Research Article

Audience Variables and Programme Preference of Radio Listeners in Uyo, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

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Abstract: The study was undertaken to determine the variables that influence programme preference of radio listeners in Uyo, the capital city of Akwa Ibom, Nigeria. The city was purposively selected because of its cosmopolitan nature as it comprises people with differing demographics and psychographics. The primary data for the study was obtained through questionnaire administered on a purposively selected sample size of 384 radio listeners distributed across the capital city. A number of variables were found to influence listeners' choice of radio stations: level of education, political affiliation, age, social status, family influence, religious belief, among others. Also various factors such as a station's house style, clear reception, news coverage, kind of programme etc. contributed in influencing audience programme preference. Entertainment programmes attracted the highest number of listeners. Findings also indicated a significant relationship between audience variables and programme preference of radio listeners. Consequently, radio stations are encouraged to come up with new programmes that will boost entertainment, sport, general interest and current affairs, which command dominant audience interest among Uyo radio listeners.

Keywords: Audience variables, Programme preference, Radio listeners, Listenership Survey, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The media exist because of their audiences on which their survival depends. Media wares are created with an audience in mind and these audiences decide what meaning they make of any media text. A media organisation without an audience is unimaginable! These audiences are composed of people who differ from each other in age, gender, economic status, education, religion, culture, race, etc. Differences in the audience affect selection and exposure to the media which may vary from person to person. Again, these differences account for why people experience the same media message differently.

A method of categorizing audiences is known as variables. Media producers basically want to know their audience variables. Once they able to ascertain this they can begin to create messages and programmes to appeal to a group with known listening habits, in this case, the radio. As the uses and gratifications theory has shown, audience members are active and often make choice of a medium to attend to and which media message to consume based on their felt need and gratification sought (Bryant & Thompson, 2002).

Since audience members have different needs which they want to satisfy, each audience member's choice and use of a mass medium depends on how well the medium would attain to their needs. It is also acceptable that some members of the audience can have overlapping needs if there is similarity in social category. With this, such similarity can also make them seek similar communication messages. Consequently, it may be hard for editors to predict how each audience member will receive a particular message. Editors can imagine they know what different groups of people will want but it is often hard to explain why some radio stations are popular and some are not.

In Nigeria there are over 250 radio houses (Mojekeh *et al.,* 2019) with a majority in private hands, which depend on audience patronage to break even. In other words, they depend on profits generated through repeated patronage and customer satisfaction to stay on air. Among the private radio stations on air in Uyo are Passion-94.5FM, Comfort-95.1 FM, Excel-106.9 FM, Planet-101.1 FM, Alantic-104.5 FM, AKBC Radio, Uniuyo-100.7 FM, Heritage 104.9 FM, Paradise-105.5 FM, Gospel revolution-107.5 FM, and Inspiration 105.9 FM. It has therefore become imperative for an empirical explanation of the factors that determine audience patronage of radio stations. Do audience variables influence listener's preference of programmes of radio stations in Uyo, the Akwa Ibom State capital?

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Research Questions
- Do audience variables like level of education, age, group membership, etc. influence choice of radio programmes among radio listeners in Uyo?
- What factors influence the choice of radio stations among Uyo radio audience?
- What are the favourite programmes of Uyo radio audience?
- Which radio station(s) is the most preferred by radio listeners in Uyo?
- What is the average hour devoted to listening to the radio by Uyo radio audience?

Research Hypothesis
- **Hypothesis One:** There is no significant relationship between audience variable and programme preference of radio listeners in Uyo.
- **Hypothesis Two:** There is no significant relationship between factors such as stations house-style, clear reception, news coverage etc. and listener's choice of a radio station.

Media Audience, Audience Variables and Media Choice

Media audiences are the recipients of mass media contents. Every media message is planned and packaged with the audience in mind. The audience constitutes the final arbiter of any media message. The media therefore exist to serve audience needs, which vary across board. In recognition of the pride of place the media audience occupy in society, Hasan (2013, p. 145) cautions the media "to pay attention to the consumers of their content if they have to sell well", because "these audiences decide whether they can survive the pressures of market or not."

