

# RADIO NEWS SOURCE PREFERENCE BY RESIDENTS OF UYO URBAN, NIGERIA

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## ABSTRACT

Exposure to broadcast news by audience members is part of human information processing. Radio is believed to be a major source of news on many local and national issues for many people in many countries. But it was uncertain whether the assumption was tenable in Nigeria. Selectivity plays significant role in audience members' exposure to broadcast news. The study set out to investigate which radio station(s) residents of Uyo residents tune to for news on important local and national issues. It also studied what factors influence their choice of radio station for news on socio-political crises in Nigeria. The findings showed that majority of the respondents prefer foreign radio stations – Voice of America (VOA) and British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) for news on socio-political crises in Nigeria. The survey also revealed that media credibility exerted great influence on audience exposure to broadcast news and choice of broadcast medium for news. It is the submission of this work that the continuous presentation of one-sided point of view, whether in government-controlled media or privately-owned ones not only makes the audience hold their news content suspect but also makes such mass medium to rank low in terms of perceived credibility. One of the implications of that situation is that mass mobilization through such media would be difficult to achieve. Consequently, it is the submission of this research that if broadcast media in Nigeria are to be reckoned trustworthy and reliable, diverse and balanced views on all issues in the news should always be presented.

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## INTRODUCTION

Information seeking is an integral part of human beings. Human beings often need information at different times for different purposes and gratifications. The broadcast media become ready and reliable sources of information to many people across different demographic groups.

Exposure to broadcast news by audience members is part of human information processing. It is influenced by a number of factors, such as selective exposure, selective attention, selective perception and selective retention. In other words, selectivity plays significant role in audience member's exposure to broadcast news. Therefore, which radio news source do resident in Uyo Urban prefer: foreign or local? Furthermore, what factors influence their choice of radio stations?

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The following were the objectives of the study:

1. To find out which radio station(s) residents of Uyo Urban, Nigeria tune to for news on important local and national issues.
2. To find out which radio station (s) residents of Uyo Urban usually prefer for news on socio-political crises in Nigeria.
3. To determine the factors which influence their choice of radio station(s) for news in socio-political crises in Nigeria.

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## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The research design adopted for the study was survey. The population of this study were adult men and women residing in Uyo Urban, Nigeria. According to 2006 Census, Uyo Local Government Area has a population figure of 309,573. Since, there was no authenticated figure for Uyo Urban, the research decided to work with a sample of about 0.10% of the population. The sample size was 320 and respondents were selected using stratified Random sampling technique. A self-administered Questionnaire was the measuring instrument. The city was divided into five sectors, for questionnaire administration with Ibom Connection (a major circus) as the starting point.

One respondent was drawn from every twenty-second houses beginning from the circus at the city centre.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The study derives its foundation from Sven Windahl's modification of Katz and Lazarsfeld's Uses and Gratification theory. This theory centers on what uses audience members make of media and what gratifications they gain from exposing themselves to the media. Instead of studying what the media do with people, the Uses and Gratification approach investigates what people do with the media. Research within this tradition focuses on the uses of media content for obtaining gratification or need fulfillment. That approach offers another perspective:

looking at the relation between media content and the audience, and of categorizing media content according to 'function' rather than level of taste (McQuail and Windahl 1981, p. 75).

This means that audience behaviour is to a large extent determined and explained by the needs and interests of the individual. As a result, some people will seek entertainment materials, others will attend to information and some people will not use mass media content at all.

According to McQuail (2010, p. 423), "media use depends on the perceived satisfactions, needs, wishes or motives of the prospective audience member... Media use is a social and often sociable activity and is governed to some extent by expectations and norms that vary from place to place and the type of media involved." Similarly, according to McQuail and Windahl's (1981, p. 81), mass media use may mean many different things:

*...it may be the same as 'exposure' which merely indicates an act of perceiving, in another context, it may stand for a complex process; in which a certain content is consumed under certain conditions, fulfilling certain functions and to which are tied certain expectations for gratifications.*

It is the latter context of mass media use that this study is predicated.

Baran (2009, p. 422) argues that, "media do not do things to people; rather people; rather people do things with media." In other words, the influence of media is limited to what people allow it to be." Corroborating this, Littlejohn and Foss (2008, p. 300) state that "the uses and gratifications approach focuses on the consumer - the audience member - rather than the message. This approach imagines the audience member to be a discriminating user of media:

In Windahl's version of the 'Uses and Gratification model presented below, emphasis is placed on the concept of 'Uses' and its determinants.

