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The 7th Mass Medium

An Exploration into the Role of Mobile Media in Development

Global Media Studies
D-level Thesis

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Abstract

The mobile phone has come to be identified as a mass medium with a significant impact in society but research is still limited to our understanding of the media that came before it. The purpose of this research was to firstly, explore how the mobile phone functions as a mass medium through the way it is used in production and distribution of media content and secondly, to investigate the contribution of mobile media to development through the way it engages citizen participation in production of content. To establish these, I employed a content analysis of SMS reports of a community media in Kenya, Voice of Kibera (VoK), which laid the platform for interviews of editors and focus group discussions of its audience. The findings revealed that the role of mobile media is mainly to enhance traditional roles of mass media such as newspapers, radio and TV. The impact and significance of the mobile phone as a mass medium therefore, largely depends on how users have appropriated it specific uses and how it is taking over the roles of previous mass media.

Keywords: Kenya, mobile phone, mass media, participation, development communication
1. Introduction

The transformation of the mobile phone from a mere communication technology to a form of media has formed part of scholarly discussion at least since 2001. Studies of the use of mobile phones during times of crises – such as the 9/11 attacks in New York, the 2004 Madrid bombings, the 2005 London bombings or the 2008 earthquake in China – have labelled out the mobile phone as a mass medium (see Höflich, 2011; Katz, 2011). In addition, Oksman (2010) argued that the use of the mobile phone for social and political mobilisation has turned it into a ‘medium in itself’ although in the past scholars held the view that the technology was a “sub-media” of the traditional media (p.3).

Earlier in 2008, Tomi Ahonen had referred to the mobile phone as the ‘The 7th of the Mass Media’, arguing that it has the same capabilities as its predecessors – print, recordings, cinema, radio, TV and the internet. What perhaps lacked in Ahonen’s argument was the specific investigation into how the mobile phone, both in theory and practice, takes a unique place as a mass medium. Yet still, the mobile phone is playing an important role in practice as a new media technology. It is increasingly being integrated into the functions of the traditional and new media through various forms of convergence. With its ubiquity, various functionalities and diverse uses, the mobile phone is influencing the way content is produced and distributed by the traditional media. As a new media technology, it is providing interactivity – one of its most revolutionary benefits – and the ability to link the media producers, their content and audience in a unique way (Heeks, 2008; Goggin & Hjorth, 2009). Indeed, the traditional and new media can be said to be gradually transforming the mobile phone into a unique mass medium, at least in its consumption.

Over the years, the increasing impact of the mobile phone on culture and society has been acknowledged and in particular, how its new media potentials such as interactivity are giving new populations a platform for civic engagement. Oksman (2010) argues that the mobile phone has lowered the “threshold for participation” for previously neglected populations in politics and society (p. 58). Although, the capacity for the mobile phone to increase media participation is now common among studies of participatory audience culture (see Jenkins, 2006) in the West, in the developing world, studies of the participatory potential of new media technologies are still few.
Despite its growing potential in society what, however, is still not clear in mobile communication and media studies is the question whether the mobile phone curves out for itself its own place as a mass medium. Another question that the growing use of the mobile phone as a mass medium poses is how its uniqueness compares with the traditional media or other new media technologies. Perhaps these questions and the place of the mobile phone as a new mass medium require investigation into its application in the real world and not only the rhetoric of its cultural and social significance.

Up to this point, it is easy to conclude that the mobile media discourse is largely western. Studies in the West on mobile media have focused on the various features of the mobile phone such as gaming and music and mobile internet because of their widespread use. However, the vast literature on any form of mobile media still largely ignore the fact that in the developing world the penetration of mobile internet or mobile phones with expanded technological features is still low.

In developing countries, the rapid diffusion and adoption of mobile phones in the past decade has presented enormous benefits for poor societies. The mobile phone is increasingly being considered as a technology that can spur socio-economic development. The success of particularly mobile banking in Kenya has led several scholars to suggest that the mobile phone might be the ‘holy grail for development’ (West, 2008). On another front, the mobile phone as a communication tool is being recognised as holding great potential in increasing the flow of information and engaging marginalised populations in development processes (ibid).

One of the impacts of mobile phones is in its growing use by the media in developing countries. In countries like Kenya, the mainstream media has over the years integrated the use of SMS in the dissemination of news among populations that have no access to the internet (Bürén et al, 2011). Apart from supplementing the role of the traditional media, the delivery of news via Short Message Service (SMS) has potentially provided increased citizenry role in the production and distribution of news. Perhaps, faced with an environment that is saturated with the rhetoric about the mobile success story, scholars have overlooked the growing significance of the mobile in media operations in developing countries.

For the last 20 years, literature on development communication has addressed the contribution of ICTs in reducing poverty in developing countries, but recently the tide
has been drawing towards the mobile phone. A new approach – mobile for development or M4D – has become a fertile ground for theory and research despite having a weak conceptual foundation (see Heeks, 2008). In fact, these dynamics of development communication approaches pose a great challenge in a field riddled with inconsistency in theorising the place of mass media or appropriating a definite role to new media technologies in development (Hemer, 2005). Yet, the role of the media, whether new or traditional, is still identified as crucial in enhancing communication for social change and therefore scholars agree there should be increased access to the media for the poor.

In the same vein, mobile communication studies put any media and development researcher in a difficult position. On the one hand, there is vast research on the use of the mobile phone for development. On the other hand, the integration of media studies into the field of mobile communications is still poor. Perhaps the reason is that the evolution of the mobile phone into a mobile medium leaves us with a “more sophisticated and complex apparatus for analysis” (Goggin and Hjorth, 2009, p.8). Consequently, the role of mobile media in development has not been defined, although scholars have just started to explore it.

That aside, mobile phones have been used to transmit various kinds of media content in the last decade in form of text, images and video (see Goggin & Hjorth, 2009). Mobile media content in developed countries have been enhanced with ‘smart phones’ which have the internet utility. Conversely, in developed countries, ‘dumb phones’ – without the internet utility – are still mostly used because of the low access to internet and therefore the Short Message Service is a popular feature of mobiles. However, with the exception of a study on the use of SMS news by Yunnan, a provincial paper in China, (see Liu & Bruns, 2007), research on the mobile media is still limited.

It is necessary therefore to explore the growing significance of the mobile phone as a mass medium through studies on how it is used, how its potentialities as a new media technology perhaps expands the opportunities for greater citizen participation and hence a probable contribution to development.

1.1. The aim of the study

The general purpose of this study is to explore how mobile media reframes the contemporary role of media in development. The objective is to establish how the mobile phone is used as a mass medium and further, if the technology carves out a
special place for itself in the production and distribution of news media content. My special focus is to investigate the use of the mobile phone by Voice of Kibera (VoK), a community media in Kenya, and how it acts as a platform for media participation. VoK is a largely an SMS-based media. It allows citizens living in Kibera – Kenya’s largest slum – to run it by sending and receiving news in form of text messages, images and video through their phones (Boakye, Scott & Smyth, 2010). I will focus on the case of mobile phone’s use in the delivery and production of content by VoK through SMS. The reason for selecting VoK is that it is a community media with a small and specific audience living in an accessible area in Kenya’s capital Nairobi, and it is also involved in citizen participatory programmes (Boakye, Scott & Smyth, 2010; Heinzelman & Waters, 2010). VoK also publishes and maintains an archive of reports on its website making the data easily available for analysis. I will therefore be guided by the following research questions:

1. How does Voice of Kibera function as a mass medium in highlighting issues affecting citizens in the community?
2. How does Voice of Kibera serve as a platform for participation and what is the resultant contribution to the community?

1.2 Definition of terms
Since some of the concepts I will use in this research are applied in various ways in different studies, here I briefly define them.

*Mobile phone*
In this research, ‘mobile phone’ or ‘mobile’ will refer to the technology for voice communication but is also used for texting, sending images and video – the function of Short Messaging Service and Multimedia Messaging Service (see Feldmann, 2005). I will further take into consideration the fact that SMS is largely used in Kenya because of widespread availability of mobile phones without internet, but the use of simple forms of mobile internet such as the Wireless Application Protocol (WAP), although limited, is starting to rise.
Mobile media
The concept of mobile media has been used in varied ways, for instance to refer to media or devices that are portable or ‘mobile’ like newspapers, radios or iPods (see Poster, 2005). This research will use the term to specifically refer to the mobile phone which serves as a site for mediated content to be produced or distributed through it (see Feldmann, 2005). Media organisations as well as users can generate this content for mobile media.

Development
The conception of development is contentious and often it is hard to pin down the term because of its use in different disciplines as well as social and cultural contexts (Sumner & Tribe, 2007). It is however crucial to be clear with the definition in any venture on development (see Melkote and Steeves, 2001; Sen, 1988).

There is common acceptance among scholars and practitioners that development entails ‘positive’ or ‘good’ change, although in the past 50 years development has oftentimes been described generally as socio-economic transformation (Sumner & Tribe, 2007). For the sake of this study, my conception of development will be narrow, focussing more on the citizen’s engagement with the opportunities that media provides to a society. For the risk of oversimplification of the concept, development in this research will imply the process of positive transformation of socio-political status of citizens as a means to attaining what Peet (2009) refers to as “better life” (p.1). By socio-political status, I will refer to the pointers towards citizen’s awareness of democratic space in which to exercise right of expression and participation as well as active engagement in affairs of their community. Even with a working definition, Chambers (2004) argues that there should be acknowledgement that the definition is “provisional and fallible” (p.iii). In this case, it is difficult to measure this kind of development I refer to, but only pointers can be noted.

Developing country
For the purpose of this study, ‘developing country’ will refer to a nation in which most people have low standards of living and at the same time has poor political culture and weak democratic institutions compared to nations in the West (only described in general terms by United Nation agencies and Freedom House, 2010).
1.3 Thesis structure

I have divided the thesis into six chapters. Accordingly, this chapter will be followed by a background, in Chapter 2, which will give a brief note on the motivation and then an introduction into the media landscape in Kenya, community media and Voice of Kibera. Chapter 3 will review literature on mobile phones in society, their implications to mass communication and the role of mass media in a developing country. It will be followed by an examination of the approaches to development communication theory, with a special focus on participatory communication. A discussion of the concept of participatory culture will lead the study to an analysis of what participation portends for the media. This chapter will be concluded through a discussion of the potential role of mobile media for development. Chapter 4 will discuss materials for the study and methods used to understand the case of Voice of Kibera. Chapter 5 will present the findings and analysis. The general conclusion reached in the study and the recommendations for future research will be in Chapter 6.
2. Background

In the last chapter, I introduced the research, specifying the aim, which is to explore how the mobile phone is used as a mass medium and its potential role in development. To understand the mobile medium, this study uses the case of a community media in Kenya, Voice of Kibera. In this chapter, I give a brief motivation of the study and an overview of the media in Kenya. I will then discuss community media before I introduce Voice of Kibera.

2.1 Personal note

Having worked with two newspapers in Kenya between 2007 and 2010, I witnessed a tremendous interest in SMS as an alternative for distribution of news by the print media. Today, the major newspapers in Kenya – the Standard and Nation – have reported remarkable success in the delivery of news through SMS (Bürén et al, 2011). SMS news delivery contributes a significant amount of revenue and has increased readership in a country of about 41 million people (Ibid). Perhaps owing to the success by the private print media, community media, like Voice of Kibera in Kenya’s largest slums, are also integrating the mobile phone in their operations. I was piqued by the fact that mobile phone is not treated like any other mass medium yet the power of SMS to distribute media content is increasingly becoming significant in Kenya. Since beginning my master’s in media studies in 2010, I have been interested in finding out how the mobile phone is being theorised as a mass medium and its possible implications to media in a developing country like Kenya. In the next part, I introduce the media in Kenya and how they have put to use the mobile phone.

2.2 Media in Kenya

Kenya’s media is touted as one of the most robust and vibrant in Africa (Abdi, Deane & BBC World Service Trust, 2008). The media’s role in development has been identified in efforts to entrench democratic governance and reduce poverty since the country’s independence from Britain in 1963. It has consequently had a tremendous impact in the socio-political awareness of the population (Ochilo, 1993; Wanyande, 1996). Indeed Kenya’s media landscape cannot be understood in isolation with major political events in the country’s history.
Kenya is among many sub-Saharan Africa countries that have experienced radical changes in political systems since the 1990s. In 1992, a change in Kenya’s independence constitution gave way to political pluralism and a gradual process of democratisation. In 2002 the opposition defeated the ruling party, the Kenya African National Union (KANU), which had been accused of repressing civil liberties. The second major milestone in Kenya’s democratic history was the promulgation of a new constitution in August 2010. The new constitution expanded the rights of citizens and secured the freedom of expression and the press. The lows of Kenya’s democratic process was in late 2007 and early 2008, when a disputed presidential election led to widespread violence in some parts of the country leading to deaths of more than 1,000 people and displacement of about 500,000 (Abdi, Deane & BBC World Service Trust, 2008). These political events have had a major impact on policy and operations of media.

The wave of democracy that begun in the early 1990s, came along with pressure from international donors for the liberalisation of the media. The state broadcaster, Kenya Broadcasting Corporation lost its monopoly leading to the rapid growth of private broadcast organisations and community media. Over the years, the media – including major newspapers, the *Daily Nation* and *Standard*, have gradually gained more freedom while restrictive regulations and oppressive laws have become disused or repealed. Indeed *Freedom House (2011)* notes that currently, freedom of the press and expression are respected while the passing of a new constitution in 2010 has put in place measures to protect these rights and other civil liberties. However, even with a more conducive political environment, Kenya’s media is not out of the woods yet. The *Freedom in the World Report 2011* stated that Kenya experiences occasional abuse of political rights and civil liberties.

To describe Kenyan’s media landscape briefly: corporate ownership of media is well-entrenched and majority of media are privately-owned by businesspeople and politicians. The government owns the public service media – the Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC). Years of political influence have seen KBC run down and lose audience although it still enjoys wide coverage across the country (Moggi and Tessier, 2001). Another notable fact is that the media in Kenya are largely urban-based and even community media have been more popular among the urban poor, leaving most rural areas neglected (Nassanga, 2010). Even so, vernacular FM radio stations target mainly the rural population and have in the years gained considerable popularity among the
populations with low literacy levels (Ibid 2010). Additionally the liberalisation of the airwaves of the 1990s saw the mushrooming of private media that have gained immense influence. Media concentration in Kenya has led to the growth of big media organisations such as Citizen, Standard and Nation media groups. Indeed the impact of these big media has seen the marginalisation of groups such as those with low incomes, women and the rural populace because these private media target the urban, affluent and rich (Gustafsson, 2008).

In summary, the traditional mass media in Kenya have had a considerable social-political impact in particularly improving governance, cultivating a democratic culture through mainly increasing citizen awareness of their rights to expression and public participation (Ochilo, 1993). They have further provided avenues for public debate on social, political and economic issues that have arguably been a major contribution to development (Ibid). But perhaps the entry of new media technologies is becoming more relevant in Kenya’s media landscape.

New media technologies
Most media in Kenya, broadcast and print, have gone online owing to the possibility of increasing their reach. They have further expanded their operations to integrate social media because of the rising use of Twitter and Facebook (see Bürén et al, 2011). The major newspapers, in particular, have some of the highest traffic to the online editions (Ibid). However, oftentimes the accessibility of new media technologies is hyped yet in Kenya access to the internet is still low and its advent in the country has further increased the ‘information gap’ between the urban and rural population or between the elites and the marginalised and poor communities (Nassanga, 2010). Even so, there is hope for wider citizen participation in governance since internet use is growing although the penetration rate is still largely low. According to 2009 statistics of the International Telecommunications Union there are only about 3.9 million users of internet (UNCTAD, 2010) in a population of 41 million (Bürén et al, 2011). Another pointer to the increasing influence of the Internet is in the use of social media in Kenya. Mäkinen and Wangu (2008) document how social media attracted a huge number of young Kenyans in rallying against violence that followed a 2007 presidential election when the government censored the mass media.
Use of mobile phones by the media

The penetration of mobile phones in sub-Saharan Africa is generally impressive (see ITU, 2010). However, the development of mobile services is still poor. In their report, Mobile media services at Sub-Saharan African newspapers: A guide to implementing mobile news and mobile business, Bürén et al (2011) observe that the rapid growth of mobile phone use in Kenya is remarkable, but mobile media services are “still quite basic and the usage and volumes are still low” (p.6).

SMS-based services still form a big part of mobile usage because most users have phones with basic functions, devices also favoured by mobile companies to increase their coverage to people of low or no incomes (Ibid). However, Bürén et al predict a success in penetration of ‘smart phones’ (with internet access for email, social media and browsing) in a few years because of the increasing availability of mobiles sold cheaply in second-hand markets. Indeed, statistics in Kenya show that 98 per cent of mobile subscribers access the internet through their phones (CCK, 2010). The positive impact of mobile internet in Kenya is contested even though the number of users is rising. A report by Abdi, Deane, BBC World Service Trust (2008) shows that mobile internet spurred the use of social media during Kenya’s post-election violence in 2007/2008 contributing to the propagation of hate speech by warring tribes.

The integration of mobile phone into traditional media is not new in Kenya. In fact when the penetration of mobile phones rose in the early 2000s, phone-in programmes became popular as well as the use of SMS to send views to FM radios (Nassanga, 2010). The popular forms of media participation are through SMS to talk shows and phone-ins on radio. Little has been documented on the impact of these kinds of SMS usage. However, as media that makes use of text, their significance can be speculated in terms of the print media and the consumption of news in Kenya.

