokhdood.com', which makes it difficult for 'alokhdood' users to read fully through the story they select.

On Twitter, the conversation is influenced by participations from different platforms. The top influencers are the news websites: maktoob.news.yahoo and www.bbc.co.uk. Most mentions of the BBCA on Twitter come from these websites respectively. Blog posts and forums influence the BBCA presence on Twitter as well. However, although analysis is filtered by BBC Arabic, a closer look at tweets from the 'influencers' indicate that these tweets involve the BBC in general, not necessarily the BBCA. Also, the Sysomos (social media monitoring and measurement tool) sometimes confuses Arabic with Persian, as both languages use a similar alphabet and share much vocabulary.

8.4.2 BBCA PARTNERS:

For its part, the BBCA cooperates with other services and spaces that could drive traffic towards the service and promote its label and content. The BBCA website depends on and collaborates heavily with the BBC (75.2%) followed by the BBC mobile (23.9%), then other partners like, masrawy.com, which follows with a huge gap (0.4%), then msn Arabia (0.3%), and ONTV (0.2%). Better links need to be built with these partners to create new opportunities to reach wider audiences. For example, airing N7 TV show on ONTV creates a new platform for the show, and the brand label of the BBCA by extension, helps reach new audiences which meets the ultimate goal of spreading the global conversation more widely and expanding the scope of the conversation. From among 6447 headlines published on the website between 15 November 2011 and 29 January 2012, the one that got the largest number of views is about 'ONTV livestreaming' which had 42,794 views out of 560,643.

9 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The research set out to determine how the BBCA social media are being used to support audience engagement and reach, who its users are, forms of their engagement with BBCA, and what improvements might be needed in the future. The tri-platform interactive political debate programme of Nuqtat Hewar was selected as a case study for analysis.

We conclude with a number of recommendations. Despite the comprehensive research that we have undertaken, it is possible that some of our recommendations may already be normal practice by now. We acknowledge that our findings are bound by the period of research that took place between November 2011 and January 2012.

9.1 SOCIAL MEDIA STRATEGY

Research is telling us that:

- Digital media are creating a new ecology of news production and consumption, one that necessitates new models of trust and authority within the BBC Arabic newsroom. Social media amplify and filter mainstream media, and vice versa. Social media are not replacing mainstream media, and people still use their trusted sources – like BBC – for accurate and in-depth analysis of the news. Social media and mainstream media complement each other. Most news organisations are still grappling with traditional practices and attitudes as they embrace social media. BBCA is not an exception.

- Arabic audiences expect closer and more 'tailored' coverage of Middle Eastern affairs than what is currently provided on the BBCA website and videos - which is often very similar to the' Middle East' page of the BBC's Global News output. What a British audience can perceive as 'balanced' and 'impartial' coverage of, for example, the Syrian revolution, might not necessarily be perceived as such by a Syrian audience.

The following is thus recommended:

- Developing a clear and coherent social media strategy and vision that all staff can own, use and feel inspired by.

- Reflecting on what balance and impartiality mean for BBCA is imperative in order to reposition BBCA in the market. BBCA needs to overcome the big challenge of competing logics within the service about what should be covered and how (the Queen's Jubilee or Syria, for example, was the most recent controversial case). This issue is wider but related to social media and requires an in-depth reflection exercise among senior staff about what the BBCA niche market is and how to provide more tailored content to that market.

- Positioning interactivity of users and audience at the centre of production regardless of which platform or media content is being produced is imperative. Rather than seeing interactivity as a single web activity or TV/radio programme, it should be

embraced as part of the total newsroom culture and daily routines. Whether offline, online or on social media, interactivity and engagement of users must be at the heart of the production at BBC WS.

- Introducing new innovative business models to ensure the gap between the resources of the Global News Languages and the wider BBC is narrowed, especially as the former comes under the licence fee in 2014. One possible idea, for example, could be to use the commercial arm of BBC to sell N7 and other programmes to other channels. BBC Arabic programming brings high quality, competitive and interactive content that is proving popular. Considering selling the programme's episodes to OnTv and similar Arabic channels could be one way of achieving sustainability for the Arabic services. The recent introduction of commercial advertisements to BBCA website could also be replicated on TV and radio – given that they are moderated by clear guidelines to ensure the editorial separation from advertisements.

- In general, a proper reconsideration of the social-media strategy of the programme is needed. There is a need for a greater online presence on both Facebook and Twitter. This can be enhanced and developed using the right techniques and by simply creating a media strategy that creates a more balanced relationship between the programme and media users.

9.2 ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

- The research found that staffing and resources are major constraints on BBCA tri-platform programmes and its social media services. As the 'Arab Spring' fades, there will be serious challenges ahead in providing new topics and angles of debates in order to keep up with the competition from other news services. This is particularly true for tri-platform interactive programmes like N7 that require a considerable amount of time for co-ordination and pre-planning. A re-allocation of staffing, resources and rotas is required to ensure online and social media staff can cover all key moments in the news production cycle, and in order for BBCA to keep up with its competitors.