Furthermore, scholars have argued that audience becomes very essential in mass communication because media texts need audiences in order to realize their potential for meaning. Media products are relevant to the extent that there are audiences to consume them, much in the same manner that production is incomplete without consumers. Media audiences are composed of large number of social groups regardless of the communication settings and these groups are homogenous in composition. Hasan (2013, p. 146) lists the following characteristics of audiences with respect to their composition and their relation to the mass media:
- Members Belong to Social Groups: The individuals of an audience of a particular media programme at any given time may belong to many informal groups like family, religious, linguistics, occupational, etc. or may belong to many formal groups like political, associational and the like.
- Reaction of Audience: Members react to the media and media messages both as isolated

personalities as well as a member of various groups. While receiving the media messages, they identify themselves with the group to which they belong and react according to their group norms. But their personality characteristics also influence their media participation and reaction to media messages.
- Group participation: Most individuals participate in the media procedures in close proximity to the company of others.
- Social Relations: The members of an audience group have well developed social relationships amidst themselves and it affects their choices and reactions to media messages. Their selective exposure to the media messages, their perception and retention also is influenced by the norms of their social group.
- Understanding and Reaction: Members of a social group continuously react and share understandings about their selection of messages and the action taken among them. This helps them to confirm their beliefs.
- Messages in Relations to Experience: The members of a social group discuss with each other their past experiences with respect to a media message and their expectation in future.
- Influence of opinion leaders: The opinion leaders are people who have greater access to media messages and they form their own opinion in the light of these messages. Their opinion followers depend on them to form opinions. The opinion leaders pass on the messages mixed with their own judgments. Thus, they are able to influence their opinion followers.

One of the ways of analyzing the mass media is by its audience variables. The mass media audience comprises people with differing characteristics in terms of age, gender, education and experience, group membership, level of income, cultural and ethnic background, etc. As Udoakah (1998, p. 5) observes, "… the nature of audience for mass communication is inherent in the concepFt itself. The audience is a mass, a collectivity of individuals with complex characteristic variables."

Audience members who share similar characteristic variable often choose similar mass medium they feel would attend to their need. Their social relationships may condition them to react in similar ways to the same message. Often, their selective exposure to the media messages, their perception and retention are also influenced by the norms of their social group (Hasan, 2013). From an advertising perspective, Duncan (2002, p. 250) adds:
Demographics are often the best predictors of consumer behavior and therefore the primary means of segmentation. What customers buy often reflects how old they are, how much

money they make, and how well educated they are. Said another way, certain demographic characteristics often correlate with certain product and brand choices.

Based on the above opinions of communication scholars on the influence of audience variables on choice of media and media contents, Anaeto *et al.* (2008) have stressed the importance of studying the characteristics of media audiences and designing the message to suit their need in order to retain them and ensure that the communication effort is not one in futility.

Theoretical Framework
The major theories relevant to this study are uses and gratifications theory, and social category theory.

Uses and Gratifications Theory
Uses and gratifications theory rests on several assumptions (Rubin, 1993), one of which is that media audience select and use media channels and messages to satisfy felt needs or desires. Media use becomes a means to satisfying wants or interests such as seeking information for reduction of uncertainty or to solve personal dilemmas. Audience members are regarded as actively engaged in seeking media contents that gratify their needs (Rubbin, 1993; Perry, 2002; & Bryant & Thompson, 2004). Since audiences are discriminating in their media exposure habit, only radio stations that offer them the desired gratification through programmes of choice will be attended to. This will result in radio stations in Uyo competing among themselves (and with other information sources) for selection, attention and use. In the end radio stations that offer utility value for audiences will be preferred to others.

Social Category Theory
The key assumptions of the theory are listed by Anaeto *et al.* (2008):
- Mass media audience consist of different sub-groups;
- Members of a particular social category have identified values, interests and attitudes which will be different from those of members of other social categories;
- A person's social category determines the media of mass communication they use and how they use them.