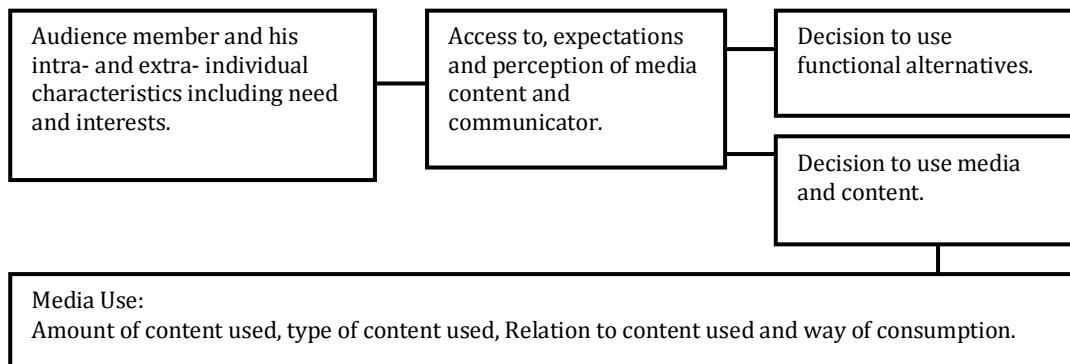


Fig. 1 The Concept of 'Use' and its determinants (Sven Windahl, 1979).

Closely related to the uses and gratifications approach is the expectancy – value theory by Little John and Foss (2008, p. 301) which states that the gratifications and audience member obtains from a mass medium are determined by his/her attitudes towards the media – his/her beliefs about what a particular medium can give him/her – and his/her evaluations of the material.

Balnaves, Donald and Shoesmith (2009, p. 68) state that “a fundamental assumption of uses and gratifications research is that mass media audiences are not composed to passive individuals who are operated on by media stimuli, as in the basic stimulus – response model. Rather, they exercise freedom in their use of the media. One theory is that they use the media most useful to them. Another is that they use the media because they have a motivation to do so. A third is that they use the media as part of an effort to remain impervious to influence. But it is fundamental to the theory that media use is goal-directed. It is assumed that we use the media to satisfy specific needs and that we select particular content to satisfy those needs. These needs are determined by our social environment, which includes our age, sex, marital status, group affiliations and personality.

**Quoting Elihu Katz and his associates who conducted a study in Israel, Williams (1984) reports that audience needs fit into five meaningful groups, namely:**

- (1) Needs related to strengthening information, knowledge and understanding – these can be called “cognitive” needs.
- (2) Needs related to strengthening aesthetic, pleasurable, and emotional experience – or “psychological” needs.
- (3) Needs related to strengthening credibility, confidence, stability, and status–these combine both cognitive and affective elements and can be labeled “integrative” needs.
- (4) Needs related to strengthening contact with family, friends and the world–these can also be seen as performing an integrative function.
- (5) Needs related to escape or tension release, which we define in terms of the weakening of contact with self and one’s social roles another psychological need.

In the opinion of Branston and Stafford (2006, p. 275-276) “the uses and gratifications model emphasizes what the audiences and readerships of media products do with them. Power is argued to lie with the individual consumer of media, who is argued to consciously use TV, the Internet etc. to gratify certain needs and Interests. Far from being duped by the media, the audience is represented as made up of individuals free to reject, use or play with media meanings as they choose. The needs to be gratified would include those for diversion and escapism, for information, for comparing relationships and life style of characters with one’s own, or for sexual stimulation.

An important, but little studied factor in the effectiveness of communication is the attitude of the audience towards the communicator of mass communication medium. For instance, acceptability of a news item in the media and opinion change would only occur if members of the audience believe that its purpose is ‘informational’ and not ‘propagandistic’. In other words, pre-dispositional factors determine or influence pattern of audience reception of broadcast news. That means individuals who are suspicious of a given mass media source may be generally less-receptive and less-responsive to output from such sources.