The major newspapers, Daily Nation and the Standard – both privately-owned – began an SMS news service in 2005 and 2006 respectively. The reason the newspapers started the delivery of news through SMS is largely economic (Bürén et al, 2011). Users subscribe to categories of content, which are mainly news alerts (see Figure 1). By 2010, the Daily Nation and the Standard had a combined subscription of 120,000 users (Ibid). The newspapers offer the SMS news service in partnership with mobile phone networks and therefore share the revenue of the subscription fee. According to government
statistics, 25 million Kenyans were connected to mobile telecommunication services by mid-2011, representing a penetration rate of more than 60 per cent (CCK, 2011).

While SMS is billed as the mobile content access point growing in popularity, the cost is inhibitive in Kenya. Bürén (2011) reports that per-second billing system for calls makes voice most desirable and cheaper than SMS. In addition, a research conducted by AudienceScapes National Survey of Kenya, shows that the level of trustworthiness of news and information from SMS news service is low (Intermedia, 2010).

### 2.3 Community media

It is not within this study to discuss the role of community media. However, given that the organisation under focus – Voice of Kibera – operates as a community media, this topic deserves a brief presentation. Here I also point out that mobile media should be understood in the context of other media – mainstream and alternative – and the general role they play in development.

Community media are small media organisations created to have a close linkage with local communities and thereby promote development by mainly giving a voice to locals and involving them in the operations and management of the institution (Kivikuru, 2008; UNESCO, 1995a). Organisations like UNESCO and Amarc-Europe (1994) emphasise the ‘non-profit’ element of the community media, which provides a distinction between it and the commercial and public service media. Since it runs on low
budgets, most community media are managed by volunteers (see Kivikuru, 2008). Indeed, the description of community media, most often define their aims. Community media works to foster access and participation to the media for the citizen (Nassanga, 2010; Rennie, 2006, p.3). It mostly targets marginalised communities that have been sidelined from the mainstream and public service media and make them participants in their own development (UNESCO, 1995b; Wanyeki, 2000).

In her study of community media in Eastern and Southern Africa, Wanyeki (2000) notes that they are diverse in the medium they employ, the level of local participation and their goals. Although the ideal community media is one owned and managed by the community, in the region, some media that are independent of the state and are not commercial have been run by institutions with the goal to integrate community participation (Ibid, p.26-32). In Kenya religious organisations, community-based organisations and civil society groups have run most community organisations.

In the 70s and 80s, small community media, taking the forms of rural journals and radio forums, sought to increase literacy rates in most Africans countries, including Kenya (Kivikuru, 2008). Since the 1990s when most African nations experienced a significant growth in small media, diverse community media have sprung up. Their growth was spurred by two crucial events. Firstly, the liberalisation policy of the 1990s that led to media pluralism, which gave way to the mushrooming of private media to compete with the existing public service media. While the pre-existing state media was controlled by government and avoided any form of participation that challenged the establishment, the private media pursued commercial interests, subsequently targeting the elites in urban areas. A large group of poor urban and those in rural areas were thus sidelined and therefore community media came in to fill this void (Nassanga, 2010; UNESCO, 1995a). Secondly, the 1990s was the period in which participatory approaches to development communication were gaining recognition especially in the developed world (Carpentier, Rico & Servaes, 2003; Melkote & Steeves, 2001; Nassanga, 2010).

In Kenya, some of the forms of community media are participatory videos, community-based theatre groups, radio, magazines, newspapers and even audio listening groups (Wanyeki, 2000, p.27). A well-established network – Kenya Community Media Network (KCOMNET) – has popularised the work of citizen media (Nassanga, 2010). Community media in rural areas are widespread, while in the urban areas they are common in the informal settlements. Kibera, the largest slum in Kenya, has a
concentration of community media ranging from print media to new ones that make use of new technologies. They include, Pamoja FM radio, Kibera News Journal, Voice of Kibera and Kibera News Network. In her research of community media in Kibera, Gustafsson (2008) concluded that their growth has largely been a response to the marginalisation by the mainstream media, negative coverage and the need to seek alternative information and platform to participation (p.2). Ultimately, apart from providing a ‘voice’ to the people of Kibera and an alternative coverage that projects an accurate image of their development and daily lives, community media have given them the opportunity as citizens to take part in the democratisation process in Kenya (Ibid).

Mapping community media in Kenya or Africa, their growth, history and impact requires ample space and time, but what is more important to this paper is how they have evolved in an environment of changing new media technologies. However, little has been documented on the advent of these new media on the community media sphere. In her study of the new media technologies in Eastern Africa, Nassanga (2010) notes that one of the significant impacts of ICTs is in expanding the concept of the ‘local’ so that community media have audiences beyond their geographical locations. Already the use of mobile phones and internet has offered community news to local audiences, creating “virtual communities”, which include international audiences (Ibid, p. 51)

Even so, Nassanga observes that the key challenges in utilisation of new media technologies include lack of media literacy, the awareness of the opportunities and skills to participate, as well as the understanding of the right of communities to express themselves through the new platforms (p.44). Another challenge for community media in Kenya is that their role is yet to be fully grasped (Moggi and Tessier, 2001).

2.3.1 Voice of Kibera
Voice of Kibera was formed as a citizen-reporting project by Map Kibera organisation. In 2009, Map Kibera started a project of using Global Positioning System (GPS) technology to create a digital map for Kibera. The purpose of the map was to identify locations and collect information that will be useful for local authorities and other organisations to effectively provide key services to Kiberans (Boakye, Scott & Smyth, 2010). When the founders, Erica Hagen and Mikel Maron, began the project, they quickly achieved their objective of locating information on vital services in the slums that are occupied by more than 250,000 people (Oliverio, 2011). What remained was how to sustain the
mapping project by feeding and updating information regularly for these identified locations.

Map Kibera then launched two citizen media arms, Voice of Kibera and Kibera News Network (a video project for up-and-coming journalists in Kibera). The purpose of the two arms was to expand the mapping concept by collating information as news and feature stories through the help of volunteers around Kibera. Map Kibera took up a ready-made application for citizen reporting created by Ushahidi – an organisation that crowdsources information about crises – to be used by Voice of Kibera. The application is designed to help participants in the community to send and consume news and other kinds of information on Kibera, (via mobiles and online) collected through the entire Map Kibera framework (see Heinzelman & Waters, 2010). It is mostly technology-based, attempting to integrate the use of SMS and online media in collecting and archiving information about the Kibera community.

Indeed the aim of VoK is to “aggregate and visualize information” about Kibera through the use a digital map prepared by Map Kibera (Tully, 2010, *What is Voice of Kibera?*). Its objective is to give locals opportunities to play the role of reporters by sending in information through SMS or its website (Ibid). Citizen reporters are expected to send reports on topical issues or community news via SMS, email or the VoK website. VoK’s procedure for citizen reporters is to send SMS to a short code, 3002. The text message must include the word ‘Kibera’ and the location (one of the digitally mapped centres. To access the information, Kiberans can subscribe to SMS alerts for different categories of news such as sports. A special subscription of “alerts digest” allows one to receive an SMS with a summary on news of the day (Boakye, Scott & Smyth, 2010, p.44). The Kenyan mobile phone networks charge five Kenya shillings (six US cents) for each SMS. Readers can as well log on to the Voice of Kibera website and read the reports that the site administrators, who act as editors, have verified and published (see Figure 2).
VoK intends to give the community editorial control and therefore locals decide what issues are to be reported (Ibid). VoK’s ‘editorial board’ consist two groups: there are the ‘site administrators’, whose role is to approve and publish reports online and ‘SMS reporters’, who are members of the community identified to help in “crowdsourcing” information (Tully, 2010, *What is Voice of Kibera*?).

Voice of Kibera is offering the community a platform through which they can engage with authorities on issues that affect them (Boakye, Scott & Smyth, 2010, p.5). VoK shares its information with community radio, Pamoja FM radio and newsletter, *Kibera Journal*. It receives donor funding from organisations such as UNICEF, but seeks to rely on volunteers to reduce costs (Ibid). One of the earliest challenges noted in a UNICEF report, *Case Studies: Mobiles for Development*, was the low level of understanding and awareness about VoK by the community. Boakye, Scott & Smyth reported that “the concept of achieving change through sending an SMS is difficult to grasp” (p.45).

**Summary**

Finally, in this section I have given a brief motivation for the study, introduced the media in Kenya and given an overview of community media, focusing on the case of Voice of Kibera. In the next section, I will review literature and discuss theoretical approaches with the aim of understanding Voice of Kibera as a mobile medium and ultimately the role of mobile media in a developing country.
3. Literature Review and Theory

In this chapter, I explore literature related to mobile media, development and participation. The objective is to investigate the potential role of mobile media in development. To understand mobile media, I will begin with a section on literature on the role of the mobile phone in society. I will examine the mobile phone as a mass medium by examining recent forms of theorising the new media technology. I will then briefly examine the role of mass media and news in society. The theoretical basis for this study will be launched in the section on development communication. Among the approaches to development communication, I will focus mainly on participatory communication. This will be followed by a section on participatory media culture. The ultimate goal for exploring the approach and concept is to examine the discourses of ‘participation’, which may perhaps shed light on the contributions of the mobile medium towards development. My exploratory journey to understanding the potential role of mobile media in development can be summarised in a radial cycle (see Figure 3).

![Figure 3: Approach to theory and literature review](image-url)
3.1 Mobile phone and SMS

Mobile phones are an integral part of our everyday lives and they have been put to many uses that can be said to be revolutionary (Heeks, 2008). According to Boyd (2005), the mobile phone has been transformed from a mere communication tool to a form of ‘Swiss army knife’. Apart from the calling function, the technology affords the user other features such as SMS, MMS, phonebook storage, clock, watch, calculator and even mini torches. Recent mobiles have come with added multimedia features such as the camera, voice recorder and the internet. These broad functions have brought with them social, political and economic benefits to the users and have been subject of various studies. In countries like Kenya where the mobile money transfer service has had huge success, the mobile phone has replaced the wallet hence the symbolic socio-economic importance. Some of the recent studies into mobiles have been concerned with how they have affected interpersonal communication and connectedness (Goggin & Hjorth, 2009) or its impact as “transaction device” and “identity marker” (West, 2008). Indeed the uses and roles of mobiles are diverse and require ample discussion. In this research, I will mainly focus on the informational capacity of mobile phones.

The capacity of the mobile phone to be used to send and receive information in form of SMS has particularly been huge in developing countries because of low literacy rates. The popularity of the mobile phone in developing countries is attributed to: low cost; the efficiency of the prepaid system by mobile network companies; functionality (not a high literacy is required); and the convenience of SMS texting (Kaplan, 2006, pp.8-9; Donner, 2009).

One of the first uses of SMS that gives evidence of the remarkable capacity of the mobile phone to be used in disseminating information is in social and political mobilisation. In his 2002 book, *Smart mobs: The next social revolution*, Howard Rheingold coined the term ‘smart-mob’ to describe the way texting was being used to mobilise communities to support social and political movements. Rheingold (2003) cites one of the first notable cases of mobile media use. In 2001, political activists in Philippines used SMS to mobilise citizens to join mass demonstrations leading to the ouster of former President Joseph Estrada (pp.157-159). The power of mobilisation through the mobile phone has also been noted in passive forms of activism as in the case where mobile phones were used massively to collect and spread information moments after the London bombings of 2005 (Gordon, 2005).
This capacity for SMS to be used for organisational purposes has given way to the emergence of the ‘citizen journalist’. According to Goggin and Hjorth (2009), ‘citizen journalism’ is a form of ‘smart-mob’ through which masses can take part in reporting, collecting, and spreading news and information (p.120). They argue that the use of SMS by the masses to spread information can surpass the ability of the traditional media to do so. The mobile phone has further been used to disseminate and distribute news that is subject to censorship on other media platforms. Kenya, in particular, is a site of one of the ‘citizen journalism’ success story. In 2007, a group of amateur journalists founded a platform, ushahidi.com, through which political violence – following a disputed presidential election – could be monitored by citizens through SMS. At the time, the Kenyan government had banned live broadcast of news.

Additionally, the mobile phone mobile has revolutionised opportunities for civic engagement (Oksman, 2010, pp.44-58). According to Castells et al (2004), “mobile communications devices are multipurpose, multi-channel connecting point of the network of communication of which everybody becomes a personal node” (p. 75). The accessibility of masses to a vast network technology has not only democratised media but is having a significant impact on the traditional centres of power. In fact, the possibilities for participation in producing media content has already challenged the commercial media enterprise and now even threatening media conglomerates (Goggin and Hjorth, 2009).

Indeed, the use of the mobile phone is gradually gaining immense significance in the mainstream media. TV and radio organisations have used the mobile phone to coordinate with reporters, who also use the device to get information from sources (Karlsen, 2010; Hellström, 2010). Through convergence, the use of the mobile phone has been integrated into that of traditional media, and more significantly in the exchange and production of various kinds of content (see Goggin & Hjorth, 2009; Oksman, 2010). Radio and newspaper organisations now receive feedback from their audiences, news tips, comments or even news content via SMS. In several countries in Africa, for instance, call-in programmes on FM radio largely depend on the audience participation with the use of their phones (Nassanga, 2010).

In the dissemination of news, the mobile as an "instant medium" not only enables content to be delivered in real-time but also in a capacity, that supersedes that of other media (Fortunati, 2005; Oksman, 2010, p. 59). However, some of the intrinsic
weaknesses of the mobile phones are a hindrance to its effective use. For instance, mobiles without internet, commonly referred to as 'dumb phones', do not enable users to access content online. Others weaknesses include, the unreliability of the mobile phones because they could easily be jammed as a result of immense voice or text traffic, or by mobile companies and governments, lack of multimedia features which limit owners from sending images or videos and their short battery life.

There are some disadvantages of the mobile, which relate directly to its increasing use for delivery of SMS news. The 160-character limit is a major hindrance in providing context and depth of issues. Others are the sublime nature of content in mobile phones and the lack of elaborate distinction with 'the personal'. Personal messages and the ones that are more serious are received and consumed the same way while SMSs being stored in the phone have to be deleted regularly because of limited storage capacity. According to Groebel, Noam and Feldmann (2006), users have not used the mobile phone entirely in receiving media content but have taken the advantage of the availability of the mobile phone everywhere in receiving information with personal importance (pp.243-244). Additionally, the small screen of mobile phones can at times affect visibility or may just be cumbersome for users hence discourage them from using it to receive media content.

Even so, there is a strong defence for use of mobile media in the developing world where media such as TV, newspapers or the internet are not as pervasive in society as in the West. Donner (2009), for instance argues that “... forms of mobile media based on low-cost, ubiquitous SMS features have the potential to be accessible, relevant, and popular among many users in the developing world” (p.93). West (2008) adds that mobile media might have a big impact in reaching audiences that have not benefitted from popular media such as radio. He asserts that the mobile phone “holds unprecedented opportunity for media in developing countries to engage their core audiences more deeply, reach new audiences on the edge of their current footprint and provide interactive and customised information services that are both profitable and life-improving” (executive summary). However, these potential benefits of mobile media are only starting to be explored and again, empirical studies investigating the use of mobile media in developing countries are rare and hence their impact is only based on speculation. Literature on mobile media in most developing countries is scarce, even though the device has provided practical solutions to editorial operations of media
organisations. It is therefore difficult to establish the impact cell phones have had in dissemination of media content. One case of use of media in dissemination of media content that has been studied is that of Yunnan, a provincial newspaper in China. According to Liu and Bruns (2007), Yunnan was driven to introduce SMS news by the existence of huge market in China and the need to provide value-added services.

In sum, scholars contend that there is tremendous potential in using the mobile phones to increase the availability of information that is necessary for development. The intervention of any mass media in development initiatives is what scholars of development communication have grappled with since the 1950s. Before we address the question of communication and development, I will focus on the mobile phone as a mass medium and what it portends for mass communication and then briefly examine the role of mass media and news in society.

3.2 Mobile as a mass medium

In 1983 when the first mobile phone was made in Manhattan, US, mobility was the new feature added to the voice telephony (Groebel, Noam & Feldmann, 2006). Since then mobile communications have been transformed with the mobile phone becoming a technology that transmits not only voice, but text and even video. It has become a widely used new media technology that allows for the creation of varied types of content and interactivity as we saw earlier in the introduction. Indeed recent studies of mobile communication such as that of Katz (2011) acknowledge that the mobile phone as a mass medium is one area that has inevitably come into the focus for media studies. In his study of the role of mobile phones during China’s 2008 earthquake, Katz noted that mass texting during the crisis and the use of the mobile phone as radio turned it into a mass medium (p.98-99).

As mentioned earlier in the introduction, Goggin and Hjorth (2009) contend that the evolution of the mobile phone to a mass medium leaves us with a “more sophisticated and complex apparatus for analysis” (p.8). This is because the mobile phone is not a “static medium” (see Oksman 2010, p.59) like other traditional media like radio and at the same time, it has been put into varied uses while it has numerous features and characteristics. The mobile phone is further “located between personal, social and mass media” (Ibid, p.3). Enthusiasts of the potentiality as of the mobile phone like Ahonen (2008) acknowledge that the mobile is the “least understood” of other media like the TV.
and internet. (p.59). Despite the complexity of the mobile as a technology, Goggin and Hjorth (2009) note that the device gives scholars a chance to rethink how to reconceptualise it in the context of the various disciplines that have hitherto addressed the mobile phone and its growing uses. However, the questions that are driving this research are, despite the complexity of the device in terms of its features and uses, does the mobile phone curve out for itself its own unique place as a mass medium? How does its uniqueness compare with the new and traditional media? In this section, I examine the mobile as a technology that is a platform for the process of mass communication.