Given the similarities in their social categories (in terms of age, gender, socio-economic status, education, etc.) audience members of the same social category will select, attend and use the media and media content in a similar fashion, other things being equal. The theory recognizes the demographics of media audience and assumes that this is an important factor in influencing their media choice and use.

RESEARCH DESIGN
The survey method was used in this study and questionnaire was the data collection instrument. Ohaja (2003, p.11) maintains that survey research design "is usually employed in studies of attitudinal and behavioral trends with the researcher seeking to uncover their demographic or psychographic underpinnings." The study area was Uyo, the capital of Akwa Ibom State, South-South, Nigeria. According to Nigeria's 2006 population census, Uyo has a population of 324, 651 people (NPC, 2006). From this population, 391 radio listeners were purposively selected. They consisted of the self-employed, civil servants and students aged 18 and above. These subjects were selected from all the 23 towns in Uyo urban namely: Afaha Offot, Aka Offot, Annua Oboo, Annua Obio Offot, Atan Offot, Effiat Offot, Epri Nsukara, Eniong Offot, Ewet Offot, Iboko, Ikot Anyang, Ikot Ekpe Offot, Ikot Ntuen Offot, Ikot Oku Ido Offot, Ikot Okubo, Nsukara Offot, Obio Offot, Use Atai, Use Ikot Obio, Use Offot, Uyo Offot.

To get the sample from each town, the researchers divide 391 by 23 and this gave 17 persons per town. So, 17 people were selected from each town. Seventeen copies of questionnaire were administered per town on the respondents in public places such as schools, hospitals, banks, workshops and offices, etc. To ensure reliability of the instrument, a pilot study was conducted using a small group of respondents (10 males and 10 females) who were part of the population but were not among the sample. The result of the pilot test was used to standardize the research instrument, which was considered reliable when it attained a reliability coefficient of 0.85 on Cronbach's coefficient alpha (Ary *et al.,* 2014; Bordens & Abbot, 2008; & Babbie, 2005). The Chi-Square goodness of fitness test was performed on the hypotheses raised in the study at 0.05 level of significance, using SPSS 21.

Data Presentation
Out of a total of 391 copies of questionnaire that were administered, 384 were retrieved from the respondents and this put the response rate at 98%. Table 1 presents the demographic variables of the respondents. Other Tables containing varying data are also presented before discussion of findings.

Table 1: Demographic Variables

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	199	51.8
Female	185	48.2
Total	**384**	**100**
Age	Frequency	Percentage (%)
18-24	160	41.67
25-34	118	30.73
35-44	65	16.93
45 and above	41	10.67
Total	**384**	**100**
Occupation	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Self-employed	127	33.07
Civil servant	75	19.53
Retired	23	5.99
Students	159	41.41
Total	**384**	**100**
Academic Qualification	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Never been to school	2	0.52
Primary School	27	7.03
O' Level	125	32.55
HND/First Degree	180	46.88
Masters and above	52	13.54
Total	**384**	**100**
Marital Status	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Single	238	61.98
Married	146	38.02
Total	**384**	**100**

Table 2: Time (Hours) Spent Listening to the Radio Daily

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1-3hours	225	58.59
4-6 hours	89	23.18
7-9hours	43	11.20
10 hours and above	27	7.03
Total	**384**	**100**

Table 3: Most Preferred Radio Station

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Most Preferred
Passion	28	7.29	
Comfort	56	14.58	
Excel	28	7.29	
Planet	37	9.63	
Atlantic	11	2.86	
AKBC Radio	42	10.93	
Uniuyo FM	13	3.38	
Heritage	2	0.52	
Paradise	3	0.78	
Gospel	6	1.56	
Inspiration	158	41.15	**1st**
Total	**384**	**100**	

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Table 4: Listener's Favorite Programme on the Radio