- Moreover, structural and cultural issues within the BBCA newsroom were observed as constraints on social media performance. In terms of job descriptions and titles, there also seems to be some tension, resulting from unclear roles and responsibilities. For instance, the BBCA web and N7 teams seem to have ambiguity about the roles associated with managing multi-media content and some social media content (e.g. Youtube videos..etc) on the BBCA's own website and its related social media outlets.

Recommendations include:

- Ensuring that the teams are fully staffed at all times with dedicated roles assigned to social media and interactivity to avoid conflicts and resentments over perceived unequal and unfair allocation of resources. Having a clear organisational structure to help allocate resources and budgets more efficiently, and prevent related administrative problems is also imperative.

- Narrowing the disparities in resources between the English news and languages services of the BBC. This will not only help bring WS languages programmes on a par with the wider BBC quality but also ensure BBC is able to compete globally with other Global and Pan-Arab broadcasters (such as Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya). This will also help ensure diaspora staff feel motivated and develop a sense of 'loyalty' to the BBC.

- Considering scheduling the airing time of N7 programme to a later hour (17:00 or 18:00 pm GMT). This is because TV prime time (peak viewing) in the Arab World is after 20:00 - the programme needs to consider that the UK is ahead of most Arab countries. Interactive 'live' programmes such as N7 must be aired during peak hours of viewing for the Arab audiences, especially when they are presented only during work days. This is particularly true for Maghreb countries which are on the same time zone as the UK; meaning the majority of people could be still at work during airing time of N7. It is not possible to have an interactive 'live' programme when people are not able to watch it or interact live with it.

- Revising the N7 schedule to three instead of five times week is, thus, strongly recommended in order to allow for better pre- and post-production preparation for a programme of this nature. Alternatively, additional full-time staff should be assigned to the programme, with at least two full-time staff dedicated to social media, if the current high frequency of airing remains the same. This will enable N7 team to focus their time on planning for episodes, particularly as production requires considerable time to engage audiences both online and offline.

- Dedicating at least two full-time staff to the online team at BBCA, in order to help synchronise the social media content between the BBC Arabic website and its social media pages, and help cross-promote content of N7 and other flagship programmes. The BBCA social media staff's responsibility should include ensuring the BBCA Facebook page(s) are on a par with BBC quality standards. Moreover, assigning clearer roles and responsibilities to ensure recent content is easily found on the website, especially UG videos.

- Introducing a more bottom-up approach to solving inherent structural and staff conflicts, by involving staff in a collective strategic planning exercise to openly discuss structural and cultural issues (e.g. through a retreat exercise). This would ensure staff engagement and sense of ownership to decisions taken. It will also help senior management get the day-to-day perspectives of social media challenges as well as solutions and build a greater sense of solidarity and cooperation among staff – many

who feel constantly under threat of losing their jobs if a strategy involving moving staff and resources to the Cairo office to save money is put in place.

- Enhancing social media skills among all levels of staff, especially senior staff, in order to cope with the fast-changing technology of social media. A training strategy is required for the whole service from top to bottom echelons. All N7 and BBCA web staff should be able to moderate, update and follow social media with ease. It is also strongly recommended that more systematic periodic training should be provided for senior staff, to keep abreast of SM technologies. Alternatively, a structural shift in HR could give more power to SM roles occupied by younger SM-savvy staff. A key obstacle is the lack of skills among senior and more expensive (to hire) staff, some of whom see SM as a threat to journalism. Technically savvy early-career staff must have access to SM data analysis software, and be empowered to make decisions regarding social media in the newsroom[31].

9.3 TECHNOLOGY & DESIGN

There are key requirements the BBCA website infrastructure should provide in order to ensure tri-platform and related interactivity and engagement with audiences are achieved. These include:

- Improving archiving and indexing systems of the website. Users should easily access older debates or news by keyword of topic, country and date of airing. It is also very important that users are able to easily access video links to previous N7 or other tri-platform episodes. If BBCA prides itself as being an interactive platform that brings digital conversation to mainstream media and TV, it must be found online.

- Creating a comprehensive online video and audio library with the episodes of N7 and other tri-platform programmes to be accessed through its designated youtube.com channel or a separate server. The library of the programme's episodes should be properly promoted on BBCA and N7 main webpage(s), and be well integrated with the Facebook pages.

- Ensuring a larger bandwidth with improved capacity of the website for faster live streaming. In addition, BBCA needs to keep abreast with the constantly changing media landscape. Trends are showing that change in modes and means of consumption is happening at an exponential rate. The growth of smart phones and other remote devices is one important case in point. For that purpose, the BBC Arabic needs to consider the following in its social media strategy:

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[31] Competitors like Aljazeera have dedicated Social media team of under 30s, who are able to constantly follow the latest IT and social media trends. Those younger journalists have the decision-making power to introduce new ideas.

- Adapting and integrating all its online services and applications to multiple platforms and devices, including smart phones and tablet PCs; and integrated with all operating systems

- Developing a Mobile-friendly and 'light' version of the website and N7 programme to ensure users easily get to the content they need on-the-go. Mobile versions of BBCA and N7 need to allow more cross platform interaction where users are able to send webcam interactions, and other UGC (including text, tweets, videos, web or Facebook comments,..etc) through their mobile phones directly. A positive step in this regard (light and interactive BBCA website mobile app) was observed to have taken place in the months following this research.