For a while, the mobile phone was understood as an interpersonal communication medium (see Katz, 2011) but the mobile phone has now ventured into the territory of mass communication. Oksman (2010) regards the mobile phone as a “medium in itself” because it has its “own specific characteristics and social functions” (p.3). One of the challenges in seeing the mobile phone as a mass medium is that it is still an “uninstitutionalized and undetermined medium” (Ibid, p. 60). There is hardly an organisation that forms itself around the mediation capacity of the mobile phone. The lack of the ‘mobile mediahouse’ is perhaps a challenge to mobile enthusiasts like Ahonen (2008) who identifies the technology as ‘the 7th of the mass media’ after the print, recordings, cinema, radio, TV and the internet [Pearce (2009) mentions two more: magazines and books].

Goggin & Hjorth (2009) highlight the challenges of examining mobiles as media. Key among them is the fundamental question of how mobile media affects our understanding of forms of communication across symbolic and technical forms. They propose that dealing with this challenge requires that we understand that mobile media is not ‘new media’ but a “recontextualization of older media, ideologies, and practices” (p.7). However, this problem of contextualisation of communication is broader as regards to the concept of ‘mass communication’. New media technologies like the mobiles have distorted our original understanding of the concept ‘mass communication’.

Mass communication has been simply understood as a form of communication that uses a technology (or medium) to deliver messages to large audiences (Baran & Davis, 2011, p. 5; Biagi 2011). A simple linear model has often been used to describe mass communication process where six elements are involved (sender, message, receiver, channel, feedback and noise). In the foundation of mass communication, the critical
element is the medium, which is basically the one that delivers the message. However, mass communication has rapidly changed due to new technologies and how people are involved in mediated communication leading to the blurring of the boundaries between interpersonal and mass communication. Baran and Davis (2011) explain:

... mediated communication as existing on a continuum that stretches from interpersonal communication at one end to traditional forms of mass communication at the other. Where different media fall along this continuum depends on the amount of control and involvement people have in the communication process (p.6).

According to Thompson (1995), ‘mass’ becomes inapplicable because new media technologies target niche audiences and not just a diverse, undifferentiated and arbitrary group. Yet again, the audience are no longer mere receivers but active participants in media production. The aspect of communication has also been reviewed by scholars. ‘Communication’ is no longer just one-way as it had been before because of the characteristics of new media such as interactivity. Thompson (1995) predicted a fundamental change in ‘mass communication’ in the way it compares to telephone communication. He saw the blurring of the ‘interpersonal’ and ‘mass’, which is now a reality with the mobile medium.

Oftentimes discussions of mass communication feature the nature and the roles of traditional media vis-à-vis newer media technologies. While the objective of this study is not to make a comparison between ‘old’ and ‘new’ media (contested terms, see Gitelman & Pingree, 2003), what might be useful to note is that the mobile phone is not used in isolation from other media or other kinds of technology related to it. Ahonen (2008) offers a techo-deterministic view of how the mobile phone is emerging as mass medium that is the “youngest, newest and most far-reaching and most powerful” (p.68). He argues that the ubiquity of the mobile phone and the huge impact of SMS makes it the most pervasive in society as we saw in the last section. Ahonen’s conception of ‘power’ of the mobile medium, although limited, is enlightening because he draws the picture of the potential influence of a ‘mobile media organisation’ could yield. In fact, Goggin (2011) explores this new discourse in the area of the political economy of the
mobile media. He argues that telecommunications companies are becoming a formidable force in shaping the cultural industry emerging out of the mobile technology. He highlights the question of commercialisation and how emerging media like the mobile medium have not been able to shade off the consequent influences by corporations. The question of media influence through commercialisation, state or private owners’ interests has been with us for a long time (see, Bagdikian, 2000). Perhaps the influence of mobile phone companies is overrated but in mass communication terms these corporations may have to be understood as the new intermediaries in the transmission of the message from traditional media, which are the traditional sources.

Moreover, Groebel, Noam and Feldmann (2006) observe that although mobile devices afford users “higher convenience”, media use is still largely determined by “rituals, practicalities, and behaviour patterns” applied (p.240). He notes that the era of media socialisation, which has given way to the adaptation of individual usage to the varied new media technologies, has shaped the consumption of mobile content. The mobile device is attractive to the users of varied new media because it meets the “5-i” criteria of “immediacy, internationality (or ubiquity), integration (of media), independence (of time and space), and interactivity” (Ibid). The SMS feature of the mobile is an example of the spontaneity of transmitting information and the interactivity that the device avails to the users and it is perhaps the reason why mobile phone use has become pervasive in society and widespread.

However, Goggin & Hjorth (2009) argue that the challenge in the conceptualisation of the mobile medium is its impact on audience creativity and in particular, how it blurs the role of professional and amateur in media production. To them, while the democratisation of media through new media technologies is a strength, the danger the mobile medium contributes is to increase inequalities since its technical possibilities for audience participation are mostly available in developed countries (Ibid, p.7).

To conclude, although the mobile phone in itself is a complex medium and is yet to be fully understood as a mass medium, one thing however is clear, the mobile medium cannot be understood outside the context of other traditional medium. As Oksman (2010) argues, the mobile phone is a “medium among others” and functions in integration with others and at the same time a medium in itself. Instances when it is understood as a mass medium are intermittent such as in times of crises, or when it is
being used for social and political mobilisation. In mass communication terms it is still “uninstitutionalized and undetermined medium” (see Ibid, p.60). Currently, Oksman observes, the role of mobile phone as mass medium is yet to be fully understood. It is therefore important to investigate how this new media technology has been put to use as a mass medium and the subsequent implications.

Here I have discussed the mobile phone as a mass medium and with basic use of SMS or MMS, but is also important to acknowledge how the significance of mobile internet. Mobile internet provides a wide array of uses and in discussing the concept of 'mobile media' it is important to put this into perspective. The access to internet on mobile phone has given way to the expansion of the basic uses of the device such as the integration with social media, which is gaining much importance in the developed as well as the developing world. It is evidently clear that generally the potentials of media participation have been widened enormously with the increased use of the mobile phone (see Jenkins, 2006).

3.3 Mass media and news in society
The classical roles of the traditional media are, education, information and entertainment. Oftentimes, however, the roles of mass media have been discussed by scholars in the context of the subjects under focus, whether they are political, social or economic. Much criticism of these roles of traditional media has formed part of the political economy discourse. Hodges (1986) broadly categorised the roles of mass media as political, educational, and cultural. According to Hodges, the media’s political function is to serve as a watchdog on behalf of the citizens by keeping in check political and economic centres of power. The watchdog function goes hand in hand with the educational role whereby the media is expected to provide information along with a ‘marketplace of ideas’ to enable citizens participate in a public sphere (Ibid, pp. 19-25). According to Curran (2005), the political role by the media is essential in cultivating a deliberative democracy:

... the media should keep people informed about public affairs so that individuals are adequately briefed when they take part in the process of self-government. The media should be fearless watchdogs, vigilantly examining the exercise of
power and protecting the public from wrongdoing. The media should also provide a platform of open debate that facilitates the formation of public opinion. In addition, the media should be the voice of the people, representing to authority the citizenry views and expressing the agreed aims of society. In short, the primary democratic tasks of the media are to inform, scrutinize, debate, and represent (p.120)

The cultural functions, according to Hodges (1986), are mainly social – the media ‘mirrors’ society by giving account of stories that defines citizens as humans in their community; and the media feeds citizens with information necessarily in their daily lives by acting like a ‘bulletin board’ (pp. 19-25).

Although Curran, emphasises that the roles she ascribes to the media are only ideal. Indeed the question that has loomed large over the media is whether it can perform its social responsibility amidst commercialisation or state control. Private media dwells on consumerism in seeking to maximise profits and therefore there is a preponderance of entertainment products, yet African scholars like Nassanga (2010) argue that developing countries need educational and informational programmes (p. 44). An additional challenge to media’s capacity to perform its role is accessibility. The reach and diversity of media like newspapers and TV is limited, although radio has often been assumed as widespread and important in developing countries. Even in cases where the reach of the media is satisfactory, benefits of the media have not sifted to the entire populace. Nassanga (2010) describes the situation, where the poor, rural, woman is still the most marginalised despite the rapid growth of media like the radio in Africa.

**News**

In general, news is a mechanism through which the “world out there” is brought to us (Monahan 2010, p.19; Watson, 2008). In other words, it is a category of knowledge and information through which a citizen can adapt to changes, makes choices and set the standards that suit a particular society (Preston, 2003, p.17-18). What news does is to offer us the realities decided by media organisations and this influences the way we interpret meaning in everyday life (Ibid).
There are two roles of news media often cited by scholars: Firstly is the agenda-setting role, whereby certain issues become the focus of media coverage. Through this role, the media highlight issues and events that would otherwise not have come to the attention of the public (Monahan, 2010). Secondly, the media provides a frame – the lens through which it “ascribe(s) meanings to actions, events, and issues and to guide interpretations of social life” (Ibid, p. 36). Through the “frame”, news then becomes a platform through which the audience “thinks and talks” about issues brought to its attention by the media (Ibid).

The understanding of the news media’s public function has often been associated with the concept of public sphere as put forward by Jurgen Habermas (1996). In the view of Habermas, the news media should provide information on community concerns along with an avenue for deliberation (Harvey, 2007, p.70). Deliberation is critical in a developing society if the masses are to perform their political role. With the information on issues affecting the society, citizens can address problems affecting development.

Furthermore, Harvey (2007) observes that the key contribution of the news media is in strengthening the democratisation process through serving as a watchdog over the abuse of power and as an agenda-setter for policymakers (p.69). African media scholars like Ochillo (1983) agree that the news media has a critical political role in the continent in promoting democracy by keeping checks on the excesses of governments. However, the benefits that come along with an open civic platform such as the increased participation diminish when the ‘public interest’ (see Preston, 2009) that is retained by the news media is subject to control by governments or corporations. Thus, the subject of media freedom for institutions and the expansion of civil liberties for citizens through the news media should be a major concern for development agents. With the advent of mobile media in particular, the significance of news is changing since the mobile phone is ubiquitous and has the potential of reaching more citizens in developing nations.

**3.4 Development communication**

Development communication, as has been referred to often, may seem to easily present us with a theoretical framework for understanding mobile phones as a mass medium, but its discourses present us with complexities from the start. Fifty years after extensive research on development communication, a coherent approach for theory and research is yet to be found (Harvey, 2007; Servaes, 2008). Even so, development communication
approaches have formed part of understanding the intervention of mass media in developing countries. I will explore development communication approaches and the role mass media has been appropriated and will later focus on one of the approaches, participatory communication.

In trying to show there is a form of consensus in this complex field, Servaes (2008), argues that “development communication” is the broad term used in all approaches that have one common aim – producing a positive societal change (p.15). With this perspective, I therefore use McPhail’s (2009) definition of development communication as “... a process of strategic intervention toward social change initiated by institutions and communities” (as cited in Wilkins & Mody, 2001, p. 385). Social change, according to McPhail's definition cuts across social, political and cultural spheres of our daily lives. As theory and practice, the area of development communication has been framed along several communications models (Tufte and Mefalopulos, 2009). Early approaches to development communication such as modernisation and dependency paradigms emphasised linear models of communication and targeted passive audience (Mefalopulos, 2008).

The main approaches to development communication have been: modernisation (sometimes referred to as the dominant paradigm), participatory and diffusion theories and, more recently information communication technologies for development (ICT4D) and mobile for development (M4D). The modernisation paradigm is significant because it not only spurred research in the integration of communication systems into development but gave way to the designing of mass media models by several scholars such as Lasswell (1948), Katz and Lazarfeld (1955) and Schramm (1964). The modernisation paradigm that was adopted soon after the First World War bequeathed the mass media a powerful role in development. The paradigm argued for the transfer of knowledge and technology from the developed countries to developing ones through the influence of attitudes and mindsets that was to be facilitated by the mass media (Inagaki, 2007, p.5; Mefalopulos, 2008).

As the dominant paradigm of the 1970s, the modernisation theory by Lerner (1962), Schramm (1964) and others assumed that the media would achieve development goals through its power “to inspire individuals to act and think in modern, Western ways” (Wilkins, 2000, p.2). The mass media was to communicate the western knowledge and technology in a top-down style to many passive recipients in developing countries.
(Mefalopulos, 2008, p.44-47). Indeed the stiffest opposition of this paradigm arose from this ‘overestimated’ power of the media. Mefalopulos (2008) argues that the paradigm gave credence to the assumption that the media could influence attitudes and mind-sets of the world’s poor to achieve development yet communication studies in the 70s was increasingly revealing the vital role of interpersonal communication. There was increasing evidence that the power of the media was overrated, the impact of the media exaggerated and that targeted audience were not necessarily passive (Ibid). Indeed the failure of this paradigm to catapult poor nations to development caused communication scholars to review the linear models of communications.

An alternative to the modernisation paradigm came in the 70s from scholars of the dependency theory. This theory was criticised immediately as it was formulated because of its proposals that rich nations had the power to drag the poor ones to development (Wilkins, 2000). But what is interesting to our discussion is perhaps the role of mass media. The point of departure from the modernisation theory was that dependency theorists emphasised the essence of a fair flow of information between nations of different status. In this attempt to create balance of information on development through the mass media the theorists overlooked the role of diverse media, owned privately and by communities and instead supported the state-run media system (see Mefalopulos, 2008, p. 48-50), which stifled freedom of citizens to actively participate in various spheres of development.

Soon after, the theory of diffusion of innovations was formulated. As put forward by American scholar Everett Rogers in the 60s, the diffusion theory proposed the transfer of information and innovations to the developing countries. Here again, the media took the fundamental role of creating awareness about development programmes so as to influence social change (Harvey, 2007; Servaes, 1995).

However, the diffusion theory was also faulted for being “too one-way” in its communication approach and therefore not giving the poor a chance to participate in their own development (Harvey, 2007, p.180-181). More significantly, it overrated the power of the media and underrated the importance of interpersonal communication (Ibid, Inagaki, 2007, p.6). When Rogers (1986) revised his works on diffusion of innovations theory, he now acknowledged the participatory role of poor communities, but at the same time appreciated the intervention of the media in the development process. Rogers’ revision of his theory had been preceded by the participatory
approach, which was an attempt by theorists and practitioners such as the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire in the 1950s, to recognise the role of communities in the process of development. Indeed, in the 1990s development scholars, whose focus were on social movements, recognised the strength of the participatory approach in giving marginalised communities power to “control their own social change” (Wilkins, 2000, p.2). What was unique about the participatory model is that it argued for the packaging of media content in a way that would make the mass media and local communities to play a mutual influential role in social change (Servaes, 1995; Wilkins, 2000).

In the next section, we shall look at in detail the approach of participatory development communication. What is noteworthy here for now is that in participatory and diffusion approaches, an ‘independent’ media has a fundamental role of providing a public sphere for addressing social issues and therefore, development agents advocate for freedom of the press. Later in the 1990s, the approaches to development communications that we have examined experienced a radical transformation when ICTs became popular leading to the emergence of the Information Communication Technologies for Development or ICT4D.

**ICT4D**

The distinction between ICT4D and the previous approaches to development is that economic growth is not its focus (Unwin, 2009). Instead, ICT4D promotes a multi-disciplinary approach in addressing development (Ibid). Many scholars agree that ICT4D integrated into development most technologies that were increasingly used in the 1990s. In the early 2000s, romanticism of new media technologies was the common feature with theorist professing its potential to spur social change. The dynamics in the developing world such as lack of access to these technologies were overlooked. Critical development theorists urged caution in calling for a consideration of the potential for social change of any technology based on the historical discourse on new media (Wilkins & Mody, 2001, p.391).

However, most ICT4D proponents emphasise the role of computer technology and mainly the internet for development purposes. According to Pieterse (2009), ICT4D is flawed since it is based on the assumption that connectivity, through ICTs, grows capital that will end poverty. Another critic Raiti (2007) argues that ICT4D is a loosely-built area of theory and research since its proponents overlook the input of other fields such
as media studies. Indeed, ICT4D is ambiguous on the role new media technologies and even the traditional media. Additionally, the ICT discourse is rife with an antagonism between optimists of ICTs and a group Houston and Jackson (2009) refers to as “cultural pessimists” (p.99). The ICT optimists are technology deterministic, seeing new technologies as a panacea to development while ‘cultural pessimists’ argue, “ICTs will not lead to development unless social context is accounted for” (Ibid).

**M4D**

The criticisms above are perhaps the key reasons why the focus is shifting to a new approach: mobile for development or M4D. This approach, which is increasingly becoming a fertile ground of theory and research, largely proposes the integration of the mobile phone into mainstream development activities. The mobile phone is seen as a tool that will spur development and lead to enormous economic change (Hellström, 2010).