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Sports	79	20.5
Entertainment	138	35.93
Religious	29	7.55
Current Affairs/News	54	14.06
General Interest	84	21.875
Total	**384**	**100**

Table 5: Variables That Influence Choice of Radio Programme

Audience Variable	No Extent	%	Small Extent	%	Moderate	%	Large Extent	%	Very Large Extent	%
Level of education	61	7.59	71	9.52	139	13.01	64	10.06	38	13.29
Political affiliation	85	10.6	83	11.1	101	9.44	66	10.38	21	7.34
Economic Status	44	5.47	91	12.2	122	11.41	74	11.64	24	8.39
Age	127	15.8	77	10.3	91	8.51	45	7.08	11	3.85
Social status	59	7.35	69	9.24	121	11.32	60	9.43	38	13.29
Gender	140	17.4	69	9.24	90	8.42	31	4.87	11	3.85
Friend's/colleague	75	9.33	93	12.5	107	10.01	62	9.75	24	8.39
Family influence	85	10.6	70	9.38	92	8.61	74	11.64	29	10.1
Religious belief	76	9.46	57	7.64	90	8.42	79	12.42	47	16.43
Occupation/profession	51	6.35	66	8.85	116	10.85	81	12.74	43	15.03
Total	**803**	**100**	**746**	**100**	**1069**	**100**	**636**	**100**	**286**	**100**

Table 6: Factors That Influence Choice of Radio Stations

Factors	No Extent	%	Small Extent	%	Moderate	%	Large Extent	%	Very Large Extent	%
Station house style	104	36.49	56	17.95	117	16.96	46	6.78	31	5.63
Clear reception	50	17.54	44	14.10	91	13.19	112	16.52	93	16.88
News coverage	11	3.86	31	9.93	88	12.75	11	1.62	113	20.51
Kind of programme	12	4.21	43	13.78	88	12.75	128	18.88	94	17.06
Station presenters	18	6.32	35	11.22	99	14.34	109	16.08	90	16.33
Station's interactivity with audience	21	7.37	43	13.78	102	14.78	100	14.75	78	14.16
Use of vernacular	69	24.21	60	19.23	105	15.22	72	10.62	52	9.44
Total	**285**	**100**	**312**	**100**	**690**	**100**	**678**	**100**	**551**	**100**

TESTING OF HYPOTHESIS
Hypothesis One

There is no significant relationship between audience variables and programme preference of radio listeners in Uyo.

Table 7: Chi-Square Analysis of the Relationship between Audience Variable and Programme Preference of Radio Listeners in Uyo

Audience Variable	No Extent	Small Extent	Moderate	Large Extent	Very Large Extent	Total	X^2cal	X^2crt
Level of Education	61(85.06)	71(78.60)	139(112.63)	64(67.01)	38(30.13)	373	15.88	
Political Affiliation	85(80.75)	83(75.02)	101(107.50)	66(63.95)	21(28.76)	356	3.6	
Economic Status	44(80.52)	91(74.81)	122(107.20)	74(63.77)	24(28.68)	355	24.5	
Age	127(99.61)	77(73.96)	91(105.99)	45(63.06)	11(28.35)	351	25.55	
Social Status	59(78.71)	69(73.12)	121(104.78)	60(62.34)	38(28.03)	347	11.29	
Gender	140(77.35)	69(71.86)	90(102.97)	31(61.26)	11(27.54)	341	77.35	82.53
Friends/Colleagues	75(81.99)	93(76.07)	107(109.01)	62(64.85)	24(29.16)	361	5.09	
Family Influence	85(79.39)	70(73.75)	92(105.69)	74(62.88)	29(28.19)	350	44.25	
Religious Belief	76(79.16)	57(73.54)	90(105.39)	79(62.70)	47(28.19)	349	22.87	
Occupation/Profession	51(80.98)	66(75.23)	116(107.80)	81(64.13)	43(28.84)	357	24.22	
Total	**803**	**746**	**1069**	**636**	**286**	**3540**	**214.6**	

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Test Station: $X^2 = \sum \frac{(0-e)2}{e} = 214.6$
Decision rule: reject Ho if:
$X^2_{cal} > X^2$
But $X^2_{0.05,36} = 82.53$

Since 214.6 > 82.53, H_0 is rejected; therefore, there is a significant relationship between audience variables; that is level of education, political affiliation, economic status, age, social status, gender, friend's/colleague, family influence, religious belief, occupation/profession and programme preference of radio listeners in Uyo.