- Considering designing a customised portal where users could directly interact with the programme through different media (e.g. web, sms texting, mms, live skyping, blogging and other social media). Technical adaptation could be made to ensure these interactions feed live to the new TV live streaming systems currently introduced at BBCA.

- Other important design and maintenance issues for both the website and the social media pages include: Standardisation of format and structure for all BBCA Facebook news and related programmes pages. The format and structure of the key available content and features on the Facebook page (left column) need to be on a par with the wider BBC global requirements. A dedicated BBCA app on Facebook is also a must, and should be integrated with the content of the website.

- Cross-promoting all BBCA flagship programmes on the main BBCA Facebook page in order to increase traffic on the website and engagement in these programmes.

- Ensuring regular maintenance and updating of social media across all BBCA and N7 accounts (Facebook, Twitter, G+ and YouTube). The rule should be, 'if it is there, it must be constantly updated and maintained'. Dedicated well-trained staff should be assigned to update and cross-promote flagship programmes and news content (e.g. sharing videos across different social media pages or posts of key debate topics, etc) across the different social media platforms.

9.4 USERS' ENGAGEMENT

In general, online audiences have increasing expectations from news organisations. They are expecting to share their views instantly and through different means, including portable devices. They are also eager to feel acknowledged and be able to share their views with their peers and the wider community. Similarly, users of the BBCA platforms seem to want more from their relationship with the service. Many do not want to simply post their comments and leave, but be recognised. At the same time, not all Arab users are savvy with social media, and new comers need to be informed of easy steps on how to participate (online or other means of interactive media) in order to avoid recycling the same users. To that N7 and the larger BBCA services need to ensure the following:

9.4.1 IMPROVING REACH (NUMBERS ENGAGED)

- Bringing the views of 'new comers' and 'non-savvy' users/callers in order to avoid repetition of participants/guests. More time and resources, thus, need to address the following:

  - Enabling more 'non-influential' users to interact and giving priority to new users over 'returning' or more proficient users. This requires more time and resources for planning each N7 episode and sharing debate topics early enough on social media and the website.

  - Repeating throughout the N7 live programme to the audience how to participate. It is important to explain the know-how of using the social media platforms during the episode. For example, how to post the webcam contribution, how to interact on Twitter, and, generally, how to be part of the conversation, should briefly be pointed.

  - Avoiding the same user/caller appearing in two consecutive episodes; preferably they should not appear in the same week.

  - Adding a clear explanation on the website and Facebook pages for users on the 'best practices' for interactions: how to increase their likelihood of being 'selected' in the live programme, and improve the quality of users' contributions (video, audio and text).

- The TV, radio and online audiences of N7 are different. Even the users of different social media have different demographics (Facebook users are younger than BBCA HYS platforms). A key challenge for the team is to connect these disparate users and audiences in a genuine participatory cross-platform multi-media production. Here lies the main value of N7 compared with its competitors.

- Encouraging fans posting on BBCA's and N7's social media pages (esp. Facebook, Twitter, G+). This should become the norm rather than the exception. More resources are required to ensure a wider fan/user posting is allowed whilst maintaining close moderation of what is being published on Facebook by fans to ensure that the quality of debate and engagement are on a par with BBC's standards. A number of measures could include:

  - Ensuring debate on SM platforms is initiated early on by the team, in order to allow enough time for users interactions.

  - Encouraging BBCA and N7 staff to comment, reply and re-share on social media what users post to encourage them. It is also possible to continue a post-episode dialogue with the users on Twitter and Facebook to help make posts go viral. Addressing users directly (i.e. asking questions) prompts more interaction and expands the circle of diffusion and engagement.

  - Embedding a staff member in the dialogue on the N7FB page could also increase the visibility of the programme and response from users. The success in quickly

creating a loyal group of active participants' in the Greenwich 7/10 project was largely contingent on the presence, responsiveness and recognition of the Greenwich 7/10 team.

  o Recognising participants by mentioning their names, especially of FB participants whose input is often aggregated on the N7 show. This would create a stronger connection with participants and incentivise them further to engage with N7 and other BBCA content. Recently, N7 team started giving more credit to its Facebook users and their postings, and this practice should be widely exercised by BBCA. It would be also beneficial if topics are linked to people who suggested them in the first place.

  o Incorporating live Twitter feeds directly during the programme, possibly streamlined through a background screen showing real-time Twitter around the programme hashtag #bbchewar. The participants can see their names on TV be and be incentivised to participate more; and other viewers get a chance to respond live to the debate. A snapshot of the questions or the comments made by the users can be captured on screen to create more dynamics to the live debate.

  o Presenting the Twitter hashtag at the bottom of the screen of the programme, or above, in order for the viewer to be reminded of the platform and N7.

  o Opening and feeding the commenting section from G+ and YouTube channel before and after of the episodes.

- Addressing women audiences with themed events and topics that interest or concern them and/or mobilising a major initiative to represent female voices on the TV show more frequently might help bridge the evident gender chasm in the dialogue. However, this is by no means a foregone conclusion.