M4D is an offshoot of ICT4D although scholars often ignore this fact. During its emergence in the mid-2000s it presented a research gold mine, but developing its conceptual roots has been overlooked (Heeks, 2008). Instead, focus has been placed on technologically deterministic research. In her report on M4D, Wicander (2009) points out to the informational capacity of the mobile as key to development (p.131-132). She argues that mobile phones, when used as media, are sufficient for improved information flows that are vital for development. However, the traditional media is yet to be integrated into the M4D approach and the same applies to the mobile media. Scholars have overrated the power of ICTs in general and have thus undermined the role of the traditional media (Ogan et al, 2009).

**Summary**

Development communication is a fruitful discourse for a study that seeks to identify the role of media because it tracks the efforts over several decades by theorist and practitioners to appropriate a role to media in development. They also highlight the intervention of any media and examine its impact. Conversely, the fluid conception of ‘development’ weighs heavily on the development discourse and thus, despite any approach geared towards the outcome of ‘development’, this goal is usually an ambiguous one. It is therefore necessary to not only question the concept of
‘development’, but to specify its definition in any single venture into development communication.

The approaches that focus on the role of the media have been inadequate perhaps because most researchers seek the audience of policymakers such as governments, and a few times, the grassroot communities. Again, the media may have been relegated because it rarely operates on the basis of social responsibility. Instead, the influential private media has become a ‘capitalistic enterprise’ bent on acquiring maximum profits as McQuail (2005) describes it (p.190).

The fundamental impact of the changing approaches to development communication was in media development. The growing denunciation of the top-bottom approaches and the consequent acceptance of two-way communication immensely influenced the drive towards the involvement of targeted communities in development. It became necessary, for instance to constitute media that valued decisions of the masses as well as placed the communities at the centre of media-making. In sub-Saharan Africa, for instance, the impact to media development saw the realisation of the fact that community media had a greater role to play in integrating the people to development initiatives as well as expanding access to information, roles which commercial and public service media were performing poorly (Wanyeki, 2000).

3.4.1 Participatory communication

Participation is a fluid concept because it is relative and is often referred to in different contexts. Its definition is in fact an area of contention – sometimes fraught with “complexity and ambiguity” – with consequent impact in theory and practice of participatory communication (Mefalopulos, 2008, p. 52). Although participation is an ideal concept (Stiglitz, 2002), over the years it has become a fundamental part of development initiatives. Tufte & Mefalopulos (2009) define participation as the “involvement of ordinary people in a development process leading to change (p.4).

The concept was taken up in the 1970s as a recourse to earlier development approaches that failed, but its adoption still leaves a lot to be desired (Mefalopulos, 2008). Since then, the concept has gained notoriety for being both contentious and problematic. Critics argue that its “multifaceted conception” is problematic but to others like Servaes, Jacobson and White (1996) this “flexibility” is a strength in its application in various contexts and particularly development approaches (Mefalopulos,
2008, p.51-52). Still, this stance on “flexibility” of participation faces stiff opposition from scholars who argue that it makes any participatory approaches in development prone to manipulation (Ibid).

Nevertheless, the participation concept forms the foundation for the new development communication approach – participatory communication. According to Chitin (2005), “participatory communication is about involving individuals and communities through a process of empowerment” (p.230).

There are various areas of theoretical attention in the participatory communication field which mostly define various levels of participation. One of the areas that further forms the bulk of the discourse of participatory communication is how involvement of communities at the grassroots can be enhanced in the support of development initiatives (Chitin, 2005; Huesca, 2007, Servaes, 2008; Tufte & Mefalopulos, 2009). The pillar for this tradition of participatory communication is the democratic transformation of society, practices and communication through which people can participate (Huesca, 2007, p.188-190). More interesting for this study is the tradition of participatory communication that engages theorists and practitioners in the notion of power and its role in the emancipation of the citizen for the goal of development. These two areas closely inform another interesting tradition, how participatory practices through the media contribute to development (Huesca, 2007). Indeed discussions on participatory communication are diverse and are not exhaustive but in this review, I will tackle the two areas as it relates to this study directly.

As seen earlier, the bedrock of participatory approaches to development is the nature of communication that is dialogic as opposed to earlier development communication approaches that were supported by linear communication. Mefalopulos (2008) adds that participatory communication saw audiences of mass media as active participants in the development process (p.50). The foundations of participatory communication, according to Servaes (2008) are inclusivity of opinions of local groups, often considered below the hierarchy in society. Historic debates on UNESCO-chaired meetings immensely influenced the broadening of participation to accommodate this thinking in the late 70s. Following a UNESCO debate on media and participation in 1980, the International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems defined ‘participation’ as “a higher level of public involvement [than access] ... in the production process and also in the management and planning of communication systems”

According to Carpentier (2011), this debate of media and participation forms part of the history of incorporation of participatory practices into the editorial process of mainstream and community media. Indeed at the core of this approach is communication that is two-way and dialogic, whose efficacy is founded in the mass media. Participatory communication has therefore emphasised that to foster the involvement of people in lower hierarchy of society, any medium should not only be interactive but allow locals to produce media content and not foreigners (Mefalopulos, 2008, p. 54).

One of the fundamental reasons for engaging in participatory communication is the fact that “participation has intrinsic value for participants, alleviating feelings of alienation and powerlessness” (Mefalopulos, 2008, p. 51). This relates to Inagaki's (2007) description of participatory communication as new approach that sees communication as a contribution to ‘self-development’. Indeed, Juan Diaz Bordenave (cited in Melkote & Steeves, 2001) argues that participation should be recognised as a basic human right:

...the needs to think, express oneself, belong to a group, be recognized as a person, be appreciated and respected, and to have some say in decisions affecting one’s life, are as essential to the development of an individual as eating, drinking and sleeping (p. 337).

In order for citizens to participate in their own development, citizens not only need to have these rights but power to engage with institutions, their representatives and the establishments. Servaes (1999) describes ‘real’ participation as one which “directly addresses power and its distribution in society” (p. 198). Indeed one of the fundamental questions when addressing ‘social change’, from the perspective of participatory communication, is the power matrix in society. As a linkage to social change, Servaes (2008) contends that a process of social emancipation – sometimes frequently referred
to as empowerment – has to take place and this implies that the centres of power such as the media are left to be autonomous to serve as platforms for equal and fair participation. This kind of social emancipation therefore calls for the local people to be given power to determine their own development since power gives them the “ability to shape social context” (Wilkins & Mody, 2001, p. 198). However, according to Servaes (2008), there is rarely ‘real participation’ as this tradition of participatory communication requires the restructuring of the power matrix, which rarely occurs because it is not in the interest of the power holders.

The participatory communication approach is not without its challenges. Participatory approaches have become popular with development practitioners and theorists recovering from past failures from approaches that advocated for linear models of communication. According to Mefalopulos (2008), “most development programs seem to carry the participatory mark, as a sign of purification from the mistakes of the past” (p.51). Even though participation is held in high regard, its practice is poor and at the same time, earlier approaches such as the modernisation theory still manifest themselves in such initiatives, disproving the idea that participatory approaches rendered them obsolete (Ibid).

In the same vein, the inconsistency in the practice of participatory communication stems from the fundamental problem of defining ‘participation’ as we saw earlier. Inagaki (2007) argues that one of the key problems arising from the varied ways of defining the concept is the “location and direction of power” (p.8). As funders, planners and managers of development initiatives, the power matrix is titled towards institutions and not necessarily local communities, even in institutions whose entire processes are participatory (Ibid). Certainly, in considering how local participants are integrated in the operation of community media, it is important to address this question of power in any venture into development and media practice.

### 3.5 Participatory culture

A different facet of participation which has gained currency in the past two decades, is participatory culture. The concept commonly refers to “a culture with relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, strong support for creating and sharing one’s creations, and some type of informal mentorship whereby what is known by the most experienced is passed along to novices” (Jenkins et al, 2006, p.3).
Participatory culture is a consequence of the drive by citizens to take up active roles in the mass media by claiming their role to promote change (Jenkins, 2006). According to Bruns (2008), citizens started claiming their role in social change after realising that their passive roles in politics and society was a result of the restrictive traditional media technologies. Some of early formidable starters in participatory culture challenged the conventional journalism practice, although it is important to note that previously, there were other forms of media participation with lesser impact (see for example Jenkins, 1992). These alternative media developed a new form of journalism that was a direct reaction to weaknesses of the mainstream media. Some of the commonly referred to examples of amateur participation are *Indymedia*, which took up the independent coverage of the protests by activists during the 1999 World Trade Organization meeting in Seattle and the South Korean, *OhmyNews*, which gave an alternative voice to the one-sided coverage of the mainstream media (Deuze, Bruns & Neuberger, 2007, p.3).

Media participation started with the loss of control of audiences by the traditional media owing to the availability of various technological possibilities of conducting professional editorial roles (Carpentier, 2011; Rosen, 2008). Bruns (2008) describes how users have come to acquire various editorial functions at different levels of news production turning their role from mere passive consumption into participatory, citizen journalism. The active role of the citizen – whom Jay Rosen (2006) has described as ‘the people formerly known as the audience’ – in contributing texts, images and video to the media has been referred often as ‘participatory journalism’. When users of new content take up the production, the two roles overlap leading to a hybrid role of user-producer, to which Bruns (2008) has coined the term ‘produser’ to describe.

The rise in participatory journalism has been attributed to the declining credibility of news from the mainstream media and the rising “self-expressive and digital media culture” (Deuze, 2006; Deuze, Bruns & Neuberger, 2007, p.1; Jenkins, 2006). Indeed new media technologies brought with them a wave of media participation that left the traditional media organisations with no choice than to cede control of their editorial powers. The audience was no longer just the ‘informed citizen’ but the “monitorial citizen” (see Jenkins, 2006, p.219). The promise that media participation brought was to democratise the practice of journalism and stimulate political deliberation.

Studies show that emerging grassroot or citizen media and the mainstream media are still interdependent. Some citizen journalist outlets take the news from mainstream
organisations and debate it with the help of users from the established organisations (Deuze, Bruns & Neuberger, 2007). For most citizen media, the mainstreams provides the ‘frame of reference’ for production of content and operation and can be said to influence their structures (Carpentier, 2011; Jenkins, 2006, p.222). For the mainstream media, forms of citizen journalism have been integrated in production and distribution of content so as to widen participation of its audience and stop their exodus.

Literature of participatory culture on mobile media is scarce partly because of the prominence of the internet – and its presence in the West – among the digital media and its influential nature in providing audience with wide possibilities of participating. Concepts such as that of ‘user’ and ‘produser’ were coined with the understanding that online platforms were sites of most audience activity (Carpentier, 2011, p. 200). The user-generated content, a much contested concept, is used to describe wide-ranging practices and platforms, mainly via the internet through which audience create content. Studies of user-generated content (see Goggin & Hjorth, 2009) agree that its growth – made possible by the internet, and now the mobile – has had an effect on the media capitalistic industry, even threatening the dominance of large media conglomerates.

Carpentier (2011) provides an elaborate connection between the participatory culture spurred by new media technologies in the last two decades and historical development of participation movements. He argues that the new participatory movement should be seen as a continuation of the attempts to increase media participation of the masses through democratising the production of content and decision-making processes of media organisations. The thrust of the discourse of participation is how the communities in the lower hierarchies of society are challenging centres of power. Couldry and Curran (2003) predicted that the emerging power wielded through alternative media production would be enhanced by new media technologies. Despite vast theoretical studies on the enormous influence audiences are amassing, through the production of content that can match that of the traditional media, there are still few studies that show the evidence of this ‘power’ that is presumably displacing or replacing the traditional media. Another serious problem with discourses on participatory culture is that they not only exaggerate the possibilities of new media, but mostly assume that the new technologies are the sole sites of active audience activity (Carpentier, 2011).
3.6 The role of a participatory mobile news media

The mobile phone can be put to various uses and therefore it is difficult to find a common way of analysing the role of mobile media (see Locksley, 2009, p.3). However, as a mass medium, as we saw earlier, the mobile phone may not be understood outside the context of other traditional and new media. Therefore, discourses on the roles and potentialities of the rest of the media support our venture. Further, we still have to treat the mobile medium as a technology that allows for the production, dissemination of content though it is important to note that it is yet to be ‘institutionalised’ like the traditional media. Even so, the role of the mobile medium may be looked at from two angles: how mobile phones through basic forms of dissemination of content perform traditional roles of any mass media in order to drive development; and how the nature of mobile phones as mass media has an impact on the current roles of traditional and new media, thereby influencing development. Here, it is also important to address limitations as well as negative roles that come with the mobile medium.

The role of media is arbitrarily defined in the development communication discourses. The new mobile for development approach that could provide a basis for the integration of the mobile medium in developmental initiatives is still largely an unexplored field. However, I focused on participatory communication with the presumption that mobile medium offers new opportunities for participation of citizens. The fundamental roles of the media have often been identified as information, education and entertainment, but scholars like (Locksley, 2009, p.2) argue that the nature of the content the media disseminates to a population in a developing country, determines its contribution to development.

As a function in development communication therefore, the role of the media is to create an informed society. Hemer (2005) observes that one of the major areas that development scholars agree on is that the media is important in stimulating exchange of information that is necessary for deliberation. To further understand the impact the mobile medium can have, we have to understand the place of news in development communication. News in itself does not occupy a clear role in development communication discourses, but is part of the process identified as creating an informed society, one that can makes citizens respond to ideas of development. As elaborated earlier, news is a vital part of the communication process that is important for social and political change. The mobile phone’s capacity to disseminate or collect news is part
of the advantage that it offers because of its status as an interactive medium and further, a convenient platform for user-generated content (see Ahonen, 2008). A mobile phone with multimedia functions can convey audio, video, graphics, text an animation in an interactive way (Westlund, 2010, p.92). With the intervention of mobile medium, organisations could deliver information in a timely manner since the mobile phone is ‘always on’ (see Ahonen, 2008). It therefore succeeds in being sufficiently accessible, a prerequisite for enabling communities to engage with institutions of power in society. Kaplan (2006) gives the main reason for the popularity of the mobile phone in developing countries as low cost; efficiency of the prepaid system; functionality (it does not require high literacy level) and the convenience of SMS texting (pp. 8-9). Considering the increasing penetration of the mobile phones in developing countries, the technology avails traditional media organisations the opportunity to reach more audiences.

However, when the application of the mobile phone as a mass medium is explored, there are questions about limitations to its usage. Firstly is the cost of using content on mobile phone, which is inhibitive in countries with large poor populations. Unlike traditional media like radio, consumption of content on mobile phone comes with a cost. Even when small, this cost is likely to affect the reception of information by users. Secondly, the 160-character limit for each news item robs users of the chance to get the context and depth of news. Thirdly, the credibility of information from mobile phones is an issue that may be of concern. A research, for example, conducted by AudienceScapes National Survey of Kenya, shows that the level of trustworthiness of news and information from SMS news service is low (Intermedia, 2010).

Earlier, we saw how the mobile phone has become a vital mobilisation tool for social and political movements and the emergence of citizen journalism. The media is identified by development theorists as a platform through which communities could be mobilised for development purposes, for instance, for civic education. Here, the ubiquity of the mobile phones particularly in developing countries enhances the role of media in mobilisation of masses. On the contrary, without proper control, the extensive reach of mobile media could be misused. In 2008, SMS between citizens was blamed for fanning tribal violence in Kenya after a disputed presidential election in 2007 (Abdi, Deane & BBC World Service Trust, 2008). In the UK, the ‘Blackberry Mobs’ were blamed for using SMS to incite the youth to violence during the riots of 2011 (Fuchs, 2011).
Again, from the development perspective, the mobilisation capacity of the mobile medium could be hindered by the unequal accessibility of mobile phones and reception of SMS. Heeks (2007), for instance, observes that there already exist a technological and informational gap between those who have mobiles and those who do not. Another kind of inequality that may arise here is one Kaplan (2006) describes as a ‘texting divide’, where there are more SMS being sent from urban to rural areas than vice versa.

Similarly, Oksman (2010) argues that the role of the mobile phone as mass medium cannot be discussed without identifying user appropriation of the technology. Indeed as she contends, the mobile feature of SMS has transformed the device into one that has become a tool of production and consumption of content. It is therefore important to investigate empirically how it is being used as a medium and its consequent impact.

### 3.6.1 Participation and media

Participatory communication and participatory culture, although they may seem related are different. Participatory communication is more of a deliberate attempt to pull the marginalised citizens from the fringes of societal hierarchy for them to take part or take advantages of opportunities for decision-making or management of their own development. On the other hand, participatory culture is associated mostly with citizens reasserting themselves to take up the opportunities provided by new media technologies to produce media content. These two approaches however, have an organic connection: the participation in the media and through the media by the citizen. This connection provides insight into how any new media technology like mobile media can be put to use for development. Perhaps an important link in the participatory discourses can be taken from Carpentier's (2011) differentiation of two main kinds of ‘participations’ based on the outcomes they have. The foundation of these two perspectives is that the involvement of the society in media practice is a human right and part of the process of building a democratic culture.

Participation ‘in’ the media entails the involvement of amateurs in the production of content and in the decision-making processes of media while participation ‘through’ the media concerns the media serving as a platform for deliberative democracy (Carpentier, 2011. Participation ‘in’ the media is crucial for cultivating civic engagement in “(micro)-spheres” and this has a positive effect on participation ‘through’ the media, the macro
level of the engagement of the citizen via the Habermasian public sphere (Carpentier, 2011, p. 355).

