

Beyond Wonga Radio Drama – Impact Briefing

Engaging youth with radio drama

BACKGROUND – TRIBE FM

Tribe FM is a youth radio station of the National Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) of Papua New Guinea (PNG). Tribe provides informative, entertaining, and engaging programming that focuses on issues relevant to young citizens of PNG. In 2008, Tribe FM was set up as a three-hour program on NBC National Radio on its own frequency. Tribe is now airing 24 hours a day and has scheduled programming from 6am to 12am, featuring more diverse programs. The station's coverage has also increased from two to nine locations: Mt Hagen, Goroka, Vanimo, Lae, Alotau, Buka, Rabaul, Kimbe, Manus.

Tribe FM is supported by the Media for Development Initiative (MDI), a project run collaboratively by ABC International Development, Australian aid and NBC. MDI focuses on building, training and strengthening the capacity of the National Broadcasting Corporation of Papua New Guinea, supporting outside broadcasts and remote area visits and generating research and content on the key areas of health, education, gender and governance.

In 2015, MDI undertook research in collaboration with Tribe FM to better understand its target audience. The research provided insights into young people's behaviours, interests, and attitudes on issues important to them and helped develop audience archetypes. The result of this research was a better understanding of issues important to youth and their diverse interests and attitudes. This understanding underpinned the development of Beyond Wonga script and characters. Illustration 1 provides a brief character outline of the Beyond Wonga drama characters.

THE SHOW

In late 2015, Tribe FM staff expressed their interest in creating a radio drama aimed at a youth audience (16-24 years) in PNG. Drama for development initiatives are an engaging radio format that can be used to introduce and discuss important youth messages in an entertaining way. Tribe FM aimed to develop a drama that promoted positive role models and tackled issues such as alcohol abuse, gender inequality and crime in an entertaining and emotive way. The MDI engaged screen writer Tania Nugent to workshop the ideas of the Tribe FM staff and support the development of the script. This collaboration resulted in the production of Season One of Tribe FM's radio drama (4 x 7 min episodes). Beyond Wonga Season Two (4 x 7 min episodes) was independently developed by Tribe FM staff in February 2016.

Beyond Wonga follows five main characters from their high school graduation and beyond where they encounter difficult choices and their consequences. Season One focused on the issue of safety on a night out celebrating, with an emphasis on alcohol abuse and violence. Season One was broadcast on Tribe FM radio and their Facebook page in December 2015 to draw attention to the rise in alcohol use at the end of year holiday period. Season Two dealt with themes such as gender, disability and drug use. The episodes were broadcast on Tribe FM radio and Facebook in March 2016 to coincide with International Women's Day.

To assess the impact of Beyond Wonga and inform future production, MDI engaged in audience research to provide insights and audience feedback to Tribe FM staff to enhance future seasons and respond to audience preferences.

Illustration 1. Main characters from Beyond Wonga

Rebecca

- Caring towards her friends, especially Tina
- Overcomes difficult challenges
- Learns to speak out about issues in her society, particularly gender and peer pressure



Steven

- A leader
- Can be inconsiderate of others
- Irresponsible, doesn't think about the consequences of his actions



Tina

- Respectful of her family
- Expresses her emotions freely
- Supportive towards her friends, especially Rebecca
- Learns to seek support from friends



Mikey

- Questions his friends but ultimately gives in to peer pressure
- Learns to overcome challenges
- Learns to stay positive in difficult situations



Andrew

- A joker
- Learns to challenge peer pressure
- Learns to support his friends



METHODOLOGY

The aim of the Beyond Wonga audience research was to provide Tribe FM staff with audience feedback on the first two seasons to inform future production. The research also sought general information on media use and interviewee's daily lives.

MDI research decided to conduct the research as one-on-one phone interviews with participants. The interview method was selected as phone calls were the only reliable way to contact provincial listeners.

Participants, age 18-24, were recruited through requests for expressions of interest on Tribe FM's Facebook page and the Tribe Research Club on WhatsApp.