## **EXPOSURE TO THE MEDIA AND MEDIA CREDIBILITY**

Scholars have agreed that people selectively expose themselves to messages that reinforce their already existing attitudes and avoid messages that challenge their preconceptions. The concept of selectivity presupposes that audience members' interaction with the mass media and how the mass media affect them is influenced by the element of selectivity. Therefore, audience members selectively expose themselves to information. According to Williams (1984, p. 103), "we tend to pay attention to communications that are of interest and value to us, and that do not tend to make us feel threatened. Persuasive communications, because they focus on personal motives, are especially susceptible to attention or inattention." He explains that "because persuasion deals so directly with personal motives, it is especially susceptible to rejection or avoidance. Although the same can be true with other forms of communication, it is not always so directly true as with communication that has persuasive qualities. If the persuasive message does not appeal at all to the motives of an individual, it is not likely to be attended to." That means every communicator, message source or mass medium should understand or consider the dynamics of the selective processes.

Baran and Davis (2009, p. 146) identifies the selective processes to include exposure, attention, retention and perception.

Selective Exposure: this according to Baran and Davis (2009, p. 146) is people's tendency to expose themselves to or attend to media messages that they feel are in accord with their already-held attitudes and interest and the parallel tendency to avoid those that might create dissonance.

According to Severin and Tankard (1992, p. 64), selective attention is the tendency for a person to pay attention to those parts of a message that are consonant with strongly held attitudes, beliefs, or behaviours and tend to avoid those parts of a message that go against strongly held attitudes, beliefs or behaviours.

Selective Retention: This is the tendency for the recall of information to be influenced by wants, needs, attitudes and other psychological factors, (Severin and Tankard, 1992, p. 64). Giving further insight into the process of selective retention, Baran and Davis (2009, p. 147) state that selective retention is the process by which people tend to remember best and longest information consistent with their pre-existing attitudes and interests.

Selective Perception: This, according to Baran and Davis (2009, p.147) refers to the idea that people will alter the meaning of messages so they become consistent with pre-existing attitudes and beliefs. The principle of selective exposure suggests that audience members will select the mass medium which disseminates or presents information that support their beliefs or appeal to their interest. Moreover, there is a tendency for people to use communication selectively in accordance with established predispositions, turning in when the ideas expressed are congenial and turning out when they are not. Even when people expose themselves to the same message, a degree of selective perception may operate – permitting two people to see the same content and receive different impressions from it, each in accordance with what he wants to believe. The perception audience members hold towards a communication activity or medium will affect their reaction to it or message from it. If an audience member is loyal to a message source, he might agree with every information from it regardless of what is said so much that if another source who is not perceived similarly said the same thing, the audience might completely disagree with it.

In the opinion of Burgoon and Ruffner (1978, p. 66), "each receiver is unique in terms of age, sex, personality, intelligence, skills and experience". They emphasize that "these characteristics which are brought into every communication situation will have some impact upon the source and the message". The audience psychograph and demography determine what uses are made of the mass media and what gratifications are gained from exposure to the media. A segment of the audience may be more interested in entertainment than they are in education or information, while others may prefer information to entertainment.

According to Gamble and Gamble (1999, p. 465), "when we use the term 'credibility,' we are talking not about what you are really like but about how an audience perceives you. If your listeners accept you as credible, they probably believe you are a person of good character (trust –worthy and fair), knowledgeable (trained, competent to discuss your topic and a reliable source of information and personable (dynamic, charismatic, active and energetic). As a result, your ideas are more likely to get a fair hearing. However, if

your listeners believe you are a liar (untrustworthy), incompetent (not sufficiently knowledgeable about your topic), and passive (lacking in dynamism), they are less likely to respond as you desire.

Note that the audience's assessment of your credibility can change during your presentation or as a result of it. Thus, we can identify three types of credibility,

**Initial credibility:** Your credibility before you actually start.

**Derived credibility:** To speak your credibility during your speech.

**Terminal credibility:** Your credibility at the end of your speech

According to Severin and Tankard (1992, p. 28), "credibility is, after all, the most important thing a communicator has. A communicator in the news media who lacks credibility probably has no audience."