Well-entrenched participation holds the promise of spurring citizens to be active by providing an avenue for deliberative democracy. Participation in countries with stable democracies has the effect of creating formidable global campaigns through networking technologies against ills of repressive governments such as press censorship, human rights violations and suppression of political dissent. Dahlberg (2004) observes that the developing world is experiencing a transition to more democratic governments because of global movements that have spread civic education among poor populations. The activities of these movements could be enhanced by new technologies such as mobile media.

There are still fears on whether the apparent rise in use of new media technologies will improve participation. Often the kind of ‘digital divide’ by critics of the internet refers to the gap that exists between the developed and the developing nations because the latter lacks ICT infrastructure (see Pieterse, 2009). There are also fears that the increasing penetration of the new media technologies globally will lead to new forms of digital divide arising globally out of the rising penetration of the new technologies. One is what, Norris (2001) refer to as ‘democratic divide’, the gap between citizens who make use of the information availed by new media technologies and those who do not. The other is the gap emerging between those “engaged and the apathetic” (Livingstone, 2005, p. 25). This last one points to what Robert Putnam (2001) has documented as continual civic disengagement in the political life by citizens in the US despite availability of new technologies with possibilities of greater participation.

**Participation and the mobile medium**

The contribution of participation through the mobile medium and, in terms of development, can be looked at several levels: the fact that participation itself is development in itself, that is, mobile media enabling civic engagement and democracy, the level of generation of mobile news as development news – content that highlight issues that concerns community and lastly, how the medium performs traditional functions such as the watchdog role.

An informed society is one that is able participate fully in a deliberative democracy (Dahlberg, 2004). What the mass media do towards this end is to perform its agenda-
setting role and at the same time, provide a public sphere to support discussion by the masses. This has a political and social contribution to development. However, avenues for deliberation through the traditional media are not adequate for fair and equal opportunities for participation because their reach is limited. Since mobile phones, through SMS, afford the chance for interactivity, they could enhance participation and hence deliberative democracy. As a new media technology, the mobile medium offers wide possibility of media participation.

One observation of participatory development communication is that it argued for the ‘participation’ to go beyond mere access to media but to include active involvement of the recipients of media content in the production process (see Serves, 2008). The formula for this involvement, at least by the 1990's, was however not fully prescribed except in suggestions by some scholars that communities ought to have a voice in the media through the projection of the audiences’ views on various media platforms. The advent of new media technologies such as mobiles provided an answer to this broad conception of participatory communication. The ability of the mobile phone to expand access to media of community voices as well as availing platform for various forms of ‘produsage’ such as that of citizen-reporting provides an interesting intersection between the goals of participatory communication and participatory culture as we saw earlier. It provides a way of conceptualising ‘participation’ in terms of how active involvement of recipients of media can not only democratise media, but foster development through providing a chance to citizens to be represented in community decision-making process and for their active participation in politics and society.

Indeed, the possibilities for participation offered by the mobile form much rhetoric of participatory culture, produser and user-generated discourses. Still, the approach to participation in face of new media technologies is contentious, with the way they are influencing our understanding of ‘information society’ and society itself. Goggin and Hjorth (2009) urges caution in approaching participation; by first understanding the kind of participation taking place then exploring its usefulness politically, socially and culturally. This could be done through empirical studies of cases where the mobile medium is applied.

Finally, both the discourse of mobile for development and participatory media show there is a risk of being techno-deterministic in any venture that investigates the contribution of a new media technology such as the mobile phone to society. Alternative
approaches to technological determinism are the study of consumption and the ‘societal context’ in which the media is used (Carpentier, 2011; Thompson, 1995).

Media’s intended role development could easily be oversimplified, but the political economy of media raises concerns on how mass media are subject to influences from owners, governments and corporations. In the case of mobile media, media organisations distribute and receive content through infrastructure that mobile companies provide. According to Goggin (2011), the mobile corporations are emerging as a force to reckon in the telecommunications world and subsequently, related industries such as the media. This intervention by a new player in the production-consumption process may have implications in the way we understand media power matrix and how it affects the role of the media in fulfilling development functions.

Summary
Since this explorative chapter has been long and multifaceted, and therefore I will make a few concluding remarks. The mobile medium has not been theorised in isolation of other new and traditional media and perhaps, the reason is that in practice the mobile phone is that it is a complex technology. In consideration of its features, ubiquity and its entry into development discourse as a new medium, the mobile phone has an important role in promoting development issues and spurring participation, perhaps better than the traditional media.

In this chapter, I have attempted retrace the role of mass media in various approaches to development communication in order to try to establish the role of the mobile phone as medium. My theoretical analysis was based on the approaches to development communication and the focus was on participatory communication.

However, it is worth noting that any venture to examine approaches into development communication and their impact is a Herculean task because of the extensive literature by theorist, practitioners and scholars in various disciplines. In the section, I have attempted to trace how the role of the mass media is theorised in various approaches to development communication in order to try to cut out a role of mobile media and its unique intervention in development initiatives and theories. I have further examined the entry of the participation from the perspective of development communication as well as media production through the concept of participatory culture.
The theoretical framework was however complicated by the fact that there is vast research in both mobile communication and media studies as regards development, but limited research that provide a link between the two, which was the objective of this study. Current research on the role of mobile phones in development is in the field of Mobile for Development (M4D). Although M4D has become a gold mine for research in developing countries, the role of media in the field is yet to be clearly defined (see for instance Wicander, 2009).

Having set the ground for understanding mobile communication, media and development, I then moved on to examine participatory communication and participatory culture. My ultimate goal was to examine the discourses of ‘participation’ in attempting to understand how new media technology like mobiles engages the citizens to play a role in the production of media content. The objective here was to understand how the citizen utilises news content and acquire a role of the producer leading to a unique relationship between the audience and the news organisation. This relationship in which the role of the producer of news and the citizen “overlaps” (see Bruns, 2010) has shown how participation is steered through mobile media in a developing country and its overall contribution to development.
4. Methodology

In this chapter, I will discuss the materials and methods I employed in investigating the case of Voice of Kibera as a mobile medium. The aim of the study is to explore the potential role of mobile medium in development. This study is guided by two research questions: How does Voice of Kibera function as a mass medium in highlighting issues affecting citizens in the community? How does Voice of Kibera serve as a platform for participation and what is the resultant contribution to the community?

As I explained earlier in the introduction, I chose the case of Voice of Kibera because it is an SMS-based media that allows locals in Kibera slums in Kenya to send and receive news in form of text messages. VoK and its users are accessible since the community media is based in small geographical region in Nairobi. Further, VoK maintains a website with a record of all the reports it generates and receives from users, making them easily accessible for study. To give answers to the research questions, I used the following methods: content analysis, in-depth interviews and focus group discussion. These chapters will discuss the theoretical motivation for the methods and how the fieldwork was conducted.

4.1 Materials

The materials studied are reports on the website of Voice of Kibera (http://voiceofkibera.org/reports) accessed on March 20, 2012. The posts on the frontpage of VoK’s, website for the period between October 1 and December 31, 2011, were analysed. The frontpages of the reports consisted headlines and intros of 85 posts for the period under study. The headlines were links leading to their full stories, which varied in length. As of the date when these materials were accessed and downloaded for study, the reports analysed were on pages three to eight. Screenshots for each of the four pages were taken and saved as PDF files while each of the reports was manually downloaded from the frontpages as well as subsequent linked text from the articles’ pages (see Appendix I). The text was preserved in PDF files for easier study. According to Karlsson and Strömbäck (2010), manual downloading of text from webpages ensures that most content for study are captured. However, the procedure is time consuming and hence may limit the amount of content to be studied (Ibid p.7)
Voice of Kibera website is a platform provided by Ushahidi organisation for collecting reports sent by citizen reporters as well as those posted by site administrators who act as editors. It is meant to be an archive of information as well as a platform through which users can access these information via SMS, mobile internet or on the website. The research further made use of transcripts from interviews of the editors and focus group discussions of users and citizen reporters of Voice of Kibera. I conducted four interviews with the editors and six focus group discussions with 21 users.

4.2 Mixed methods
I employed mixed methods in this study since the aim of the fieldwork was to understand production and consumption of news media content of Voice of Kibera. While qualitative methods allow a researcher to observe the audience in a ‘natural’ setting, they are also appropriate for understanding how audiences relate to the media Denscombe (2007). However, to understand what and how much media content the audience engages with, a quantitative method was useful. Denscombe (2007) describes mixed methods as a strategy for using different methods, usually qualitative and quantitative, with the objective of finding the most practical solution to a research problem (p.107-9). Although using the mixed method strategy is one way of finding a complete picture of a particular research, Denscombe proposes that the strategy can be used to build levels of analysis for research. In this case, one method is used to provide results that will be used to launch another method. A quantitative research for instance, therefore “informs” a qualitative research (p.112). The contribution that the mixed method strategy brings in providing broad perspectives of the research is one of its strengths. However, the downside is that the strategy requires more time and costs. In this research, I sought to use the combined methods of content analysis and interviews.

Since I was investigating how Voice of Kibera contributes to a process of informational exchange that engages them as citizens, the combination of content analysis and interviews were useful to capture several aspects of the study. To understand the contribution of Voice of Kibera to development, there were two broad levels of analysis: The first was how the news content highlighted issues of development and the second, was how the entire mobile media infrastructure served as a platform for citizen participation. Therefore, my approach was best served by a content analysis that would precede the interviews and focus group discussions.
4.2.1 Content Analysis

Bernard Berelson (1952) famously defined content analysis as “a research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication” (as cited in Deacon et al, 1998, p.147). This qualitative method is useful in media research for analysing content, identifying their characteristics and even drawing meaning of texts and their intended effect (Krippendorff, 2004; Wimmer & Dominick, 2010). As a method for understanding media texts, content analysis befits this study. In particular, the content analysis of reports published on Voice of Kibera’s website was useful in understanding the content that makes up the mobile medium.

If the mobile phone functions as a mass medium, then it is a channel through which it is used to deliver a message. Therefore, content on the platform of Voice of Kibera was interesting to this study. By analysing the body of media texts, I was able to categorise the kind of content that defines VoK and use the findings as starting point in investigating the use of Voice of Kibera as a mobile medium. The finding supported the inquiry into Voice of Kibera as a media through interviews and focus group discussions on participation of users in production of content. Content analysis for this study took the following approach:

Unit of Analysis: This is a sample or smallest portion of content, which can be counted (Wimmer & Dominick, 2010). According to Krippendorff (2004), a sample is necessary because “the universe of available texts is too large to be examined as a whole” (p.111). The sample selected was of articles on the Voice of Kibera website that have the dates of between October 1 and December 31, 2011.

Categories: Categories are key for any content analysis since they are used to classify data. Any category framework needs to be exclusive; meaning a unit of analysis has to be put into one identifiable category. It should also be exhaustive; meaning a unit of analysis can have a relation with an existing category (Wimmer & Dominick, 2010). The nature of this study necessitates two groups of categories: the types of reports contributed to VoK and their key themes. The categories of reports on VoK’s website were:
1. Politics
2. Citizen rights
3. Social groups
4. Community events
5. Social services
6. Gender
7. Poverty
8. Health
9. Security
10. Environment
11. Others

The emerging themes were:

1. Information
2. Education
3. Sensitisation
4. Mobilisation
5. Bulletin Board

*Content Coding:* The content was examined, using the coding schedule (see Appendix II). In the study, I content analysed 85 posts to find out the issues highlighted. Earlier I noted the justification for use of the posts of Voice of Kibera at the introduction, with the highlight being that its data is readily available on the website.

Like any other piloting exercise, testing the coding of a small sample of material is important for content analysis. It enables the researcher to identify inconsistencies in the process of identifying categories as well as checking the reliability of the content analysis (Priest, 2009, pp.118-121). Coder reliability tests are essential for content analysis. In this exploratory research, and due to the limitation of time, I conducted an intra-coder reliability test to assess the reliability of the coding process (see Ibid). I coded 11 per cent sample of the content which was equivalent to nine postings on the Voice of Kibera website at the beginning of the study. A week later, I coded the same set of data. I then used the two sets of results to calculate reliability statistics using Holstí's
reliability formulae. Holsti (1969) formulae for calculating the reliability coefficient is as follows (see Wimmer and Dominick, 2010):

\[
\text{Reliability} = \frac{2M}{N^1 + N^2}
\]

M represents the numbers of coding decisions, which are in agreement for the two sets of data while N1 and N2 represent the total of coding for the initial and seconding coding process (Ibid, p. 172). The reliability rating obtained was 0.79 per cent. According to Neuendorf (2002) the rating is lower than most acceptable levels of reliability coefficients, but may be agreeable for exploratory studies (quoted in Wimmer & Dominick, 2010, p. 175).

\textit{Limitations of content analysis}

As a methodological approach, content analysis has both strong points and challenges. This approach is popular because of its ease in analysing text unobtrusively since it entails collecting data more or less as a participant observer (Bryman 2012, Longhurst, 2008). Furthermore, it is convenient and cheap, although its data collection process is time-consuming. In addition, different researchers may obtain different findings depending on the general process and identification of categories used (Wimmer & Dominick, 2010). For proper examination, content analysis requires text to be preserved yet for online content, it is ephemeral in nature. This therefore lowers reliability of the analysis since different researchers might obtain varied results.

A major challenge with content analysis is that, while it gives a deep insight into content by offering generalisable themes, it may not give adequate understanding or reasons for the themes or the theoretical implications of the data collected (Priest, 2009). As regards this study, content analysis did not provide additional information on important aspects of Voice of Kibera such the perceptions of users on participation and VoK as a mass medium. In this case, therefore, I used the findings from content analysis to launch a qualitative study consisting interviews and focus group discussions.

\textit{4.2.2 In-depth Interviews}

Denscombe (2007) proposes interviews for a research that intends to explore “more complex and subtle phenomena”, mostly obtained through examining perceptions
(p.174-175). In my case, the fact that the research intends to explore how Voice of Kibera operates as a mobile medium, how the mobile phone defines it as a medium and its contribution to the community, makes the interview approach appropriate.

My target for the in-depth interviews was site administrators of Voice of Kibera who act as editors. For this research, I chose a semi-structured interview, which requires a researcher to have a set of questions as guide. The advantage with this method is that it is flexible and gives more room to ask questions that may arise during the process (Gillham, 2005). With the semi-structured approach, it is thus easier to build on ideas of how mobile media is used and further to get more perspectives about participation of users. Additionally, with the advantage that the interviews provide in being able to record them, makes it possible to do a thorough analysis. The downside of the interviews is that they are strenuous in collection, processing and analysis of data. Again, in interviewing there is the danger of being subjective which ultimately affects the validity of the research (Berger, 2000).

Sample

Although the sample size for the interviews much depends on the kind of research being undertaken, the time and resources available for research are important factors. Silverman (2010) proposes purposive sampling in cases where the researcher is concerned about time and extent of study as well as convenience. The in-depth interview targeted four editorial staff of Voice of Kibera because they are directly involved in the operations of the community media.

4.2.3 Focus Group Discussions

As one form of interviews, FGDs target small groups. Researchers choose this method because it is convenient and cost-efficient to conduct the study of many people in small groups (Hansen et al, 1998). Additionally, FGDs enable the researcher to study the groups through the way they respond to the questions and engage with the issues together (Ibid). In this study, since my target group were the users of Voice of Kibera, I anticipated a large number of people, and therefore FGDs were suitable in this case.

That aside, FGDs are appropriate for examining audiences, their use of media and the role of the media in everyday life (Hansen et al, 1998). This research sought to investigate how the audience use the mobile phone as a mass medium. It further sought
to investigate how they use it as a platform for media participation and what they perceive as role of Voice of Kibera in their development as citizens.

While the key advantage in using FGDs is that it saves cost and time, the participation of the respondents as a social group of users of media are useful in availing rich data from the conversation and interaction (Hansen et al, 1998). Additionally, they offer the advantage of group dynamics (Ibid, p.262). This advantage enriches the data-collection process by eliciting more sharing of views that individual interviews may not provide. However, this is sometimes deemed as the downside of this approach since the group may suppress individual views by dominating or intimidating ones with unpopular opinions (Ibid).

I was the moderator in all the six focus groups convened in Kibera. As moderator, I took the role of ensuring every participant was given the chance to speak. What was notable during the discussions was that participants tended to work towards a common agreement on contentious issues and thus in some cases those in the minority with an opposing view were silent (as noted by Hansen et al, 1998). To scholars such as Liebes and Katz (1990) this is not necessarily negative, but ‘natural’ since discussions in everyday life occur the same way.

Sample

It is common in media research to seek “population of interest” rather than representatives of the population because to find out how people use media and their perception about the content, a researcher seeks a group related to the particular media in focus (Hansen et al, 1998, p.265).

My target group were the users of Voice of Kibera and mainly citizen reporters. With the help of editors, who had contacts of few SMS reporters, we were able to enlist those willing to take part in the interviews. Initially, phoning the participants to invite them for the interviews was not yielding results as many of them asked to be called later or to be given time to confirm. Later when my guide and I visited some of them to invite and explain to them the purpose of the discussion, they confirmed their attendance. The editors also asked citizen reporters they work directly with (they have identified two in each of the 13 villages in Kibera) to accompany the reporters. In the end, 21 turned up for the full period of the six focus group discussions held on different dates in April 2012.
However, most of those who turned up were young men and the discussions had only three female participants. Since a homogenous group enables more participation in discussions (Hansen et al, 1998), I invited the three female participants to one focus group with four participants, with fourth male participant being a friend of the two.