- A greater understanding of the changing nature of media consumption and uses of new technologies among women in the region and diasporas is required in order to better serve their needs. Research and outreach to women's and family groups might assit this process.

- Giving more attention to under-represented audiences of the Arab region, such as those in the Maghreb and Sudan who have high presence but low engagement with the N7 programme. One reason the reach of N7 is not very high in the Maghreb region could be the timing of live broadcasting of N7 programme which coincides with the working hours in most Maghreb countries. Arab audiences in diasporas are also a very large potentially very active social media clientele and it would be wise to encourage their inclusion in the global conversation – not only to make it more global but also because in previous research we found that they were good mediators of debates because they could bring alternative perspectuves on issues under discussion.

- Shifting the schedule of at least one episode of N7 to the weekend in order to allow for more whole family and household viewing of the programme and enhance the live interactions.

- Revitalising the N7 web page(s) design, in order to increase cross-promotion and user-friendliness of the site.

- Considering some of the suggestions made by BBCA users on Free Space regarding the BBCA hosting a forum for youth where they can discuss current affairs; having experienced BBCA staff assess their conributions and highlight their shortcomings; and announcing compettions and prizes for citizen journalism and incentives for best posts or users. These are unconventional suggestions but other organisations like Al Jazeera have already pursued, and could help create a great Buzz around BBCA and social media.

- Investing in producing more rich media about N7 programme on social media. Users throughout the analysed platforms prefer the visual content, as video posts and news with photos were the type of content that engaged users the most and were most often referred. Video snippets of N7 were popular and posting photos of BBCA staff drew significant traffic to the service and mobilised users to react to the content.

- Creating rapport with users. It is recommended that the BBCA staff ask fans questions, seek their input in decisions, and use these spaces as a way to gather feedback about the service. One of the suggestions on Free Space on 1 March 2012 was, 'why don't you open the following quesiton for discussion: "what are your suggestions for improving our channel?'

- BBCA presenters need to be more attentive to their fans and respond personally and instantly to their audience expressions of admiration.

9.4.2 IMPROVING QUALITY OF ENGAGEMENT (DEBATE)

- Improving the quality of debate, through investing time and human resources in monitoring, selecting and moderating debate on the website and on social media. Particular attention should be dedicated to Facebook and Twitter, and regular updating of 'influential users' should be done on a monthly basis.

- Allocating more time to cater for and plan new and innovative angles to cover, particularly uses related to the 'Arab Spring' as the political heat lessens in intensity and audience look for alternative topics.

- BBCA need to take risks and not fear covering controversial social issues, especially ones related to women in the region. BBCA might consider a Women's Hour programme made by, for and about women – and of course including male contributions.

- Considering allowing bilingual contributions in order to cater for the large BBCA audience in diaspora and incentivise some of the younger generations to participate. This might expand the fan base of the service. For instance, UGC that are made in English could be translated for the TV and presented (perhaps using subtitles.

Moreover, reconsidering the editorial policy regarding banning of English comments and posts made on Facebook and Twitter.

- Providing training to staff on best practices for 'moderating' debate online, and on SM. Revisiting policy regarding eliminating users English comments. Moreover, providing clearer parameters particular to 'Arabic' debate – beyond the generic BBC editorial guidelines, in order to cope with the Arabic culture and expectations of Arab Listening more proactively to users' suggestions made on the Free Space (FS) platforms (both on the website and on Facebook). Suggestions made on these spaces would ideally be the inception point for the life cycle of any given topic for debate. Preferences and complaints expressed on the interactive platforms could also give valuable insights into what interest audiences more and the best practices to keep them attached to the service.

- Considering new types/media of UGC contributions such as satire (currently very popular), pictures or audio (only) to allow for a wider variety of audiences and skills (esp. women and shy users) to express their opinion about the topic of the debate. This will maximise the use of this tri-platform medium and could bring innovative ways of interactions with the debates.

- Local reporting: Filming programmess on location and presenting less in-studio programmess would reduce the perception that BBCA is 'outside the Arab world' and raise credibility; and add a sense of liveness to the programme.

10 APPENDIX: METHODS

10.1 STRAND A: ETHNOGRAPHY OF PRODUCTION

The aim of this strand was to examine the practices and conceptions inside the Nuqtat Hewar newsroom, looking at the dynamics of work, and the factors shaping social media decisions and implementations.

A total of 21 days of participant observation of Nuqtat Hewar (N7) programme was conducted in the period between 15 November 2011 and 31 January 2012, looking at the flows of users content and the routines of managing this content inside the newsroom. The researcher was located inside the N7 newsroom and had viewing access to their running order and content management software ENPS. A typical day of observation included attending the N7 team's daily morning meeting, observing the actual show at the TV/radio gallery, and attending the post-episode meeting (known as the 'post-mortem' meeting) that takes place at 5:00pm. The researcher also participated in the Social Media team's preparation for the Egyptian Elections, including coming up with a list of potential active users to follow on Twitter and working different hashtags.