MDI then developed a recruitment screener, to ensure that chosen participants understood and consented to what was involved in the research. The screener also ensured that the selected interviewees represented a diversity of gender, age, region and occupation. The discussion guide was created with input from Tribe FM staff to include questions that would assist the production of a third season. The draft guide was tested in three pilot interviews. This helped refine the guide to address unexpected questions and areas of interest. MDI adapted the guide to cater for

various language groups in PNG as well as altering questions to increase their clarity. This guide asked interviewees to respond to questions in several areas:

- Personal interests
- Storyline
- Characters
- Production elements
- General feedback

As very few selected interviewees had listened to Beyond Wonga on radio, participants were sent the program directly to their mobile phone, so they could listen before their interview. Half of the participants were sent Season One and half were sent Season Two. Participants received phone credit to cover the cost of listening. As audiences listened to the drama to participate in research, it is important to recognise that their answers were primed and may differ from answers had they listened under normal circumstances. Over a period of two weeks, 16 phone interviews were conducted with listeners from four regions (see Table One). As an incentive to participate and to thank interviewees for their time, they were sent 10 Kina phone credit on completion of the interview.

Table One: Audience research sample

	Southern (NCD)	Highlands	Islands	Momase	Total
Male	2	3	2	1	8
Female	3	3	1	1	8

All interviews were transcribed, translated and analysed thematically.

FINDINGS

Overall, listeners had positive feedback about Beyond Wonga as well as recommendations for improvement. Findings emerged in three broad areas: representation, relevance and engagement.

REPRESENTATION

Beyond Wonga creators wanted to ensure that listeners identified with characters that represented them and their peers in the drama. Accurately representing young people of PNG helps Beyond Wonga appear realistic to its audience. Listeners related strongly to characters, with several comparing themselves and their friends with key characters:

The character of Steven is very much like myself. – Male, 21, Highlands (Season 1 and 2)

Rebecca's character is very real to me as I see myself mostly in her shoes, where I get angry and snap very quickly. Also, when it comes to me going out with friends, I had to get permission from my parents or ask them, sometimes I sneak out just like Rebecca. – Female, 21, Islands (Season 1 and 2)

Tina – I have some friends that are like her. Steven – there are some boys who are similar to him. – Female, 19, Southern (Season 1 and 2)

Some characters were more relatable than others. Listeners made mention of the relatability of some characters, Tina (5 times), Rebecca (4 times), Steven (twice), Andrew (twice) and Mikey (once). Female listeners were most likely to identify with or know people like Tina and Rebecca, however they also mentioned Andrew, Mikey and Steven. Male listeners only reported knowing males like the Beyond Wonga characters,

particularly Andrew and Steven. All urban listeners related to the Beyond Wonga characters, however two provincial listeners did not see themselves and their peers represented in the drama:

I'm not sure whether these characters do match or are similar to some folks in my community. – Male, 21, Highlands (Season 1)

Language was another area where some listeners did not feel represented. Of 16 responses, nine listeners wanted a balance of Tok Pisin and English and seven wanted more Tok Pisin than English. One listener stated:

Should balance English and Tok Pisin, consider people who do not clearly understand English. – Female, 22 Highlands (Season 1)

RELEVANCE

Effective drama for social change is culturally relevant and context-specific (Population Media Centre 2016). The Beyond Wonga audience research found that the most important issues for young people were alcohol abuse, unemployment and unplanned pregnancy. Listeners identified alcohol abuse and unplanned pregnancy as the two biggest issues in Beyond Wonga, demonstrating the drama's connection with young people's concerns. Some listeners shared how the issues discussed in the show relate to their lives:

My cousin brother drank steam [potent home brew] and he got very drunk, got into a fight and stabbed another boy. He is now in jail. They said he could be bailed out and his parents bailed him out. He's slowed down drinking and his parents sent him to the village. – Female, 19, Southern (Season 1 and 2)

My class girl who was very quiet and doesn't hang out but she had a boyfriend who tricked her into sleeping with her, when she fell pregnant the boyfriend denied that the child was his. – Female, 19, Southern (Season 1 and 2)

Most of the issues covered were quite real to me. – Female, 21, Islands (Season 1 and 2)