The objective of the research and resources available usually determine the number of focus group discussions (Silverman, 2010). In my case, I had set a goal of hosting seven focus groups but, I later settled on six because of mainly time for research and availability of the participants. I conducted a pilot study with three respondents who turned up. The first focus group discussion, however, aborted because only one participant turned up despite having booked a venue.

Oftentimes, participants are not too willing to sit for discussions when they are not sure what to gain from it and in some cases, it may require inducements to ensure their attendance and participation (Hansen et al, 1998). As an inducement for those turning up for the focus group discussions, I offered refreshments, although it later it turned out to be cumbersome and time consuming.

I conducted all the discussions in a hired social hall, which was convenient for the participants since most of them had attended community meetings there. Hiring the venue was costly, but the advantage of using it was that it was free from interruptions. However, the venue was sometimes fully booked and I had to postpone two discussions while one aborted prematurely because other clients had booked the room. It proved difficult later to set up a different discussion with the participants who had turned up on that day.

**Research assistant**

I hired a research assistant to help in coordinating and organising the focus group discussions as well as taking notes on discussion subjects and other observations during the interviews. The research assistant was also helpful in ensuring clarity of language during the discussions. The slang spoken in Kibera, locally referred to as *Sheng*, was used by most participants. Although Sheng is largely made up of Swahili, which I speak, a few words that are common parlance in Kibera had to be interpreted by the research assistant.

I prepared an interview guide for the discussions. It acted more as a “menu” of subjects (see Hansen et al, 1998, p.274) to tackle during the discussion but I was able to
occasionally break from the guide to probe more on issues or asked a related question (see Appendix III). The guide further identified themes to address during the discussions and this proved useful when doing the analysis.

4.3 Reliability and validity

Ensuring rigour in procedures for gathering data and the quality of the measurement process is crucial for any quantitative and qualitative research. The tools for maintaining a reasonable standard for a fruitful research are reliability and validity. When a study is tested for reliability, it means the measure of the same material is expected to consistently lead to the same findings (Priest, 2009, p.67). Validity on the other hand, from a quantitative dimension, is often referred to the degree to which “an instrument actually measures what is sets out to measure” (Wimmer & Dominick, 2010, p.127) In the qualitative dimension, validity often concerns the believability of the results or whether the conclusions reached for a study can be considered credible (Byrman, 2012). A research such as this requires an open discussion on steps taken to evaluate instruments and data from the research in a bid to check quality.

To start with, in this study the process of coding for content analysis had an effect on reliability. This study opted for an intra-coder reliability test in assessing reliability since content analysis had to be conducted within a short time after beginning the research to inform and give enough time for interviews and focus group discussions. Although it is declining in use, intra-coder reliability tests are acceptable for exploratory studies such as this research (see Priest, 2009). Even so, the one-coder study yielded a high reliability rating, but this would have improved with an inter-coder test. To counter this limitation, mixed methods were used and they subsequently had a boost to reliability, and even validity.

Validity procedures are often contentious but most often Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) standards of validity – based on credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability – are acknowledged as laying the groundwork for checking quality of research. In fact, Lincoln and Guba’s framework boils down to the integrity of the process and it requires of researchers to self-evaluate their work and take adequate measures to elaborate and check the quality of the process. In view of this argument, this study worked towards increasing validity of the results through an “audit trail”, a clear description of the research processes, and “methodological coherence”, the rigour

The study elaborated all procedures taken in the collection of data, including the source of materials for the study of Voice of Kibera as well as the aim of the qualitative study undertaken to obtain data from participants. A semi-structured interview guide (see Appendix III) was prepared for the interviews and focus group discussions, but it gave room for additional questions to be asked and further probing to obtain sufficient data to answer the research questions. To ensure accurate information was obtained for verification, the interviews and focus group discussions were audio recorded. Additionally, this study gave a broad description of the findings collected from the qualitative approaches. Creswel (2009) argues that “rich, thick description” make the results to “become more realistic and richer” and therefore increases the validity of a research (pp. 191-2).

4.4 Data collection and analysis

For the content analysis, I downloaded and stored the pages of the downloaded websites in a file in my computer. For my focus and in-depth interviews, I audio recorded each of them as well as took notes of the discussions with the help of a research assistant.

In analysing data, I was guided by Lawrence Neuman’s (1997) process of coding that involved three phases: open; axial and selective coding, an approach that is appropriate in the expectation of rich data. In the first phase of open coding, I sifted through each paragraph in the transcripts in order to capture themes. This process was guided by the research questions. In the second phase of axial coding, I reviewed the obtained themes to find out how they related to each other. During the last stage of selective coding, my aim was to use the themes to find how they have been explained based on ideas.

Summary

Finally, in this chapter, I have discussed how the objectives of the research and research questions have informed the decisions on the research design that employed content analysis, focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews. I have discussed the research materials, the research environment, justification for the methods, sampling decisions as well as the data analysis modes I used. The methods presented limitations
that I discussed along with the validity of the research. It is however noteworthy here that because of the qualitative thrust of the research, it cannot be claimed that the results are generalisable and that a similar approach will yield the same results. With the data at hand and the analysis done as discussed above, in the next section I will present and analyse the findings.
5 Results and Analysis

Having discussed the materials and methods in the last section, I will now present the findings and analyse them. The aim of the research was to explore the potential role of mobile media in development through the case of Voice of Kibera. I conducted the study through the use of mixed methods – content analysis, interviews and focus group discussions. In the first part of this section, I will present the findings and thereafter I will give the analysis.

5.1 The findings

The questions that the methods sought to answer are: How does Voice of Kibera function as a mass medium in highlighting issues affecting citizens in the community? How does Voice of Kibera serve as a platform for participation and what is the resultant contribution to the community? These questions relate to how the mobile phone is used as a mass medium and how it engages citizens to participate in production of content. In the first part, I present the results from quantitative angle of the research and then the second part will consist the results from the qualitative dimension.

5.1.1 The quantitative dimension

The aim of the quantitative study was to analyse the posts on Voice of Kibera website in the attempt to answer the questions: how does Voice of Kibera as a mass medium in highlighting issues of development through the news? The corollaries to this question were: what are issues highlighted through the reports on Voice of Kibera? How do these issues define VoK as a mass medium? The analysis therefore focused on the characteristics of the reports of VoK, their length (in attempting to establish if they pose as content for SMS, characterwise and in format), the categories of the reports and the amount of news stories and the themes of the reports.

The reports published on Voice of Kibera website between October 1 and December 31, 2011 were 85. Forty-nine posts took the nature of news, 34, features and one opinion. Table 1 further shows the length of the reports based on the 160-character limit for SMS. Reports with 320 characters or less suggest they are complete to be received in two SMSs. In the analysis, only 14 news stories out of 49 had less than 320 characters and 11 out of 34 features had a similar range of characters (see Table 1).
Table 1. Character limit, Voice of Kibera reports

The main issues emerging from the reports concerned were on social services. Out of the 85 posts, 19 were on social services in the community such as water and electricity. Community events were 15 out of 85. Other issues that were prominent were on poverty, which were 11. Issues of politics and citizens’ rights were few, 8 and 5 respectively (see Table 2).

Table 2. Issues of focus on Voice of Kibera

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issues</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Politics</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citizen rights</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social groups</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Events</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social services</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender issues</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td><strong>85</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The findings on the themes showed that information was the key role, taking 32 out of 85 reports. The reports that took the nature of sensitisation were 16, while those that placed VoK as a bulletin board were 12. Mobilisation and education were themes that took 12 and 10 reports respectively (see Table 3).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Information</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensitisation</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobilisation</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulletin Board</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>85</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 3. Key themes of Voice of Kibera*

Further, the context in which we should understand the content of VoK is that they are prepared for several media platforms including the mobile phone, the archiving website and the blog, thus have varied structure and length. The content further suggested that the tone, style and coverage followed that of the mainstream.

What content analysis did not highlight, and which were useful in launching the interviews were; the amount of contribution by citizen reporters; the level of participation, the kinds of users who participated and what participation was changing in the Kibera community.

5.1.2 The qualitative dimension
The qualitative study, through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions sought to use the findings from content analysis and attempted to answer the question, how does Voice of Kibera serve as a platform for participation and what is the resultant contribution to the community? It mostly focused on how the mobile phone is used by Voice of Kibera. The following are the emerging results, first from the interviews and then focus group discussions.
How Voice of Kibera operates

There is convergence of online and mobile content as well as from traditional media. On the production side, Voice of Kibera uses text, images and video sent in through SMS or posted on the website by their citizen reporters. However, editors noted that citizen reporters have so far sent in few images and videos. Voice of Kibera also makes use of news, features and images taken by editors. In addition, the other media arm of Map Kibera – the Kibera News Network – embeds its videos on the related articles posted by Voice of Kibera on the website. Editors explained the purpose of the integration of videos from KNN was to expand the context of their reports as well as feed comprehensive information into the mapped areas of Kibera, which is the goal of their larger organisation, Map Kibera. Editor 3 explained:

We all work together (Map Kibera units). We work with the mappers when locating events or stories. We also work closely with KNN to be able to deliver multimedia (stories). The text we collect and the videos and pictures collected from various points are mapped and published online, so our media can be complete.

Reports can be read on the website through the computer or the mobile phone. VoK had initially planned to distribute the reports through SMS, but during the period of fieldwork, it was yet to enable the service because its content management system did not have the function. The forms of contributions from SMS reporters are varied: they include reports in form of news and comments from users as well as news tips. Other cases mentioned by editors are situations when users help to verify information when contacted by editors or their assistance in providing information for writing up news features. Users utilise only the Voice of Kibera website but also its blog, as well as social media such as Twitter.

VoK shares its content with other community media such as Kibera journal, a community magazine, and community radio, Pamoja FM, as a way of getting its content published for a wider audience. The initial objective of Voice of Kibera was to give citizen reporters and audiences maximum editorial control. To an extent, by passing all
verified news content for publication the volunteer editors have allowed the audience to take control.

The editors are volunteers who were citizen journalists at the time of joining VoK. None has a background in journalism. However they have good writing skills (and some were bloggers) and have over time received basic editorial training on selecting of stories, verifying facts as well as basic training on how to manage the Ushahidi content management system. According to the editors, VoK expect them to pass the skills they have acquired to citizen reporters, as Editor 4 explained:

We are volunteers…. We do this because we see the potential of creating an informed community. There are no funds to cater for our salaries. Rather than staying idle, we get involved with this job. When we came to the platform as founders, we learnt a lot so we share what we have with the newcomers. Also, we train the citizen reporters.

All the editors I interviewed suggested that they would want to receive adequate training in journalism, work with experienced journalists or have an intern from journalism school join them because they feel they are not sufficiently skilled.

The main tasks of the editors are technical, editorial and training. The technical work mostly includes administering the Voice of Kibera site, which makes use of a platform by Ushahidi for crowdsourcing information. They have basic IT skills on working with the Ushahidi content management system and when there is a technical problem they cannot solve, they get help from IT experts who work under Map Kibera or external consultants. The duties of the editors include reporting, fact-checking, verification and approval of reports as well as coordinating with SMS reporters in Kibera. The editing work is made simpler by the Ushahidi platform whose content management system consist basic media editing features. Each of the six editors is in charge of coordinating reports from at least two of the 13 villages across Kibera. They have identified at least two prolific SMS reporters in each of the villages, who recruit others and assist locals to file in reports. According to Editor 1, giving the citizen reporters incentives contributed to VoK operations positively:
We have identified two citizen reporters ...we sort of recruited them. We have recruited them and we try to reimburse their airtime expense. And, they are part of those people whom we meet on community forums. The rest also contribute the same way, but we cannot reimburse everybody. These two (in the villages) help us. Through the forums, we train them how to send the SMS or we go with our laptops and teach them how to send their reports (online).

Editors also take part in training. They have received training through experts in IT and media, invited occasionally by Map Kibera organisation. The editors then train new volunteers who join them as well as the citizen reporters who show interest in their work. They also participate in forums and other community outreach programmes organised by map Kibera to educate the community on the mapping concept. During these forums, the editors train citizen reporters on how to file reports, display their site for locals to read the reports as well as teach them how to access the reports online. Additionally, they create awareness on Voice of Kibera’s work and educate the locals on the importance of participating in sending the reports. Although, most of the forums have received positive reception, the editors observed, during the interviews, that the level of awareness of Voice of Kibera’s work was still low. They also cited funding as an impediment to hosting community outreach programmes across Kibera. Indeed their sources of funding are non-governmental organisations like UNICEF as mentioned earlier. Editor 2 however asserted that their work is independent of the donors:

We work under Map Kibera, you know, the organisation that takes care of these (the operations of VoK). Our sense of duty is to the community. They (locals) decide what is to be run (on the VoK platform) ... and we are there to help them do just that. But of course, we could do more for Voice of Kibera with more funds.

Even so, the mapping concept fronted by the Map Kibera organisation is an influence on editorial operations. Editors noted that the ‘location’ was the key factor guiding their editorial work. The location is embedded in the Ushahidi platform and it defines how
content is viewed and its acceptability. For instance, news sent in by a reporter, without the specification of the location is not verified and may not be approved. The mapping idea is a contribution to Map Kibera’s aim to collate information of various geographical points in Kibera and archive them. According to editors, it is useful in being able to monitor development and various issues for the community. Editor 4, however, attested that there is still low awareness of the mapping idea, and how collecting information for locations is useful:

Mapping is still ignored by the people here in Kibera, and you know it forms the core of our programme under Map Kibera. We are trying to tell them that collecting information about their villages helps us expand knowledge to the rest of Kibera.

**Mobile phone use**

Vok made use of the mobile in receiving news and other reports from citizen reporters, coordinating when in the field and for contacting locals to verify reports sent. The advantage of the mobile phone, according to the editors, was in receiving instant reports, mostly alerts on events occurring in the community. Editors further observed that, occasionally, when they received many reports on the same event or occurrences, they used them to check facts against each other. The many reports on the same events further helped in building up some stories and sometimes the editors wrote features out of the reports and published them on Voice of Kibera’s blog.

When asked about the usage of the mobile phones and its contribution to their work, editors did not show immense attachment to the exclusivity of the mobile medium in itself, but seemed to be concerned about how VoK stands in comparison to the mainstream media. Editor explained that the mobile phone is a “small channel” through which reports can be conveyed but cannot be able to play the role of other mass media such as the newspaper.

A major hindrance in the use of the mobile phone by VoK was the cost of SMS. Each SMS is charged five Kenya shillings. The editors explained that the cost of SMS was a hindrance in sustaining reports from the locals. One of the challenges editors dealt with was occasional demands by SMS reporters to be compensated for the costs they incurred in sending SMSs. Editor 1 explained:
The cost (of SMS) is a problem. People want to do something for the community. Our organisation tried to negotiate with the service provider to bring the cost (fee on SMS) down. It was brought down, but that was not good enough. It is five shillings (about 6 US cents) now, but we think it should come a little bit down, to about one shilling. It is a question of somebody using his own money to send us news. We don’t pay them as a rule but exceptionally we reimburse prolific reporters.

To be able to read the reports users had either to access computers with internet or use mobile internet. Editors observed that most users did not have phones with internet and some who had them, did not know how to use mobile internet and therefore had to be trained on how to use it to access the VoK website at community forums. Although the use of mobile in sending reports was high, editors noted that there was growing numbers of news reports and opinions send to VoK’s Twitter page.

Participation

Generally, the amount of contribution of news reports by ‘SMS reporters’ was low, according to the editors. The highest number of SMS reports recorded in a day, since VoK started in 2009, is 35 in a day, but there were days when no reports were received. The periods they have had a high SMS traffic are during major events such as elections. Other contributions by locals such as comments have been few owing to the low number of users who can access the internet. However, there had been a rising number of contributions on VoK’s Twitter page and editors attributed this to a new system of integration of SMS and twitter accounts by Kenya’s mobile phone companies.

One of the major hindrances to participation was the cost of SMS. Editors explained that five Kenya shillings fee for every SMS of 160 characters discouraged many from participating or sending longer reports. The reports sent in also required much editing and verification of facts because they were mostly written in shortened formats or in unclear manner.

Editors also mentioned that language used for SMS was likely to be affecting locals who wished to participate. Most reports sent in were in English and only a few citizen
reporters used Swahili and Sheng (slang in Kibera). The editors translated the reports to English before they were published. They attributed the trend of use of English – even by the semi-illiterate – to the notion in Kenya that the formal media language is English because majority of mainstream media use the language. Editor 2 suggested that VoK would be more participatory if the community is sensitised on how they can participate:

We don’t intend to discourage anyone from sending SMS, so we are open to receiving news in either Kiswahili or English because I believe most people here in Kibera understand the two. People just want to do what they have seen is being done by these other mainstream media houses. What we need to do is to educate them on what we do.

Additionally, two of the respondents felt that as much as Voice of Kibera attempts to reach locals, the integration of new media technologies in its work meant that its main target group was the techno-savvy. They observed that the techno-savvy or those in the community interested in learning and using the new technologies were young men and thus marginalised groups such as women were left out.