Furthermore; Chester, Garrison and Willis (1971, p. 109) reiterate that

*... the effectiveness of television and radio depends ultimately on the willingness of the public to listen to or view what is broadcast. No broadcasting system, however well-intentioned can survive without public acceptance of the programmes it offers.*

For this reason, it is important for a station's management to know how the public perceives the station and its services, hence the need for station – image study. Public misperception of management's purposes can create a decrease in audience size, and consequently in advertising revenue. Management of broadcast stations should maintain current information on how the audience perceives its station and services.

Balnaves, Donald and Shoemsmith (2009, p. 69) report the findings of studies done in the United States of America, Britain, Finland and Israel on audience uses and gratifications of mass communication as follows:

- a). the social and psychological origins of
- b). needs, which generate
- c). expectations of
- d). The mass media or other sources which lead to
- e). differential patterns of media exposure (or engage in other activities)
- f). resulting in need gratifications and
- g). other consequences; perhaps mostly unintended ones.

Some of those investigations begin by specifying needs and then attempt to trace the extent to which they are gratified by the media or other sources. Others take observed gratifications as a starting point and attempt to reconstruct the needs that are being gratified. Yet others focus on the social origins of audience expectations. McQuail (2010, p. 423) agree that "typical of such needs are those for information, relaxation, companionship, diversion or 'escape,'" In any case, their findings tend to support the "uses and gratifications" approach to mass communication analysis. According to Katz, Blumler & Gurevitch (1996, p. 74), that approach makes the following assumptions:

- a). The audience is conceived of as active. That is, an important part of media use is assumed to be goal directed... Of course it cannot be denied that media exposure often has a causal origin. In addition, the issue is whether patterns of media use are shaped by more or less definite expectations of what certain kinds of content have to offer the audience member.
- b). In mass communication process, much initiative in linking need gratification and media choice lies with the audience member. This places a strong limitation on theorizing about any form of straight-line effect of media content on attitudes and behaviour.
- c). The media compete with other sources of need gratification. The need served by mass communication constitutes by a segment of the wider range of human needs, and the degree to which they can be adequately met through mass media consumption certainly varies.

Quoting Perse and Dunn (1995), Anaeto, Onabanjo and Osifeso (2008, p. 188), "even among computer owners, few listed computers as their primary source of learning about what is going on in the world, of entertainment, excitement, relaxation, forgetting about problems, feeling less lonely, doing something to keep busy, doing something because it is a habit, or doing something with friends or family."

Also, according to Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch (in: Boyd-Barrett and Newbold, 1995, p. 166) there are social origins of audience needs and gratifications. Among them are that:

- a). Social situation produces tensions and conflicts, leading to pressure for their easement through mass media consumption.
- b). Social situation creates an awareness of problems that demand attention, information about which may be sought in the media.

From the findings of Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch, it is apparent that an audience member does more with media content than what the media do to him. This implies a selective use of media content by an audience member.

The selective exposure and attention to media content is largely attitudinal. Pearson, et. al. (2003, p. 44), explain that "in selective exposure, you expose yourself to information that reinforces, rather than contradicts your beliefs or opinion. In selective attention, even when you do expose yourself to information and ideas, you focus on certain cues and ignore others."

McQuail and Windahl (1981, p. 36) maintains that:

*... the medium image held by the receiver causes expectations of the media content and may thus be assumed to have an influence on the receiver's choice of content as well as on his way of experiencing it. The prestige and credibility of the medium are important element in this image.*

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The selective exposure and attention to media content is largely attitudinal. Mortensen (1972, p. 101) states that:

*... attitudes constitute a pre-disposition or readiness to respond to message cues in stable and consistent ways. Typically, the state of readiness is grounded in a judgmental bias, either positive or negative towards classes of ideas, events or objects of perception.*

Generally, government controlled media in Nigeria are held suspect. This is because, apart from being accused of publishing propaganda items and image laundering contents in favour of the government of the day and its officials, they do not provide significant opportunity for contrasting views to be heard in the media.

This justifies the timeous and urgent call by Akpan (1985, p. 220) that "the problems arising from the present system of broadcast journalism ought to be wrested now for if the present trends continue, broadcast journalism in Nigeria could damage its credibility to a point that every piece of information that comes out of our broadcast media would be dismissed as falsehood. For various reasons, the credibility of the broadcast media in Nigeria has suffered.

As a result, we now have a situation whereby some people do not believe the government, others do not believe the media, while others neither believe the government nor the media.