Moreover, a total of 24 semi-structured interviews were conducted with the editorial, management, technical, and Social Media teams, both at BBC Arabic and N7, as well as tens of informal chats with the BBCA journalists. The interviews focused on eliciting the visions and factors shaping N7 users' participation. The study also included an extensive review of archival and documentation records as well as technological artefacts used for managing and moderating debate (e.g. TOPCat 2 news management system, the *Jive* moderating system, ENPS).

All data collected was analysed using a thematic analysis that was triangulation via the different data sources, using Nvivo software.

10.2 STRAND B: SOCIAL MEDIA MONITORING ANALYTICS

Users' practices on SM platforms within the time span from 15 November to 25 January were analysed with special focus on specific cases relevant to the Arab uprising (i.e. the Egyptian parliamentary elections of 2011 and the first anniversary of the Egyptian Revolution on 25 January 2012). In order to assess the uses of SM platforms, a quantitative analysis was conducted based on three different tools for monitoring the social media landscape:

- **Facebook insights**, to analyse Facebook users and uses. Facebook insights help monitoring the pulse of conversations on Facebook pages. Analysing the FB insights helps understand the performance of the Page and learning which content resonates with the audience. In the current research, users activities on two BBCA-related Facebook pages were monitored and analysed: the BBCA website page and the N7 FB page. The analysis first starts with an overview of the general performance of the page. The page posts were arranged according to their reach during the period from 15 November to 25 January. A table of the most viewed and the most engaging posts

was generated and the posts were translated into English. The second layer of analyses focused on how users interact with the posts and which posts drew more activity on the page.

- **Site Catalyst** is a one integrated tool that helps measure, analyse, and optimise integrated data from all online initiatives across multiple communication channels and technologies in one place. For the purpose of this research, SiteCatalyst was used to analyse users and uses of BBCA website. The tool helps identify the most profitable paths through the website and determine where visitors go after navigating away from the website. Sitecatalyst offers Drag-and-drop dashboard design—personalise dashboards, alerts, and bookmarks to deliver quick snapshots of key performance indicators (KPIs) for online communication media.

- **Sysomos Heartbeat** social media monitoring and measurement tool offers a snapshot of social media activity from different platforms like Twitter, Facebook, blogs, forums, as well as traditional media sources. For the purpose of this research, Sysomos Heartbeat was used to look at BBCA-related activities on Twitter. The Sysomos dashboard helps assess how often the BBCA is mentioned, key influencers, and the most active keywords within a given period of time. Insights about demographics and where the conversations are happening, who is driving the conversation and text analytics are also analysed to address the research question 'who' in relation to the BBCA presence on Twitter.

To measure 'reach', certain categories of exposure and active engagement were selected from the measures offered by the aforementioned monitoring tools. These categories were particularly selected as they provide a comprehensive representation of users' preferences and communicative practices for each analysed SM platform. Discussing users' practices through these categories also makes it easier to report findings throughout three distinct, yet connected, platforms in one analytical frame. The following table summarizes these categories (see glossary for operational definition of each analytical category):

Table 9 Categories of analysis over the selected BBCA platforms

BBCA Network	Facebook[32]	Twitter
Site metrics	Post organic reach	Entities.
Site content	Post viral reach	Key conversations.
Syndication partner	Talking about this (Post)	BuzzGraph
Visitor reports	Negative feedback users	Top influencers
Traffic sources	Demographics	Demographics
Demographics		

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[32] Figures are for the first 28 days after a post's publication only. Posts are sorted differently by each indicator.

Starting 15 December, the Facebook insights started to be displayed differently. Some categories were merged while others were defined differently under new labels.

10.3 STRAND C METHODS – CONTENT AND DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

This section explains which platforms and data were selected for analysis and why, and the methodology and tools employed in the research. Conducting a cross-platform comparable analysis was imperative to understand the life cycle of topics for debate and various discourses starting from their inception, generated either by the BBCA or users, all the way through to their discussion on the Nuqtat Hewar TV show. Hence, this Strand aimed at extracting and examining multi-layered slices of relevant BBCA platforms in order to have a deep and comprehensive view of debates, users, participation and dialogue across these platforms, and for the same topic and within the same period of time. After an initial survey of BBCA's interactive platforms to determine their relevance to the main questions of this project, the following were selected:

> Free Space (FS), which can be found on the BBCA website
> Have Your Say (HYS), which can be found on the BBCA website
> N7 Facebook (N7 FB)
> BBC Arabic Facebook page (BBCA FB)
> N7 episodes
> Al Jazeera (for comparative purposes)

An example of the analysis of Free Space is presented below:

10.4 FREE SPACE [33]

Free Space (FS) is the platform that would ideally be the inception point for the life cycle of any given topic for debate, as it is the platform where users are invited to 'take part in selecting topics' they 'wish to be discussed on HYS page and N7 programme'[34]. Free Space is not restricted to suggestions for topics users wish to discuss but includes comments to the BBC, complaints, queries, etc. In a sense, it is the key platform for users' contact and communication with the BBCA. This platform was selected for analysis to verify the extent to which the BBCA considers users' suggestions and recommendations for topics to be discussed in HYS and N7 debates. Moreover, this space provides an important window into people's interests, concerns and priorities within a given period of time, against those of the BBC and their editorial line.