Hypothesis Two

There is no significant relationship between factors such as station house style, clear reception, news coverage etc. and listeners' choice of a radio station.

Table 8: Chi-Square Analysis of the Significance between Station's House Style, Clear Reception, News Coverage, etc. and Listener's Choice of a Radio Station

Station Variable	No Extent	Small Extent	Moderate	Large Extent	Very Large Extent	Total	X²cal	X²crt
Station House style	104(40.09)	56(43.89)	117(97.08)	46(95.39)	31(77.52)	354	162.78	
Clear Reception	50(44.17)	44(48.36)	91(106.95)	112(105.09)	93(88.40)	390	4.64	
News Coverage	11(40.09)	31(43.89)	88(97.08)	11(98.39)	113(77.52)	354	44.5	
Kind of programme	12(41.34)	43(45.26)	88(100.09)	128(98.35)	94(79.93)	365	33.79	
Station Presenters	18(39.75)	35(43.52)	99(96.25)	109(94.58)	90(76.86	351	18.06	36.42
Station's interactivity with Audience	21(38.96)	43(42.61)	102(94.34)	100(92.69)	78(75.33)	344	9.55	
Use of Vernacular	69(40.55)	60(44.39)	105(98.17)	72(96.47)	52(78.40)	358	40.99	
Total	285	312	690	678	551	2516	314.31	

Text Station $X^2_{cal} = \sum \frac{(0-e)2}{e} = 314 \cdot 31$
Decision rule: reject H_o if:
$X^2_{cal} > X^2_{x,}$
But $X^2_{0.05,24} = 36.42$

Since 314.31 > 36.42, H_0 is rejected; therefore, there is a significant relationship between factors such as station house style, clear reception, news coverage, kinds of programme, station presenters, interactively and use of vernacular and one's choice of radio station.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This section discusses the findings of the study as it relates to the research questions and the two hypotheses tested.

RQ1: Do Audience Variables Like Level of Education, Age, and Group Membership Influence Choice of Radio Programmes Among Listeners in Uyo?

The answer to this question is provided in Table 5 and Table 7. Level of education, political affiliation, economic status, social status, friends/colleagues, etc. does to a high percentage (Table 5) influence respondents' choice of a radio programme. This is in sync with Nwokah *et al.* (2009) findings that demographic variables play a significant role in audience preference for radio programme or media content.

Results of test of hypothesis one (Table 7) indicated that there is a significant relationship between audience variables which include level of education, political affiliation, economic status, age, social status, gender, etc. and programme preference of radio listeners in Uyo. Audience variables according to Duncan (2002) are the predictors of consumers' behaviour and therefore the primary means of segmentation. As he pointed out, what customers buy is often a reflection of how old they are, how much money they have, and how well educated they are. Thus, certain variables often reflect in product and brand choice.

Consequently, it has been recognised that audience variables influence media choice. As posited by the social category theory, members of a given social category determined by age, sex, socio-economic station, etc. often seek out similar media messages which they would also respond to in like fashion, other things being equal (Anaeto *et al.,* 2008). Therefore, it is important to study the characteristics of different classes of audiences and then design the message to suit their needs, interests and tastes.

RQ 2: What Factors Influence Choice of Radio Stations among Uyo Radio Audience?

In assessing what factors that influence the choice of radio stations among Uyo radio audience, it was found that station house style, news coverage, station presenters, clear reception, station's interactivity with audience and use of vernacular did influence their choices of radio stations, with kind of programmes topping the chart, followed by clear reception (Table 6). The present result differs from Kwakwa (2012) which reported that the most important factors that influence a listener's radio choice were clear reception, kind of

programmes and news coverage as ranked by strength of influence.