Agee, Ault and Emery (1979, p. 137) list circumstances under which the credibility of the media suffers. These include the following:-

- a). When it becomes known that the journalist who should be an independent gatherer of news is serving as a salaried intelligence operative for the government and its agencies.

- b). When news organizations are owned or subsidized by government intelligence. When this happens, there would be widespread publication of pro-establishment news and propaganda; with resultant effect of misinformation of their audience.
  - c). When reporters exchange information with government agencies.
  - d). A deliberate planting of misinformation in the media.
  - e). Impersonation of the journalist by government operatives in order to obtain information about dissent groups.
  - f). Cover-ups and withholding of the truth about events in the news.
- Uchem (1991, p. 88) also highlights the damage done to the image of the media by the categories of journalists he calls “journalists of bread and butter” and “public relations or general orders journalists.” In the case of “journalists of bread and butter,” Uchem says they are:

*... those who are after the 'brown envelopes'. Their major interests are monetary or fringe benefits. They hand around the 'big shots' and slant colour, concoct and write fictions once there is anyone to pay... they are also praise - singers: writing what their mentors want to hear and read, no matter how far away they are to the truth.*

According to him, those who belong to the group of “public relations or general orders journalists” are:

*... those who act as public relations officials in the ministries of information. They are strict gate-keepers for press releases and other kinds of information from the ministries of information. ... Here, they are faced with what is expected of them as 'information officers.' If the journalist of the group acts professionally as his training demands, he is either fired or frustrated on the job - no promotion for him.*

Other members of this group, according to UNESCO report (1981, p. 76) are “those whose role is limited to supporting their government in all circumstances.”

A major cause of credibility crisis suffered by electronic media in this country is government ownership and control with its resultant restrictive news content. Decrying this state of affairs, Levy (1985, p. 65) maintains that:

*... the liberty of the press is doubtless a very great blessing, but this liberty means no more than a freedom for everything to pass from the press without licence. That is: you shall not be obliged to obtain licence from any authority before the emission of things from the press.*

He explains the motivation behind the propensity of most governments to control the media with the following words:

*... there is nothing so fretting and vexatious, nothing so justly terrible to tyrants, and their tools and abettors as a free press. The reason is obvious; namely; because it is, as it has been very justly observed in a spirited answer to a spirited speech, the bulwark of people's liberties. For this reason, it is ever watched by those who are forming plans for the destruction of people's liberties; with an envious and malignant eyes.*

Speaking further on the consequence of the media's subservience to any form of control, Levy (1985, p. 88) observes:

*... when bland and non partisan, it had at least constituted something of a forum for differing opinions. When the press is deeply committed to a political position, its governing principle assumed that truth was one-sided and that freedom should be available only to believers.*

The issue of objectivity and balance in news reporting is undoubtedly as old as journalism itself and persists as a continuing concern of conscientious journalists, students and critics of journalism.

Media's dependence on representatives of the state and those sympathetic to the ruling class as primary sources of news and comments also contributes to its credibility crisis. According to Field (1991, p. 94), when that happens “news organizations are virtually obliged to transmit the state's definition of situation.”

The consequence is that news producers become subjects to deliberate and regular interventions, conspirational or otherwise, of those with axes to grind and the muscle to do so effectively.

Severin and Tankard (1992, p. 83) admonish that a journalist can do a great deal toward being objective by eliminating inferences and judgments and sticking as much as possible to reports.

Three concepts are related to objectivity, namely; reports, inferences, judgments, and the related issue of slanting.

**Reports:** This is a statement that is capable of verification and excludes inferences and judgment. E.g. "The low temperature last night in Durban. North Carolina, was 47 degrees."

**Inference:** An Inference is a statement about the unknown made on the basis of the known. Any statement about a another person's thoughts or feelings is an example of an inference.

**Judgement:** This is an expression of approval or disapproval for an occurrence. Person or object.

**Slanting** is selecting details that are favourable or unfavourable to the subject being described.

Objectivity in news content simply means the news story must be a report and nothing more or less. To this end, Gordon and Kittross (1999, p. 83) define objectivity as "reporting without bias – more easily than achieving more complex ethical goals as truth. On any day a reporter may get up on the wrong side of the bed, may allow personal impressions of events or subjects to colour what and who is reported. Reporters are trained to stand outside of controversies, although this is hard to do and still report fully."