*Development Issues*

Editors do not influence the coverage of issues for the community because Voice of Kibera aims to give citizen reporters a freehand in deciding what should be reported. Editors noted that the reports sent to VoK mainly consist community events and daily occurrences such as crimes, fires, floods or outbreak of diseases. Other reports include political events such as elections or campaigns against political violence. They also noted that locals working with non-governmental organisations, or others exposed to their work, send reports on mobilisation and education of citizens on rights, justice, representation, gender violence or health matters.

Editors have been major contributors to these reports and all the respondents affirmed that they have attempted to focus coverage on issues affecting the community such as electoral violence, services such as water, sanitation, electricity and security as well as social issues such as campaigns by women and youth against discrimination and
poverty. However, according to one of the respondents, their reports as editors have been biased on social and economic issues that affect the daily lives of Kiberans:

As you know, Kibera is a slum and these (socio-economic problems) are the things that readily come to our minds. When there is water rationing and so many people have gone without water, we focus on that as a policy. We want to use this media platform as an avenue of bringing better lives to our people (Editor 3).

Despite coverage on issues aimed at emancipating the locals, the respondents raised concerns about the impact of VoK. They argued that the community media fairs poorly in fulfilling its roles as compared to the mainstream media. They preferred that the reportage of VoK meet standards – they described largely as “editorial” – of the mainstream media.

That aside, editorial control did not translate to the publishing of content that is necessarily of community interest. The aim of VoK is to give citizen reporters the platform for them to make decisions on choice of issues to cover for the community. Several problems arose from these independence of citizen journalists. Editors complained that some citizen reporters are publicists for NGOs and businesses and use the platform to advertise instead of specifically bringing to light issues that affect Kiberans. Editors further contended that their role in ‘gatekeeping’ is reduced to fact checking, “just to ensure the information we have received is not false” (Editor 3). The editors, although with little training on journalism, perceive the independence locals are given through VoK “devalues the quality of news” (Editor 1):

Their reports are not journalistic. You know when writing a story you have to be at least objective and write it out in a good structure. We mostly have to keep calling them to check these facts or just get what they are trying to say.
The reasons the editors gave for “poor quality” of stories give are: the use of SMS in posting reports, the 160-character limit which is restrictive and so citizen reporters use abbreviated words and the lack of basic journalistic skills of deciding on stories/issues to report on, writing and editing.

**VoK as a community media**

One of the issues raised as regard VoK as a mass medium was its nature as a community media and how its goals influence its use of the mobile technology. VoK’s contribution to Kibera was its proximity to the locals and their needs, according to the editors. Editor 2 noted that:

> Other media are not based in the grassroots, so often they exaggerate information. Even if they don't exaggerate what we have is that we are the media that is close to the people. We understand issues that affect us directly.

Apart from the overall objective of VoK to support Map Kibera in collecting information of Kibera, as a community media it served as an alternative to other sources of news and information for Kibera. Editors cited the negative poor coverage and negative reporting from the mainstream media as reasons for the community’s support for local media. Editor 3 explained:

> We have had this problem, whereby Kibera is covered (by the mainstream media) when things are bad. For example, when (an) illicit brew has killed several people or maybe there is violence and suchlike stuff. It is our business to ensure that, not only bad things happening in Kibera are covered. There are equally better things going on.

The editors also mentioned that the roles of VoK are to allow citizens a chance to engage their leaders and each other on issues that affect the community. However, editors felt that the locals still “do not own VoK” (Editor 2) since they have not actively taken advantage of the opportunities it gives them to participate in its operation. They cited
low level of participation in sending news reports and the demands by some to be compensated for cost of sending SMS reports as signs that they do not as yet understand the opportunities that that the community media presents.

In addition to enhancing citizen participation, editors asserted that since VoK reports online have a likely global audience, they were a means through which Kibera could find a global voice and expose its community problems to donors and foreign governments.

Focus group discussions
The following are themes that emerged from the six focus group discussions of users of Voice of Kibera.

Uses of the mobile phone
Most of the respondents had mobile phones without internet. Out of the 21 participants in the focus group discussions, only four had phones with internet. They attributed their use of the phones without internet to low cost and ease of use. Some admitted they do not know how to use the internet on their mobile phones while others wanted to avoid additional cost in paying internet fees. In receiving information, the respondents said the mobile phone was a convenient technology because they could read news or reports anywhere through SMS and it was owned by most people in the community availing them a network.

I have the phone everywhere so it is easy to access quick news. If you have a TV sometimes you aerial is faulty so you cannot watch the news but for a phone, you will always make sure it works because you use it every minute (Respondent 1, FGD2).

One of the interesting discussions was how VoK as a medium made use of the mobile phone. Respondents in FGD 2 mostly criticised VoK for using the internet since, according to them, few people in the community had access to it. Although most of the users, who took part in the discussions, had not received news from VoK via SMS, they preferred that the community media introduces the service. However, when asked if mobile phone can act in place of other media, they were mixed reactions.
Respondents in the FGDs that were mostly composed of young people, agreed that receiving news and other reports through the phone – either on mobile internet or SMS – was most convenient. However, other groups were opposed to VoK becoming a ‘mobile-only’ medium because of credibility, lack of depth and the ephemeral nature of SMS. Respondent 5 in FGD2 explained:

If I give someone the SMS and tell him this is news, he will not believe it because he will say ‘this is not written’. He will say if the news is not on the paper then I am lying to him. People always check the newspapers to confirm if the news is true because they just don’t believe any serious news can be sent by SMS.

Respondent 2 in FGD 3 further explained that when news comes in as SMS it is stored with other personal messages hence making them be taken “an intrusion into private life”. Other respondents cited the 160-character limit of SMS as a hindrance to understanding news or other reports. Respondent 4 in FGD 3 also mentioned the "short-lived" nature of SMS as problematic, explaining that SMSs in one’s phone have to be deleted to give way to others hence particular news items may not be given the attention they deserve.

FGD 3 suggested that VoK instead makes use of “familiar media” like the newspaper and FM radio in disseminating its news and information. In FGD 4, there was a consensus that if any media had to have an impact in the community then familiarity and reach will be the most important factors. Respondent 3 in the group explained:

We talk about the mobile phone, SMS, Facebook and Twitter every time yet the *mama mbogas* (local vegetable vendors) don’t know about this and don’t even know how to use it. It is better to have a familiar medium. These new ones take time to learn. Even some local people here are still struggling to learn how to use SMS and other features of the phone. We need a newspaper in vernacular even for those that are illiterate.
Other challenges the respondents mentioned as regards reception of SMS news through their phones were its technical limitations. Some of the respondents were concerned that most of the phones had small screens and tiny characters hence affected their reading of reports. Others mentioned the 160-character limit of the SMS which they said made the consumption of SMS news costly and at the same time did not provide complete information. Respondent 2 (FGD 1) suggested that the SMS should be used to give alerts or “pointers” to the news that one needs to follow since it cannot give a complete story. This were reiterated by Respondent 4 in the group, who sighted a ‘breakings news’ service that he has subscribed to from one of the newspapers, which gives him alerts on unfolding events.

Consumption of media
Although most of them admitted to having difficulty in accessing reports of VoK, they have in past heard the reports being read out on Pamoja FM radio or seen them on Kibera Journal. The respondents preferred that VoK sends the reports through SMS that are free (initially, VoK had piloted the SMS delivery system through which SMS alerts could be sent to users but the plan did take off as mentioned by editors).

Respondents cited the reason for their interest in reports for VoK as being its coverage of community issues. The fact that it highlighted social and political issues of direct concern to the community meant that it reflected and represented community interests, according to the respondents. Most of the respondents however felt VoK could not adequately address their issues as citizen since its coverage was restricted to Kibera. They felt that even though VoK played a key role in informing them, it could not enable them to share views about rights, representation and national politics. According to respondent 4 (FGD 2), VoK’s “voice is small” and restricts its influence to Kibera instead of projecting the community to the national arena.

On the contrary, other participants cited their participation in SMS reporting as a key factor in enabling them to engage with elected leaders and government institutions in ensuring rights of citizen are respected, and a democratic culture is cultivated. Respondent 4 (FGD 5) gave the example of a referendum in 2010 (on Kenya’s new constitution), where citizen reporters monitored the voting process to ensure “no rigging takes place”. (Kibera was a hotspot for violence that followed a disputed presidential election in 2007, when the area member of parliament Raila Odinga – vying
as well for the presidency – was perceived to have been rigged out by the incumbent President Mwai Kibaki).

Participation on Voice of Kibera

The respondents in all the six focus group discussions were aware of VoK’s work and the role it gives locals in acting as ‘SMS reporters’. Out of the 21 respondents I interviewed, 17 had sent a report to VoK either online or through SMS. Majority of the SMS they had sent were news alerts, other general reports and opinions. The respondents gave varied reasons given for their participation. Majority of respondents mentioned the sense of obligation they have for the community as the main reason for participating. Respondent 3 in FGD 2 explained:

I send news on fires, or on tournaments in the neighbourhood or when gangsters attack someone or police kills one. I always want to make sure people who are not in the vicinity get that information fast and respond to it.

Others who had sent reports of occurrences such as fires and break-ins noted that they wanted their reports to help save lives and for masses to know so they respond appropriately. A few who had sent news and comments to mainstream media before said they were discouraged as their reports were “ignored”, but VoK had published all their reports and comments. Most of the respondents also agreed they had been approached by VoK editors or attended forums, where they were educated on importance of taking part in a ‘community project’. They further said the grassroots nature and the proximity of the editors had made them feel they own the project.

A few mentioned the prestige associated with the title ‘citizen reporter’ as being an incentive for their participation. The observed that oftentimes the title ‘reporter’ had been given to well-known reporters on the mainstream media who “highlight very serious issues of national concern” and therefore are highly respected in the society (Respondent 2, FGD 6). There was also the perception that Voice of Kibera had a role in projecting a positive image of Kibera and taking part in its production, according to the Respondent 4 (FGD 3), felt like taking part “in making things right”:
News on Kibera is always negative. It shocks you when they (mainstream media) misreport stuff that happened in your neighbourhood. They see Kibera as a place of crime and full of crooks. When we send these news (to VoK), we see them (published) as they are.

Another reason cited for participation by a few respondents was the creative opportunity reporting gave them. They mentioned that writing the reports engaged them so they do not remain idle and further made them freely express themselves.

However, the use of internet was making VoK unpopular because of the feeling that it is meant for the few who can afford to access internet or who are techno-savvy. An internet-based VoK was not seen as representing the community but a small group of young techno-savvy people.

The role of Voice of Kibera

According to most respondents, the key role of Voice of Kibera was informing Kiberans about community issues. Its focus on issues affecting the day to day lives of Kiberans was the reason most respondents preferred it to the mainstream media. Two respondents explained:

It gets to us more like the mtaani (neighbourhood) gossip, but this time you know it’s true. You get information instantly that a gangster was killed at Laini Saba (village) and then we get to know someone is concerned about our security (Respondent 3, FGD 1).

We want to see things that happen around us. The problem with other media is that they fill us with news about things that happen far away. We feel happy when we hear things that happen around our homes, not international or national. They (mainstream media) give us news about America, about Kakamega (in Western Kenya) yet we are in Kibera (Respondent 2, FGD 6).
However, VoK was criticised for its poor reach and influence in the community. One respondent explained that the community's political leaders have not been involved in the work of VoK and hence the community does not take it seriously as a “medium but a mere project” (Respondent 2, FGD 3). The respondent suggested that the community should be involved in expanding it and government devolvement funds – commonly referred to as constituency development funds in Kenya – be used to expand it.

Additionally, respondents were of the view that VoK put Kibera on the national and international spotlight. Some respondents mentioned the involvement of various local and international organisations in projects in the slum are a direct result of the community media highlighting issues of Kibera. Their perception was that if VoK carried reports on everyday hardships of Kiberans, more organisations and donors would visit the slum to help.

5.2 Analysis

In this section, I offer a discussion of the findings. This study set out to develop insights on the role of the mobile phone as a mass medium in a developing country. The community media, Voice of Kibera provided the framework to understand how the mobile phone is used as a mass medium in dissemination and production of content through the participation of citizens in Kibera community. The research questions were, how does Voice of Kibera function as a mass medium in highlighting issues affecting citizens in the community? How does Voice of Kibera serve as a platform for participation and what is the resultant contribution to the community?

5.2.1 Role of mobile media

Content analysis provided a basis for understanding issues highlighted through Voice of Kibera. The objective for content analysis was to analyse, the type of reports posted on VoK’s website and establish the possible roles of the issues highlighted. Findings from the content analysis showed that the prime role of the reports on Voice of Kibera is to serve as a community’s main source of information and education on social and political issues as well as to a bulletin board on community events and services. There was also a substantial amount of content that sought to mobilise and sensitise the community on
issues of human rights, health and political violence. There were however less opinions, which suggested that Voice of Kibera is not serving as a platform for debate of issues.

What was notable about the characteristics of the reports of Voice of Kibera was that they were composed of information targeted at the masses and not the interpersonal. This suggested an extent of awareness of the journalistic tradition of writing and presenting stories, a possible intervention by skilled editors or citizen reporters, who have received training on these skills. The training in basic journalism skills was confirmed by editors during the interviews. The style of presenting reports also implied that, even as a ‘citizen medium’, the ‘frame of reference’ for Voice of Kibera was the mainstream media and traditional journalism. Another characteristic of the content on Voice of Kibera’s website was the length. Considering the 160-character limit for SMS reports, most reports exceeded the limits of two SMS (that is 320 characters) suggesting either the reports were posted on the website or SMS reports from citizens were expanded by editors of Voice of Kibera. Indeed, the editors confirmed that most stories sent in by SMS reporters or posted on VoK’s website were rewritten to get context and depth of issues. Even so, the length suggested most of the reports had to be accessed online to be read exhaustively. This implied that Voice of Kibera largely depended on the internet for its dissemination of news. The shorter reports, likely being generated from SMS, raise questions if the mobile media is a viable platform for citizen to debate on issues they are well informed about.

Therefore, in terms of highlighting issues of the community and how it affected citizens, Voice of Kibera served as a medium that targeted the masses. As a news medium, it provided a source of information to create an informed citizenry. The news reports perhaps formed the basis for deliberation on other media or offline. However, as a medium, it is doubtful whether Voice of Kibera itself provided an adequate space for discussions on issues that affect community.

An investigation into how this medium presented a technology for users to engage each other and the community was done through interviews. The qualitative methods were also focused on understanding how the mobile medium serves as a platform of participation through their production of content. With the knowledge of the content of Voice of Kibera as a mass medium, the study set out to understand media participation and the implication for the role of mobile media in development.
In relation to how Voice of Kibera operates, the study finds that the key role of a mobile medium is to enhance the roles of other traditional new media. The mobile phone therefore functions more effectively as a medium among other media than a medium in itself (see Oksman 2010). Voice of Kibera largely depends on other media. Here I examine the findings in in two perspectives: Firstly, the way Voice of Kibera serves as a medium in itself in relation to other traditional and new media and secondly, the way it integrates other media.

The findings from the study of Voice of Kibera show that the mobile medium cannot be understood outside the context of other traditional media. Users asserted that as a mass medium the mobile phone lacked ‘familiarity’. Here ‘familiarity’ implied the novelty of the mobile technology and the apathy towards it in being used as a mass medium as well as the convenient nature of the traditional media. According to the users, the newspapers and radio have become the key sources of ‘reliable’ information. To the users, since the mobile phone is used frequently as a technology for interpersonal communication, adapting it use for mass communication purposes is problematic. The reason for this is that SMS news was seen as lacking in credibility because it is often used to ‘spread gossip’ among peers and therefore any information from the mobile, is considered trivial. The negative views on the use of the mobile phone as a mass medium have been reinforced by past findings that revealed that content of SMS is considered of low credibility in Kenya. A research conducted by AudienceScapes National Survey of Kenya, has shown that the level of trustworthiness of news and information from SMS is low (Intermedia, 2010). Other weaknesses of the mobile phone as a medium that came up in the findings were the ephemeral nature of the content (the fact that text messages have to be constantly deleted to give room for more) and the intrusion into personal life. Indeed, according to Groebel, Noam and Feldmann (2006), users of mobile phone have not put it to use entirely in receiving news they need. He observes that instead, they take advantage of the availability of the mobile phone everywhere in receiving information with personal importance (pp.243-244). Other issues that came up in the fieldwork are the intrinsic weaknesses of the mobile phone as a technology. They include the 160-character limit of the text messages that lacks context and depth of issues and the small screen of the mobiles which affects visibility. This is likely to have an impact of the functions of the media itself.
Despite the weaknesses of the mobile as a mass medium, the findings revealed that users appropriated the technology the function of receiving and delivering ‘alerts’. Some users asserted that the mobile provided snippets of news they should follow through other media or information that needed quick action. Indeed, in the dissemination of news, the mobile as an "instant medium" not only enables content to be delivered in real-time but also in a capacity, that supersedes that of other media (Fortunati, 2005; Oksman, 2010, p. 59). In investigating the possible contribution of a new technology therefore, the potential uses that a medium could be put to by the audience are important. Here media appropriation studies, specifically the domestication of technology, could be appropriate in further investigation how the mass medium could have an impact on consumption of media texts.