To systematically collect data from the HYS main page and 'Free Space' pages, a table in excel was created with the below variables for the period 20 Nov 2011 to 20 Dec 2011 (collection of relevant data from this platform continued into March 2012):

> Date
> Name
> Country of residence
> Country of origin

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[33] http://newsforums.bbc.co.uk/ws/ar/thread.jspa?forumID=9312

[34] http://newsforums.bbc.co.uk/ws/ar/thread.jspa?forumID=9312

Gender
Age
Suggested topic
Details of suggestion
Country/person/ issue/ concept involved
Nature of topic (e.g. political, social, etc.)
No. of recommendations (likes)
Additional Comments

The sample selected for analysis was a month's worth of contributions, from 20 November till 20 December 2011, amounting to 210 postings in total. While the database would ideally extend beyond this date, it was difficult given the timeframe for the assignment. The selected data was extracted, translated into English, categorised using the above table (variables) and summarised. This data sample offers demographics based on self-reporting and more importantly information about popular topics, countries of interest, peaks in contributions, and comments on or to the BBC itself as a media corporation.

In order to inform analysis, answer certain questions, and facilitate data-mining by other team members, the researcher further sub-categorised the data into key themes (see the multiple sheets within main annex 1), some of which are listed below:

Recurrent requests/ suggestions/ themes
Recurrent countries involved in requests
Instances of interaction among users
Comments on or to the BBCA as a media corporation
Areas neglected by the BBCA (e.g Maghreb and non-Arab Spring countries)
Egypt-related topics (esp. on the elections)
Nationalities of users

Below is an example of how the data in this table and in others that will later be mentioned has been and can be used to inform research and come upon findings:

Between 20 November and 20 December 2011 the biggest number of contributions on Free Space came from participants who reported residing in Egypt (Figure 3). Matching that number was, unsurprisingly, Egypt's share in suggestions for topics to be discussed (Figure 4). Finally, Egypt received the biggest share of topics raised for debate by the BBCA on HYS platform and N7 programme (Figure 5). See below graphs for illustration.
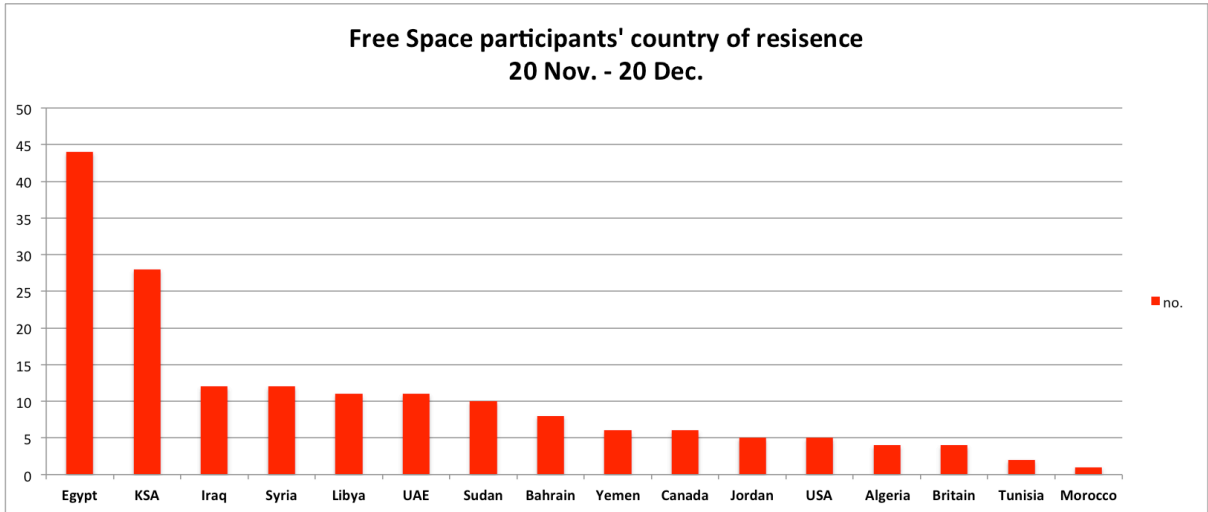
Figure 10 Nationalities, based on self-reporting, of Free Space users (20 Nov - 20 Dec 2011)
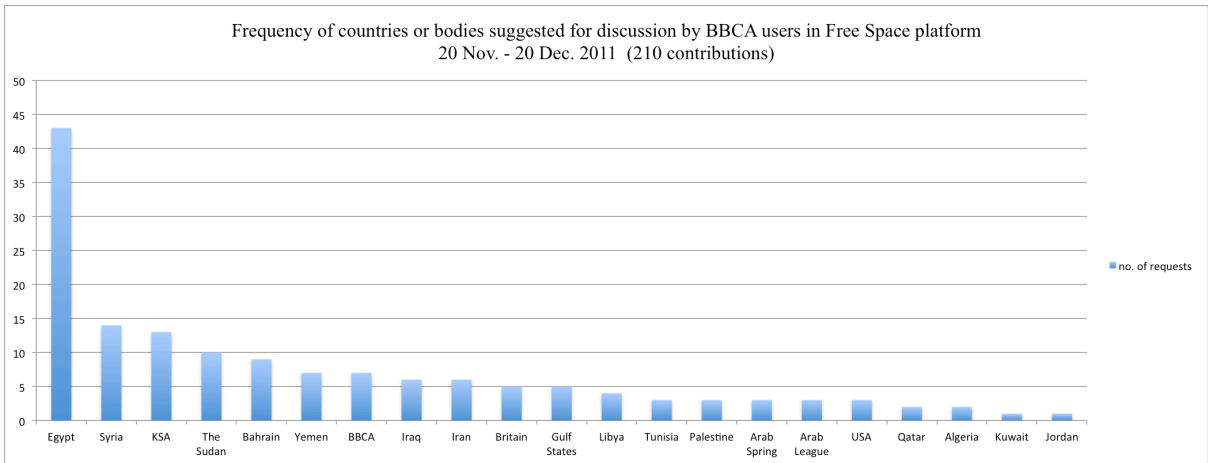