Moreover, when dissenting views are denied expression in the news and current affairs programmes, the credibility of the media suffers. However, as a UNESCO report (1981, p. 21) rightly notes:

*...the monopoly of the controlled media is broken by other means of communication; news is passed on by words of mouth, illegal leaflets are circulated. And foreign broadcast makes inroads on the monopoly enforced by the state within its frontiers.*

Traber (1987, p. 66) observes that:

*... African mass media are by and large autocratic rather than democratic. They are primarily concerned with the interests of elites, rather than with the aspirations of those we disparagingly call 'ordinary people' or in the terminology of the left 'the masses,' who have no face, no will of their own.*

There may be exceptions to Traber's observation. Generally, there must be a democratization of communication. According to UNESCO (1981, p. 166), the democratization of communication is the process whereby:

- a). The individual becomes an active partner and not a mere object of communication
- b). The variety of messages exchanged increases, and
- c). The extent and quality of social representation or participation in communication are augmented.

In the above respect, Traber (1987, p. 66) has this to say:

*... democratization of communication and democratization of society are of course interdependent. They are variables of the same reality. To democratize communication therefore means to democratize society, and vice versa. But from our perspective of public philosophy, it is precisely the role of the media to be a catalyst in the democratic process.*

Also, the Latin American media experts, reported by Traber, at a meeting in Embu, Brazil in 1982 affirmed that:

*... democracy is above all a fundamental human attitude expressed in communication by abolishing authoritarian forms and relying on the conscious, organized and collective action of the oppressed. Pluralistic participation of social actors should manifest itself in the different levels of communication process, particularly in the production, distribution and consumption of cultural goods.*

In view of the above, Traber (1987, p. 66) suggests a change in the 'social actors' criterion of news selection. By this, he means that the masses, instead of the elites, should become the focus when considering the 'who' of an event.



He posits that:

*... alternative criteria of news need to be established, practiced and taught, and they are to a large extent a reversal of the news values of conventional journalism. What is needed first and foremost are alternative social actors, or the re-definition of the criterion of prominence.*

**Presentation of Data from Survey of 'Radio News Preference by Residents of Uyo Urban, Nigeria**

**Table 1:** Distribution of Responses on Radio Stations Preferred for News on Important National Socio-Political Issues:

Radio stations	1st choice	2nd choice	3rd choice	4th choice
	Number of respondents	Number of respondents	Number of respondents	Number of respondents
Local stations	110	100	60	60
VOA	106	120	110	102
BBC	105	100	150	140
TOTAL	320	320	320	312*

\*Eight of the respondents did not indicate their fourth choice radio station for news.

**Table 2:** Distribution of Responses to Question on Radio Stations Usually Preferred for News on Socio-Political Crises in Nigeria:

Radio stations	1st choice	2nd choice	3rd choice	4th choice
	Number of respondents	Number of respondents	Number of respondents	Number of respondents
Local stations	100	90	80	80
VOA	110	120	110	100
BBC	110	110	130	140
TOTAL	320	320	320	320

**Table 3:** Distribution of Responses to Question on Factor which Influences Respondents' Choice of Radio Station for News on Socio-Political Crises in Nigeria:

Options	No. of respondents	%
Trustworthiness	100	31.3
Balanced presentation	100	31.3
Detailed reports	90	28.1
Absence of bias	30	9.3
Total	320	100%

**Table 4:** Respondents' Highest Academic Qualification and their choice of Radio Stations for News on Socio-Political Crises in Nigeria.

Academic Qualification	Preferred Radio Station and No. of Respondents			Total
	LOCAL STATIONS	VOA	BBC	
WASC/GCE	250	50	20	320
DIPLOMA/NCE	200	80	40	320
HND/BA/BSC.	60	100	160	320
MA/MSc/Ph.D	50	140	130	320

Table 4 shows that generally, respondents with lower academic qualification tuned to local radio stations for news on socio-political crises in Nigeria, while those with higher academic qualifications go for foreign radio news sources.