Overall, it is noteworthy here that the findings on how the mobile phone is put to use has implications on the development communication approaches. Discourses on participatory communication in particular stop at the point of provision of media platforms for people to participate in their own development. There is a common assumption in most of participatory development studies that when the media is available, citizens can chart their own way of development yet in some cases, citizens do not put mass media to the uses that theorists and practitioners think they will.

Concerning how the mobile medium integrates other mass media, the findings on Voice of Kibera showed that these old and new media play an important role in its operations. The internet is the platform through which VoK publishes its content so the community can access it. The citizen reporters, apart from sending reports through SMS, have an option of posting reports directly on the website. There was also a growing use of Twitter by a few users of Voice of Kibera, who posted news and opinions on its page. Voice of Kibera’s news were also published on a community newsletter, *Kibera Journal*, and broadcast by Pamoja FM, a community radio.

However, the accessibility of the new media technologies had an impact on Voice of Kibera’s operations. VoK was incapable of disseminating SMS news since its content management system was inadequate. Users therefore had to access VoK’s reports online yet majority of them did not have access to the internet. Through this inaccessibility to its content, VoK may be increasing the information gap in the community. Indeed, the form of ‘digital divide’ (see Pieterse, 2009) arising here is the informational gap between those who can access Voice of Kibera’s content online and those who cannot.
This gap hampers the effectiveness of Voice of Kibera as a medium that can adequately provide the citizenry with the information they need to participate in their own development. Even though more citizens could potentially access Voice of Kibera’s content through the mobile phone, scholars such as Heeks (2007) warn against technodeterminism. He argues that a technological and informational gap will still exist between those who have mobiles and those who do not. Future research may be need to investigate whether mobile as a medium could contribute to closing various forms of ‘digital divide’ owing to the ubiquity of the technology.

5.2.2 Participation
Voice of Kibera was created specifically to integrate the participatory role of users and because of the availability of the new media technologies that were suitable for citizen journalism (Boakye, Scott and Smyth, 2010). Indeed the rapid growth of media participation has been as a result of availability of new media technologies like mobile phones that give citizens a convenient platform to participate in media production and decision-making processes of the media organisations (see Carpentier, 2011; Rosen, 2008). Findings on media participation through Voice of Kibera were particularly interesting for this research. Here I will briefly discuss the role of participation through VoK and the nature of participation on this platform along with its implications on development.

The role of participation through the mobile medium of Voice of Kibera was particularly interesting from the perspective of users. The main contribution of audience participation via Voice of Kibera was the empowerment of citizens who often feel marginalised by the mainstream media. The context of ‘power’ to the citizen was expanded through Voice of Kibera in several perspectives, as I will explain shortly. The findings also showed that the nature of the media determines the power the audience feel they gain through participation.

Participants of VoK felt the mobile phone gave them direct and increased avenues to express themselves as well as take part in the decision-making process and production of content. Additionally, participants felt their participation gave them an alternative voice in articulating their social and political issues in the community, nationally and globally. The reasons the users cited for their participation was a sense of obligation to
inform the community as well as Voice of Kibera’s use of the mobile phone and its community-based objectives. Although the participation of locals in Kibera was low owing to the use of internet by VoK, content analysis revealed that the issues covered by the participants were mostly aimed at addressing socio-political issues affecting Kibera. However, Voice of Kibera could not provide an adequate platform for deliberating these issues because its main use of the internet hampered accessibility.

Even so, Voice of Kibera is facilitating participation in the media, the kind of participation where non-media professionals are incorporated in the production of content and in the decision-making processes of the organisation (see Carpentier 2011). Participation through the media, where the media serves as a platform for deliberative democracy, is however lacking (see Ibid). Yet still, participation in the media through Voice of Kibera is likely to be spurring debates by citizens offline and thus contributing to deliberation.

The goal of VoK to give citizens editorial independence had several implications. Users felt that Voice of Kibera gave them power to “right the wrongs of other (mainstream) media” owing to underrepresentation of the community and negative coverage by popular newspapers, TV and radios in Kenya. This power, to contribute to media production, gave them a sense of control of the centre of power that is media and further, it gave them control over issues to be covered through VoK.

The tradition of participatory communication engages theorists and practitioners in the notion of power and its role in the emancipation of the citizens for development. Indeed, development scholars have been concerned with the strength of the participatory approach in giving marginalised communities power to “control their own social change” (Wilkins, 2000, p.2). The platform that Voice of Kibera provides can be seen to feed into the idea of development. The idea of editorial independence positions Voice of Kibera as a platform for equal and fair participation, what Servaes (2008) terms as empowerment, whereby communities in the lower hierarchies of society are able to challenge centres of power. Voice of Kibera then becomes a potential platform for ‘real participation’ where citizens could engage with institutions of power in the society such as media or the government. Additionally, VoK is giving citizens an opportunity for self-development as citizens. Participation in production of media “has intrinsic value for participants, alleviating feelings of alienation and powerlessness” (Mefalopulos, 2008, p. 51). Indeed enthusiasts of participatory media claim citizen journalists are gaining
power over the mainstream media and other centres of power, although this power is yet to be a subject of adequate research.

However, findings from the focus group with users showed that most of them doubt the power they gain through Voice of Kibera. They expressed concern that the mobile medium may not have an impact as compared to tradition media, which still withholds most ‘media power’ because of its perceived reach to a wider audience in the country. Additionally, it is doubtful if giving citizen reporters control over what content to cover makes them adequately addresses the issues that affect them as citizens and hence adequately address socio-political problems in the community. Editors argued that the editorial independence given to the community dumbs down on the quality of news, leading to the failure of the content to adequately fulfil the roles of information, education, sensitisation and mobilisation. Further, barriers to participation such as inaccessibility to the internet, the mobile costs and imbalance in use – where the young and techno-savvy are main participants – made the potential ‘power’ of Voice of Kibera doubtful.

However, in the case of Voice of Kibera, the opportunities that the mobile medium provides for participation are not utilised by all groups in the community. The dominant group is still the male youth. Women are still underrepresented. Among the six editors I interviewed, only one was female. In the focus group discussions, out of the 21 respondents, only three were women. That most participants were male and young confirms the argument by (Norris, 2001) that the democratising nature of participation is oftentimes exaggerated. Enthusiasts of participatory culture have romanticised the possibilities of new media technologies in revolutionising citizen participation. Notwithstanding the fact that these scholars hold a western view of the influence of communication technologies, they overlook the fact that there is low usage of new technologies in the developing world.

Voice of Kibera could not reach most populations in the community since its reports had to be accessed online or through mobile internet, according to the editors and the users. The citizen reporters who participated in sending reports to VoK were few because most could not have access to the internet while the cost of SMS, although low, discouraged many from participating. The implication for participation in media production is that it has to be examined further in consideration of the groups
participating. The question that comes up here is, do new technologies democratise participation or it further marginalises other groups in the society?

5.2.3 Community media paradigm

The findings further showed that Voice of Kibera changes the way community media has been theorised. VoK’s mapping concept perhaps presents a paradigm shift in the way community media operates in an environment of changing technology. Map Kibera, the organisation that founded Voice of Kibera, uses the mapping concept to “aggregate and visualize information” about Kibera through the use of a digital map prepared by Map Kibera (Tully, 2010, *What is Voice of Kibera?*). The mapping concept has been integrated in the editorial operations of Map Kibera. The editors of Voice of Kibera suggested that mapping ensures every part of the community of Kibera slum is covered since it provides a sort of monitory tool for the community media. For instance, news sent in by a citizen reporter, without the specification of the location was not verified and or approved to be published. The mapping concept can have a positive or negative outcome. In itself, it defines the strong connection between the geography of the community and content. In editorial sense, the location limits the reports sent in by citizen reporters. As a monitory tool for coverage of different villages of Kibera and citizen participation it is likely to foster social inclusion by ensuring the participants have equal voice and opportunities to participate in the media.

Summary

This section set out to analyse the findings from the content analysis, interviews and focus group discussion in relation to the research questions. The assessment of the operations of Voice of Kibera revealed that as mass medium the mobile phone largely serves its role in development as a medium among other media. What is there to note as regards the role of Voice of Kibera is that the mobile phone has not carved out its place as a mass media like the traditional ones. The mobile phone technology as a mass medium has largely been enhanced by convergence of other media technologies such as the internet and the traditional media. The next chapter concludes the study and gives recommendations for future research.
6. Conclusion

In this chapter, I present the conclusion to the study and the suggestions for the areas for further research. The aim of this study was to explore the potential role of mobile media in development. The objective was to establish how the mobile phone is used as a mass medium and further, if the technology curves out a special place for itself in the production and distribution of news media content. This study used the case of Voice of Kibera, a community media in Kenya, to understand its role and how it acts as a platform for media participation. I was guided by two research questions: How does Voice of Kibera function as a mass medium in highlighting issues affecting citizens in the community? How does Voice of Kibera serve as a platform for participation and what is the resultant contribution to the community?

To investigate how mobile media reframes the role of mass media in development, my approach was based on an exploration of related theory and literature. I first examined how the mobile phone has been theorised as a mass medium, followed by a discussion of the significance of mobile phones and mass media in society. This was followed by a discussion of the approaches to development communication as an entry point to the theory of participatory communication. Having set the ground for understanding mobile media, mass media and development, I examined the discourses on participatory culture in attempting to understand how new media technologies like mobiles engage citizens in the production of content. Through this, I understood how the citizen utilises news content and acquires a role of the producer leading to a unique relationship between the audience and the media organisation. For the empirical study, I performed a content analysis on reports published on Voice of Kibera’s website in an attempt to identify the characteristics of its reports from citizen reporters and further quantify issues highlighted on the community media. Subsequently, I conducted interviews of four editors and six focus group discussions with 21 respondents to further understand the operations of Voice of Kibera as a mobile medium and how it incorporates citizen participation.

The findings revealed that the role of mobile media is mainly to enhance traditional roles of media. These roles include, stimulating exchange of information thereby creating an informed society and further providing an avenue for participation in media production. Participants further used Voice of Kibera uniquely to send instant
information. The consumption of news produced through Voice of Kibera was boosted through other traditional media and internet. It however did not serve adequately as a platform for widening deliberation since its content could only be accessed through the internet, which was available to few users, mainly the techno-savvy youth. Further, the nature of the mobile phones as a technology and its usage presented structural problems such as its 160-character limit affecting the context and depth of media content.

What was noteworthy as regards the role of Voice of Kibera is that the mobile phone has not carved out its place as a mass medium like the traditional ones. Findings from the study further reinforced the idea that the mobile phone technology as a mass medium has largely been enhanced by convergence with other media technologies such as the internet technologies and the traditional media. Although it is clear that technology is changing and its use is transforming, the study of Voice of Kibera showed that mobile phone can be a medium itself but not a mass media by itself. The study, most importantly revealed that, the impact and significance of the mobile phone as a mass medium largely depends on how users have appropriated its uses in relation to other media and how it is taking over the roles of previous mass media.

Indeed the mobile medium, as the findings showed, present greater opportunities for citizen participation in a developing country. It gives an incentive to participate owing to the fact that it provides a ready platform for the citizen to exercise freedom in media production. One of the contributions of audience participation through Voice of Kibera is the empowerment of citizens who often feel marginalised in social and political activities. The context of ‘power’ to the citizen is expanded through the mobile technology that gives enormous ability for mobilisation of citizens to project their political and social agenda through the platform.

This study also shows that mobile media could play a vital role in enhancing the operations of community media. It holds greater potential for providing coverage of issues affecting the community. Although it may not provide adequate capacity to citizens for deliberation due to its intrinsic weaknesses as a technology, its informational capacity could be propped up through integration with the previous six mass media – the print, recordings, cinema, radio, TV and the internet (see Ahonen, 2008).
The study however grappled with several limitations. Mobile media has not been theorised in media and development studies. Therefore, this research ventured into the discourse on development communication to understand the role of mass media in a developing country in order to locate the potential role of mobile media in development. Since the mobile for development or M4D is an emerging area of scholarship, there is still inadequate literature in this field. Additionally, there are varied ways in which one can analyse the role of media in development and thus any study cannot be exhaustive because any medium and the mobile phone technology can be put into numerous uses.

This study began with the goal of finding a possible linkage among media, mobile communication and development studies. This research has hopefully provided an impetus for the entry of mobile media into the fields of development studies, media studies and digital media culture (owing to the mobile phone’s contribution to media participation). Further, this research has hopefully contributed to the understanding of the use of the mobile phone as a mass medium from the context of a developing country.

The growing ‘mobile media’ studies (see for instance, Goggin, 2011; Goggin & Hjorth, 2009; Groebel, Noam & Feldmann, 2006) have taken a Western perspective of the mobile media concept owing to the use of advanced mobile technologies with varied functions such as gaming in the developed world. I acknowledge that these advanced forms of mobile technologies are growing in developing countries, but the simple forms of mobile media such as SMS are currently having more significance. Therefore, this study recommends that developing the field of mobile media in media studies will need the integration of research on how the mobile phone is put to use in the developing world.

6.1 Future research

Resources and time limited this study. A larger study involving more respondents would offer a broader perspective. This can be followed by an audience research that may need to focus on comparative studies of various uses of different media and the mobile medium. Future research may further need to investigate the impact of mobile media and how development initiatives will be affected by its extensive use in developing countries. A study of mobile media would be necessary to find out if it addresses the development needs of poor populations.
Since the findings showed that the mobile phone as a mass medium much depends on how it is put to use, therefore, in investigating the possible contribution of a new technology, the potential uses that a medium could be put to by the audience are important. Here media appropriation studies, specifically the domestication of technology, could be useful in further investigation on how the mass medium could have an impact on consumption of media texts.

In addition, more studies are needed on the growing participatory culture in Kenya and its significance to citizen participation in a deliberative democracy. These studies perhaps should not only focus on SMS use, but also mobile internet because of its growing adoption in Kenya and other developing countries.
References


Appendix I

Screenshot of Voice of Kibera reports’ webpage

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Appendix II

Coding schedule

A. CATEGORIES

1. News
2. Features
3. Opinions

B. CHARACTERS

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C. ISSUES

1. Politics
2. Citizen rights
3. Social groups
4. Community events
5. Social services
6. Gender issues
7. Poverty
8. Health
9. Security
10. Environment
11. Others

E. EMERGING THEMES

1. Information
2. Education
3. Sensitisation
4. Mobilisation
5. Bulletin Board
Appendix III

Interview Guide

I. Voice of Kibera Editors

SECTION A: The Community Media (VoK)
1. What is your role at the VoK?
2. What is the mission of VoK?
3. What is VoK’s target group?

SECTION B: Mobile phone use
4. How are you using the mobile phone in your work?
5. What is the contribution of the mobile phone to your work?
6. How do you integrate the use of the mobile phone in your editorial process?
7. How are you integrating online and SMS media?

SECTION C: Mobile media content
8. What do you consider as the key issues that you cover on Voice of Kibera?
9. What do you consider is the key role of VoK? Is VoK’s main aim to inform the community?
10. Do you feel VoK adequately addresses issues affecting the community? Why?
11. How has the mobile phone helped to cover issues of affecting Kibera?
12. Does the use of the mobile phone have an effect on coverage of issues affecting the community?
13. What do you think has been VoK’s contribution to Kibera?

SECTION D: Participation
14. How do your users/audience help you in your editorial work?
15. What are the main forms of contribution to VoK?
16. What is the level of audience contribution to your news site?
17. How would you rate the value of content you get from the audiences?
18. Do you reject some of their contributions? Why?
19. Why do you think your audience contribute news to VoK?
SECTION E: Media Agenda

20. Who funds your organisation?
21. Do they set the agenda for your news coverage?
22. How would you compare VoK with other media?

II. Users of Voice of Kibera

SECTION A: Mobile phone technology
1. What kind of mobile phone do you have? a) With Internet b) Without Internet
2. Why do you use the type of phone you have?

Uses of mobile phone/SMS
3. Do you use your mobile phone to get any information from the media?
4. How frequently do you use it to get news? What kinds of news are you interested in?
5. Do you receive SMS news? How would you compare SMS news to those on radio, TV or newspaper?
6. Do you feel the mobile phone is good for receiving news?

SECTION B: Consumption of content of VoK
7. Do you subscribe to Voice of Kibera news? Why do you prefer VoK?
8. How do you read the SMS news published by VoK? a) Through the phone?
b) Through the website? c) Through the blog?
9. What kinds of news from VoK are you interested in? Why?
10. How do the reports from VoK help you as a citizen in Kibera?

SECTION C: Participation
11. What kind of contribution have you made through Voice of Kibera? a) SMS b) Pictures and video via MMS c) Comments on the website?
12. How do you send them in to VoK? a) Through SMS? b) Through the website? c) Through the blog?
13. How regularly do you send in the news?
14. How do you understand the role of a citizen reporter?
15. What do you feel is your contribution to Kibera through being a citizen reporter?
16. Why do you make these contributions through VoK?

*Development News/Content?*
17. What kinds of information do you send to VoK?
18. Why do you send these kinds of news through VoK?
19. How do you think VoK helps you as a citizen?
20. Are issues raised on VoK important to Kibera?

*Barriers*
21. What hinders you from sending in news reports?
22. Do you feel you would send in more reports if this were the mainstream media (radio, TV and newspaper)? Why?

*SECTION D: Contribution of Voice of Kibera*
23. How do you think the news on VoK helps Kibera?
24. How do you think VoK in general helps Kibera?
25. How does the mobile phone make VoK different from other media?