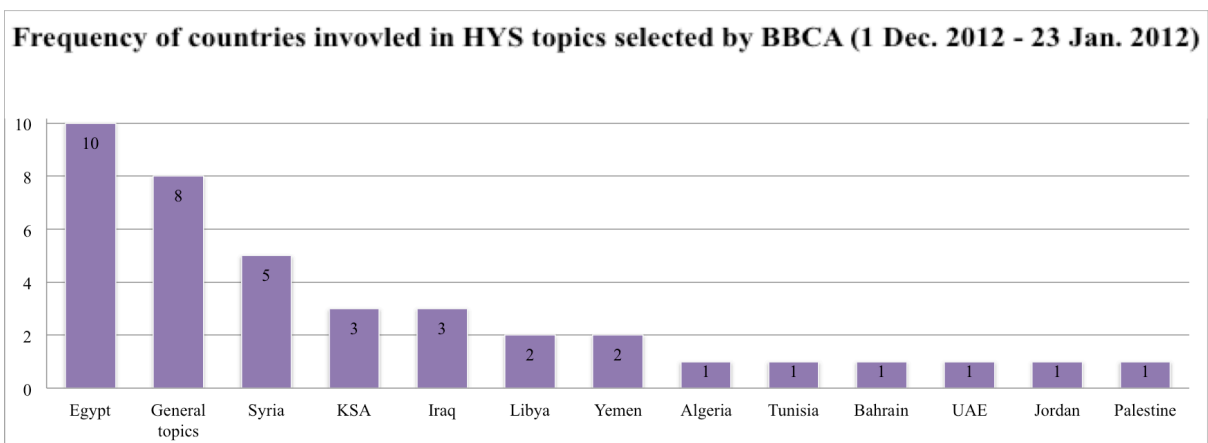*Figure 11 Countries suggested for debate by users on Free Space (20 Nov - 20 Dec 2011)*

Figure 12 Frequency of countries invovled in BBCA-selected HYS debates

Given the detailed information and variables available in the main excel table, which FB insights and other analytics cannot capture, it can be used to answer various questions, broad and specific, about the Free Space users postings.

As stated above, contributions on this space are not limited to topics audience want to discuss but include comments on the BBCA's performance and media coverage. Therefore, it is a space worth following by the BBCA as it offers a window to its audiences' views on the channel. Below are some of the examples of recommendations to, praise for, and critique of the BBC:

Please allow an on-demand component to your website to allow us to watch your programmes at our convenience. (Nabil Saleh Yemen, 20/11/2011)

It would be very useful if you created a forum for BBC users to allow us to interact with one another and discuss topics of our choice. (Mohammed, Sudan, 22/11/2011) (The same member suggests allowing comments on BBCA's news stories on the BBCA website, similar to Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya)

I would like to congratulate the BBC for winning the award for best news channel from Hotbird satellite. Well-deserved as the BBC's programmes and coverage are balanced, impartial, professional and allows various views. The BBC has an excellent team of professional and capable media persons who deserve all respect and appreciation. (Mohammed Al-Balawi, KSA, 29/11/2011)

I would like to congratulate the BBC, its staff and its audience (for same above mentioned award). Your win is ours as audience and participants who take part in enriching its programmes through the available and user-friendly communication means and ease through which we can contact you. The down-to-earth attitude of your presenters and show hosts have made us feel comfortable, not to mention the channel's objectivity in covering news. Your interactive programmes that allow open dialogue with viewers have make us feel not just audience but members of your team, which is why your happiness and gain are ours. Congratulations mother of all media! (Ali Al-Zantani, Libya, 01/12/2011)

"Please explain why all the commentators and political analysts you host are seculars who are biased against Islamists?", bringing into question the balance and impartiality of the BBC. (Hamza Arfy, Libya, 16/12/2011)

Please host new faces, especially youth of the Internet and opposition. I highly respect the BBC but sometimes it too becomes traditional by hosting figures from the older generation whose ideas are outdated. (Sultan Al Mashour, Algeria, 07/12/2011)

In general, the Free Space data sample showed that BBCA users are much more interested in political topics than cultural and social ones of everyday life. The ratio of topics of a political nature suggested by users against the total number of examined postings was: 168 out of 210. Interestingly, the second most popular topic was media values and media role in critical events.