## **ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS**

The data collected from a survey of foreign radio news preference by residents of Uyo metropolis, Nigeria were contained in the 320 fully completed copies of the questionnaire. Responses to questions which relate to the research questions are discussed below. The research questions were as follows:

- i). Which radio stations do residents of Akwa Ibom State tune to for news on important local and national issues?
- ii). Which radio stations do they usually prefer for news on socio-political crises in Nigeria?
- iii). What factor usually influence their choice of radio station for news on socio-political crises in Nigeria?

**Table One:** This table shows the distribution of responses to question on the radio stations respondents tune to for news on important national socio-political issues. Findings showed that 110 of the respondents, tune to local stations for such information, 105 tune to VOA, while 105 prefer BBC. Data revealed that though majority, (obviously marginal) opted for local stations, a very significant percentage of the population prefers foreign radio stations for news on important local and national issues. This finding has answered research question number one which we investigated the radio stations residents of Uyo, Akwa Ibom State tune to for news on important local and national issues. Responses revealed and confirmed the influence of selectivity in the choice of radio stations for news.

The finding vindicates the information processing model which focuses on the individual audience members in terms of how they select, attend to, interpret, process and evaluate messages. According to Lind (1997, p. 540), such approaches focus on contents (the thoughts, concepts, dispositions, attitudes and evaluations stored in the mind), structures (the forms information takes and how it is structured in the mind), and processes (how the content is acquired or attended to, acted on, and used in thought).

**Table Two:** This table shows the distribution of responses to question on which radio stations residents usually prefer for news on socio-political crises in Nigeria. One hundred (100) of the respondent said they prefer local stations for information on socio-political crises in Nigeria. This means that audience members are selective in exposing themselves to the electronic media on a wide range of subject matters. This vindicates McQuail and Windahl's (1981, p. 36) assertion that:

*the medium image held by the receiver causes expectations of the media content and may thus be assumed to have an influence on the receiver's choice of content as well as on his way of experiencing it. The prestige and credibility of the medium are important element in this image.*

One hundred and ten (110) of them prefer VOA for news while another 110 opted for BBC for news on socio-political crises in Nigeria. A greater number of the respondents prefer foreign radio station for news on socio-political crises in Nigeria.

Table 4 shows that generally respondents with lower academic socio-political crises in Nigeria, while those with higher academic qualifications go for foreign radio news sources. The finding brings to focus the apparent loss of confidence in local radio stations among radio listeners in Uyo, Nigeria. This is indicative of a possible or perceived absence of commitment to professional ethics by news personnel working in local radio stations.

**Table Three:** This table shows distribution of responses to the question on the factor which influences respondent's choice of radio station for news on socio-political crises in Nigeria. One hundred (100) – 31.3% respondents said trustworthiness of the medium influences their choice of radio station for news. The same number, (100) – 31.3% listed balanced presentation, 90 (28.1%) said detailed reports influences their choice of radio station, while 30 respondents mentioned "absence of bias" as a factor which influences their choices of radio station for news. The findings buttress respondents' awareness and expectation of professional obligation of credibility, balance and objectivity from journalists. It has also confirmed that their selective exposure to broadcast news is based on perception of the level of professionalism exhibited by the medium.

Moreover, respondents with lower academic qualifications West African School Certificate, (WASC)/General Certificate in Education (GCE) and Diploma/National Certificate in Education (NCE) usually tune to local radio stations for news on socio-political crises in Nigeria. On the other hand, respondents with higher

educational qualifications are more discriminatory and sophisticated in their information-seeking activity. The implication of this finding is that as audience members become more educated, they become more demanding of journalistic principles of fact, truth and balanced reporting.

The findings corroborate Bower's assertion that (1973, p.2) "people of higher socio-economic - the wealthier, better - educated, white-collar workers and professionals were more apt to be critical of particular aspects of the medium (Bower, 1973, p. 2)". He observes that the highly educated are more critical and less enthusiastic in their exposure to the media. The principle of selective exposure suggests that audience members will select the media which disseminate or present information that support their beliefs or appeal to their interest. The theory of selective exposure account for the moderate influence by the media. According to this theory, "effects on audience are mediated by selectivity, as well as group and interpersonal factors. This means that audiences members are selective in their exposure to information."

