

Social television as sign of the times

LAGOS, NIGERIA: Christian Purefoy, a former CNN reporter, recently initiated a user-generated news and video platform, BattaBox, in Nigeria. In its first week of existence, it became the first and only channel to stream the current protests taking place across the country.

About a month ago, hundreds of thousands people were out on the streets of Nigeria protesting. Social media - with a new platform called BattaBox, in particular - ended up playing a major role.

Christian Purefoy left his position as CNN correspondent in West Africa to found BattaBox. "This is a watershed moment for the internet here. Nigerians from around the world can now tune in, watch and listen to people shouting, singing, praying and protesting on the streets of Lagos. This has never happened before and you can feel the 'electricity' and significance of the moment," says Purefoy.

The population of Nigeria is under great pressure. In the north, the Islamic sect Boko Haram has recently killed hundreds of people. Nationwide demonstrations are taking place protesting against increasing costs and asking for more responsible governance. Meanwhile the major news agencies usually only have one correspondent, if that, in the region. Hence, the international media has paid relatively little attention what is occurring in Nigeria.

RNW spoke to Christian Purefoy in Lagos, Nigeria.

What do you hope to achieve with BattaBox?

"I hope with BattaBox, Nigerians will now have a free platform to tell their stories and to share, be it news, debate, comedy or music. There is a huge demand. Almost everyone in Nigeria has a mobile phone these days and many people have internet access on it. We have already created apps for Blackberry, Android and Nokia phones."

How unique is BattaBox? Can it be seen as a Nigerian Facebook?

"We're social television. Nigerians are the directors, actors, reporters, fashionistas as well as the audience. People have compared us to YouTube and Facebook - as a social network for you, your friends and maybe a few recommended strangers. But as our viewing figures have shown, BattaBox has gotten people's voices heard by the audience that matters most: Nigerians at home and around the world."

Does Nigeria have a sufficient technological infrastructure?

"Even a year ago, BattaBox would not have been possible. The mobile phone and internet have brought immeasurable changes to peoples' lives in Nigeria and the infrastructure is rapidly expanding. As the internet becomes more widely available, there is an increased need for information, content and platforms for people to make their voice heard. That said, huge challenges remain in operating an internet business in Nigeria."

For example, it is still quite costly and, when compared to more developed countries, too slow for the majority of people to upload their stories. But we hope that BattaBox will help promote the need for people to use the internet - and, in turn, promote the market for improved infrastructure."

Can people put anything online? Or is there some kind of editorial filter?

"BattaBox has a very simple editorial filter: it must have a Nigerian focus and not have inflammatory content. Otherwise, BattaBox accepts anything. We are constantly surprised at how people use the platform - for example, we've had requests from people wanting to create their own shows, explain their artwork or even give cooking lessons."

What have been the results so far? How are people reacting?

"We've had over ten thousand views and hundreds of uploads - and we've not even through our first month yet! It is already making a difference to peoples' lives. We are extremely grateful to our audience and users."

Source: allAfrica.com

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