As test results of hypothesis two has shown, there is a significant relationship between factors such as station's house style, clear receptions, news coverage, etc. and listener's choice of a radio station (Table 8). Therefore, for radio stations to attract and retain a large number of listeners, it is important that they pay attention to factors that stir and sustain listeners' interest.

RQ 3: What are the Favorite Programmes of Uyo Radio Audience?

To ascertain the favorite programmes of Uyo radio audience, five types of programmes were presented in Table 4 and the 384 respondents were asked to choose which of the alternatives was their favorite radio programme. The five programme types included sports, entertainment, religious, current affairs/news, and general interest. The respondents were able to identify these five programmes of radio stations in Uyo. Entertainment programme was the favorite among radio listeners in Uyo. Entertainment programmes include music, comedy, radio drama, concerts. etc.

As shown in Table 4, 138 respondents representing 35.93% of radio audience, tune into entertainment programmes. Prior studies have found that a greater percentage of radio audience chose radio stations based on their entertainment content than for news and information (Nwokah *et al.,* 2009; Kwakwa, 2012; & Mojekeh *et al.,* 2019).

RQ 4: Which Radio Station(S) Is The Most Preferred By Listeners In Uyo?

The mission of the radio stations, in line with media functions, include information, education, surveillance, transmission of cultural heritage, entertainment, etc. How well they play these roles to audience satisfaction can make them loved or hated. As shown in Table 3, 158 respondents representing 41.15% chose Inspiration FM based on the quality of radio services and presentation. For this radio station to be the most preferred, radio audience must have critically distinguished Inspiration FM from other radio stations for its entertainment programme which made it rank as the highest with 35.93% (Table 4). Inspiration 105.9 FM is a family radio, providing content safe for family consumption. It's on air from 5a.m. to 12a.m. daily, providing a metropolitan environment for promotions, intensive inspiration, and music. The station says it was established to inspire Nigerians between the ages of 18 and 50 to live their dreams and achieve their potential. Comfort FM and Planet FM were the second and third most preferred stations respectively.

RQ 5: What Is The Average Hour Devoted To Listening To The Radio By Uyo Radio Audience?

As shown in Table 2, a total number of 384 respondents actually listen to the radio with 27 respondents representing 7.03% spending 10 hours and above. Two hundred and twenty-five listeners (58.59%) spend 1-3 hours, 89 (23.18%) spend 4-6 hours while 43 (11.20%) listen to the radio between 7-9 hours. From the analyses, when summed, the average listening hours for a greater percentage of Uyo radio audience (81.77%) is six hours per day, even though the single largest population (58.59%) invest between one and three hours daily into listening to the radio (Table 2). Mojekeh *et al.* (2019) had also found that the highest number of radio listeners (40%) in Owerri, Imo State Nigeria also spent between one and three hours daily listening to the radio. Egbuchulam (2002) sees the radio as a major communication tool for improving people's quality of life by availing them with current news, entertainment and education. Several studies in Nigeria have found the radio to be the most popular mass media organ among the populace (Okigbo, 1990; & Akpan & Nwankpa, 2012).

CONCLUSION

As the study has shown, there is a significant relationship between audience variables and programmes preferred by radio listeners in Uyo. These variables include level of education, political affiliation, economic status, age, social status, gender, friends/colleagues, family influence, religious belief and occupation/profession, etc. Radio houses wishing to survive, grow and remain profitable must therefore understand the behaviours and expectations of their audiences. Research charts the course in this direction. Radio stations should periodically carry out listenership research to obtain information on the variables, psychology and behaviours of their listeners and strive to feature contents that would satisfy more listeners. Given the growing number of radio stations in Uyo, competition can only get stiffer in the industry. Future research should be conducted into comparative analysis of programme preference across Nigerian states.

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