Exposure to broadcast news may be influenced or determined by the perceived creditability of the source or medium. The source with high credibility is more effective in producing a variety of desired outcomes than one with low credibility. Burgoon and Ruffner (1978, p. 35) emphasize that the "credibility of a communicator may be the best single predictor of the course or direction of most communication transactions." Of course, no communicator possesses an inherent quality called credibility. Source credibility is something that exists "in the eye of the beholder". The receiver must confer credibility on a speaker, or it does not exist. In other words, no communicator speaks well unless the receiver judges it to be so. As each receiver is a unique individual, the way he or she perceives the source is based on past experience. The terms "objectivity," "balance" and "credibility" are often used when discussing the news content and character of a mass communication medium. These terms provide a foundation for the proposition that audience exposure to broadcast news is to a great extent a function of the factor of medium credibility as perceived by the audience member.

Bittner (1991, p. 378) defines media credibility as the "role and contribution of different media to a story's believability." This implies that mass communication audiences are no longer "incubators" waiting for the media to implant messages. This is because, underlying the audience's response to mass media messages is a principle of selectivity in which individuals are likely to expose themselves only to messages from mass media sources they consider credible.

McQuail (2010, p. 509) says "a condition of news to achieve effects is the attribution of believability by an audience. Essentially, some trust is required for a news sources to effective, although there is plenty of evidence that people do habitually pay attention to media sources that they do not trust." Quoting Gaziano and McGrath (1987), McQuail (2010, p. 509) found that credibility had more to do with perceived fairness, lack of bias and good faith rather than perceived accuracy or reliability of information as such.

Phrases such as "projecting the right image", "credibility," "prestige" and "credibility gap" have become very prominent among mass media audience. The question of source credibility is applied when discussing or analyzing messages from the media. The source of communication works through a complex organization and the message may actually represent the efforts of many individuals. Yet in judging the message, we group the many individuals producing the message as representing the source. According to Mortensen (1972, 142 - 143).

*...underlying the many uses of the term 'credibility' are a number of common elements. The term corresponds to impressions or image people hold towards a message source - whether a person, a medium or an institution. Moreover, the impression is largely evaluative and general. We think of credibility as a result of the interaction between source-related attributes that are held by the receiver.*

Therefore, mass media should aim at earning credibility from audience members through factual, balanced and unbiased reporting.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The study brought into focus the fact that audience members are not taken in by the sophistication of broadcast media in their news-listening activity. Instead, the perceived reliability and balanced news reporting of the medium influence their choice of radio station(s) for news.

Opubor (1985, p. 93-94) alludes to the harm which successive regimes have done in suppressing the expression of differing views in government-controlled mass media in Nigeria. By so doing they have caused the media to cease to be "a market place" of ideas. This situation arose because government uses its funding of public mass media houses to justify the exclusion of dissent opinions and statements about its policies and actions in those media.

Nwuneli (1985, p. 93-94) rightly observes that:

*In Nigeria, the audience has little say and essentially no control over what it gets from the broadcast media. The best an individual can do is to flip his radio dial to another station outside the country.*

That probably explains why many Nigerians prefer foreign radio stations for news about the country to listening to what one of the respondent called "government views on local stations" This confirms UNESCO'S report (1981) which states that:

*The monopoly of the controlled media is broken by other means of communication. News is passed on by words of mouth, illegal leaflets are circulated. Finally, foreign broadcasts make inroads on the monopoly enforced by the state within its frontiers.*

The UNESCO Report is buttressed by the fact that 105 (32.8%) of the respondent tune to VOA for news on important local and national socio-political issues. The same number of respondents – 105 (32.8%) prefers BBC for news on local and national socio-political issues. Moreover, 100 (34.4%) of the respondents prefer VOA for news on socio-political crises in Nigeria. The same number, 110 (34.4%) also listed BBC as their first choice radio station for news on socio-political crises in Nigeria. Media credibility cannot be ignored in the selective process of exposure to broadcast news. This is buttressed by the fact that 100 (31.3%) of the respondents listed trustworthiness as a factor which influences respondent's choice of radio station for news on socio-political crises in Nigeria. This therefore poses a great challenge for media controllers to enhance their image and the image of the media they have charge over by understanding what low credibility rating can do in the overall effectiveness of some communication endeavours. Journalists should exhibit an uncompromising commitment to objectivity and balance in news reporting, selection and presentation. Government should remember that the mass media it controls are financed by public money, and divergent views held by the public should be reflected in or projected by such media. This calls for the democratization of the mass media and society as a whole.

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