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i http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/about-us/what-we-do/spend-our-budget/public-diplomacy/

ii http://digitaldiplomacy.fco.gov.uk/en/about/digital-diplomacy/

11 GLOSSARY

Active engagement refers to forms of active practices that users perform on the analysed platforms that exceed content viewership to interaction with that content in a way that creates wider circles of diffusion and increases the fan base of the service. Users can practice a range of activities that vary according to the platform they are interacting through. On Facebook, Engaging with the content involves creating stories about the page, either by liking the page, posting on the page wall, linking, commenting on or sharing one of the page posts, answering a question posted on the page, mentioning the page, tagging the page, or recommending the page (talking about this). Tweeting or re-tweeting messages, reading news stories on a website, suggesting topics for discussion (i.e. on the Free Space section on BBCA website), or answering a question (i.e. questions posted on HYS section of the BBCA website) are all forms of activities through which users could participate in wider dissemination of the message and better performance and promotion of the BBCA space.

To avoid duplication and over estimation of audience activities, the analysis solely focuses on unique users' active engagement practices.

Website Site metrics
Page views: Page views report displays the number of times your website pages were viewed for the selected time period (hour, day, week, month, quarter or year). This report allows you to track page views for each individual page on your site, as well as an aggregate of page views for your website as a whole.
Weekly unique visitors: The number of unduplicated (counted only once) visitors to your website over the course of a single week. This report shows the number of unique visitors to your site for a selected weekly time frame. A unique visitor is counted the first time he/she visits your site within the selected time frame. If a visitor returns again to your site, they are not counted as a unique user again until the selected time frame has passed.
Time spent per visit: The length of time visitors spend viewing your site as a whole during each visit.
Site content
Pages: The Pages Report ranks the pages on your site based on those that receive the most traffic.
Exit links: The Exit Links report shows you the links that your visitors click to leave your site and go to another site. Exit links are those links that take your visitor to another site. Most common examples of exit links are links to partners, affiliates, etc.
Visitor retention

Visit number: SiteCatalyst report that helps you gauge visitor loyalty by tracking the number of times each visitor visits your site. During your selected time period, you can see whether more of the visits were from visitors that came to your site for the first time or the 20th time.
Return frequency: SiteCatalyst report that shows the number of days between repeat visits from your visitors.
Return visits: SiteCatalyst report that shows how many individuals have visited more than once since SiteCatalyst began tracking your site. These visits are not for a specified time, but are all those that have viewed your site once and have then returned.
Traffic sources
Referrers: The Referrers report shows where your visitors came from before they arrived at your site, the methods visitors use to find your Web site, and the number of visits to your site that came from these referring locations.
Facebook Performance of the Page
Total likes: The number of unique people who like your Page.
Friends of fans: The number of unique people who are friends with your fans, including your current fans.
People talking about this: The number of unique people who have created a story about your Page in the last seven days.
Total reach: The number of unique people who have seen any content associated with your Page (including any adverts or sponsored stories pointing to your Page) in the last seven days.
Publishing to the audience
Organic Reach: The number of unique people, fans or non-fans, who saw this post in their News Feed, Ticker or on your Page.
1.1.1 **Talking about this:** The number of unique people who have created a story from your Post. Stories include: Liking, commenting on or sharing your post, answering a question, responding to an event.
Viral Reach: The number of unique people who saw this post from a story published by a friend. These stories can include liking, commenting or sharing your post, answering a question or RSVP-ing to an event.
Who is the audience:
Gender and age: The percentage of people who liked your Page for each age and gender bracket as of the last day of your selected date range. This is based on the data people enter in their profile.
Countries: The number of people who liked your Page as of the last day of your selected date range, broken down by country. This is based on the user's IP address.
Languages: The number of people who liked your Page as of the last day of your selected date range, broken down by language. This is based on the user's default

language setting.

1.1.2 Twitter

BuzzGraph: A visual summary of 'buzz' around the searched term 'BBC Arabic' displays words that appear most frequently within the search results. Association between different keywords is represented by edges between them, which can be bold, simple, or dashed based on the strength of association. Strongly related words, which frequently appear together, have darker edges between them. The position of a word is not indicative to its relevance or frequency of mention. A word that appears at the corner of the BuzzGraph image can have the same or higher frequency of mention than a word in the centre. The BuzzGraph can be used to get a quick glance at the most talked about topics and keywords in relation to the search query, in this case, 'BBC Arabic'.

Key Conversations: The Key Conversations report extracts sentences that are most indicative of the buzz and discussion themes taking place for any particular search or query. The larger and bolder the font, the more representative a sentence is in capturing the buzz for a search.

Entities: An extraction of key entities and concepts associated with the dialogue surrounding the query (BBCA). Each phrase or term is automatically classified into predetermined categories in order to analyse dialogue by entity types (i.e. Person, Technology, City, Currency). Clicking on the category to the right brings up the list of entities in that category.

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End of report