ENGAGEMENT

The ability of a drama to engage and entertain listeners is linked to its ability to get its message across to audiences (Population Media Centre 2016). Dramas that generate a range of emotions from the audience are more likely to impact the way they engage with an issue. Beyond Wonga audiences demonstrated that the drama engaged them both emotionally and intellectually:

The episodes kept me in suspense and my heart was pounding, so I wanted to know what would happen next. – Male, 21, Highlands (Season 1 and 2)

If people in rural areas hear the drama on the radio, it will really capture and captivate them. – Female, 21, Islands (Season 1 and 2)

The way listeners engaged with Beyond Wonga messaging varied between Season One and Season Two. All participants who listened to Season One identified alcohol abuse and safety on a night out as the key message of the drama. Season Two covered many different topics and those who listened to Season Two varied greatly in their interpretation of the season's key message, often listing several messages rather than one focus.

Radio drama aims to engage the audience in social issues by role modelling a range of choices and responses to situations. In Season

One, for example, all the characters need to get home after the night out. Tina had reserved money for travel and takes taxi home. Rebecca asks for a lift from strangers. Steven and Mikey, still drunk, drive to the river while Andrew leaves them and walks home. The audience are presented with a range of behaviours and are able to make a judgement about the characters and their choices.

Audience feedback on characters demonstrates listeners' engagement with decision making processes and difficult choices the characters faced. This often impacts how likeable they found the character. Tina and Mikey were both judged as 'likeable' characters:

[Tina] accepted the fact that she's pregnant and this does not hinder her from moving on in life. – Female, 18, Momase (Season 2)

[Tina] had the courtesy to ask for permission from her parents before going out with her friends. – Female, 22, Highlands (Season 1)

[Mikey] even is disabled but now is thinking of the Para-Olympics. He hasn't given up; he is trying to be someone. – Male, 23, Southern (Season 1 and 2)

[Mikey] even though he was unable/ paralysed, he had the passion, the drive in him to pursue life and to discover more on life. – Male 23, Momase (Season 2)

Listeners mentioned Tina, Justin and Steven as disliked characters, and this is linked with their poor behaviour:

Tina didn't own up and take responsibility for her actions. – Male, 21, Highlands (Season 1 and 2)

Even though he [Justin] knows that his

girlfriend Tina was pregnant, he was not supportive enough. – Female, 18, Momase (Season 2)

Steven is a student and for him to involve in such behaviours of negligence driving and possession of fire arms. He did not think like an educated person, he knows all the rules and regulations, laws and he should not be involved in things like this. – Male, 23, Momase (Season 2)

The ethical and social questions raised by the drama engaged listeners in the story. Listeners' responses demonstrated a deep connection between audience, characters and message. Several listeners commented that the moral issues in the show were their favourite part of Beyond Wonga:

I'm really interested because it teaches me more lessons which people like me they need to hear. So it's really like awareness to the society we live in. – Male, 23, Momase (Season 2)

Radio drama is good because most youth will come to realise their mistakes and refrain from bad habits. – Female, 22, Highlands (Season 1)

It inspires me, like especially young people to change and improve their lives. – Male, 21, Highlands (Season 1 and 2)

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SEASON THREE

Positive reactions from listeners demonstrate a demand for Beyond Wonga to continue and expand into a third season:

Share it with other radio stations. – Male, 21, Highlands (Season 1 and 2)

I think Beyond Wonga could be improved by making it into a film. – Female, 21, Islands (Season 1 and 2)

The findings of this research provide recommendations to inform the creation of a third season of Beyond Wonga, they are:

1. Increase representation of provincial characters and the issues that are important to them.
2. Increase use of Tok Pisin to better represent non-English speaking listeners.
3. Address youth unemployment – one of the top three issues for young people and not addressed in Seasons One and Two.
4. Consider how Beyond Wonga can best express its key messages so that they can be explored more deeply as in Season One.
5. Continue creating situations where listeners are challenged to critically consider characters' choices and behaviour.

REFERENCES

Population Media Centre (2016) Serial Dramas, accessed 6 July 2016, <https://www.populationmedia.org/product/serial-dramas/>