



## DETERMINANTS OF RADIO PROGRAMMING IN THE DIGITAL AGE: A STUDY OF ANAMBRA STATE

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### Abstract

Radio broadcasting is one of the legacy media that has remained relevant even in the midst of the exciting innovations of digital technology. Despite the multiple alternatives available to people for entertainment and information sharing, many members of radio audience have remained glued to their choice broadcast programmes. This study explored the determinants of radio programmes that create loyal audience segment for broadcast media in Anambra State. Uses and gratifications theory was used as the theoretical framework for the study. Descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. All radio workers in Anambra State formed the population of the study, A sample size of 196 was determined from the population of study using Krejcie and Morgan table. The data for the study were collected with questionnaire instrument and analysed with mean and standard deviation. The findings of the study revealed that audience is the primary determinant of radio programming and also showed other secondary determinants that influence programming process. The study recommended regular audience research for radio stations in Anambra State so that they can keep pace with the changing interests of radio audience in the state. The study concluded by highlighting the need for proper management of radio programme determinants for the realisation of the broadcast objective and standard.

**Keywords:** radio, radio programming, determinants, audience, digital technology

### Introduction

Stable structures that stand the test of time are erected on solid foundations. Such structures survive many years of weather adversity and environmental impacts testifying to the strength of their foundation. In the broadcast industry, radio programmes are like structures. They sustain the viability of broadcast industry when they are firmly established on proper programming determinants, helping radio stations to survive the challenging transformations that mark the digital era. The emergence of digital technology has led to a shift in the in the traditional interests of radio audience, creating in them more thirst for new styles and forms of packaging audio visual messages. In the face of these new challenges, radio can appear to be outdated, and out of tune with the current technological trend. But radio, as Haywood et al. (2023) observes, "is not a fixed media" (p. 1846). It has the capacity to keep pace with the changing times. With the proper determinants, radio programmes will remain ever relevant in the society even with the innovations of digital technology.

Anambra State is one of the instances where the survival of radio is evident in the midst of the challenging socio-economic reality of the contemporary time. It has an estimated population of 6,358,311 inhabitants (NaijaDetails, 2025) with high prospects of development for the broadcast industry and other business activities. The global revolution occasioned by the emergence of digital technology and artificial intelligence is significantly influencing all the sectors of the State especially the broadcast industry. This could be attributed to the technological pre-disposition of the State because the indigenes of Awka, the State capital, are traditionally known for their proficiency in blacksmithing skill.

The State has an exceptionally receptive attitude towards technological innovations and this has continued to shape its broadcast environment. There are as many as 20 functional radio stations competing for the attention of the citizens in the state. This raises the question of how these radio stations win and engage the interests of the audience with their programmes in the competitive environment of the state? Many radio studies have been done in Anambra State, but only very few have focused on radio programmes determinants.

Radio programmes confer on radio stations a unique identity around which an audience segment is constituted. This study explores the determinants of radio programming and their general scale of importance which have facilitated the progress of radio broadcast industry in Anambra State. The study is guided by the following objectives;

1. to find out the principal determinant of radio programming in Anambra State.
2. to discover other determinants of radio programming in Anambra State.

## **Literature review**

### **Radio broadcasting**

The technological feats of the 20<sup>th</sup> century blurred the boundaries of space and time which has over the years restricted the innate desire in man for discovery, sharing and interaction (Traub & Hendricks, 2022). Radio, as one of the outstanding technological inventions that defined that century, plays significant role in the realisation of human communication across distances.

Radio is most often defined inclusively to cover the physical forms like the transmitter, the radio set and other physical components as well as programming and other activities that are associated with radio broadcasting (Ramadhani et al., 2025). This is because the listener carrying his receiving set will not receive any signal if radio action is stalled at the transmission terminal. Radio broadcasting is, hence, defined as the process of transferring audio signals from one point to another through electromagnetic waves (Radioking, 2025). Radio is a unique media that forges unity among people. Wikesa (2016) emphasizes this point in his description of radio as a communication media that has the capacity to permeate “through cultural, social and geographical boundaries” (p.437) with its message. Radio broadcasting has a wide area of coverage and that is one of the features that qualifies it as a mass communication media.

Radio broadcasting has great social relevance. This is portrayed in the vital functions it plays in the society with regard to education, socialization, surveillance, entertainment and sharing of information (Koblwo & Madu, 2018; Ojo, 2021). Connelly (2017) argues that radio has been able to maintain its pride of place in the society as a result of its openness to “convergence, consolidation and digitalization” (p. 3). These three things have equipped radio with the resilience and adaptation it needs to survive the wave of change occasioned by technological advancement. Radio programming is an important broadcast dimension where the adaptive feature of radio is made manifest.

### **Radio programming**

Broadcast programme is a key metrics in the assessment of any broadcast industry. The development and retrogression of any broadcast industry can always be ascertained from a critical evaluation of its programmes (Ramadhani et al., 2025; MacFarland, 2017). In other words, loyal radio audience is the function of captivating radio programmes. Oberiri (2017) defines radio programmes as “the various meaningful sounds produced by human beings or recorded sounds used to fill the airtime to be heard but not seen” (p. 33). Radio programming, therefore, involves the entire process of planning, producing,

presenting, and sustaining these well organised meaningful sounds to the satisfaction of the targeted audience.

Radio programmes draw extensively from the wide horizon of human imagination and the facticity of real life situations to form its contents and devise an appropriate means to realise its set objectives (Oberiri, 2017). Radio programmes, even when they fall under entertainment category, are essentially designed to address specific societal problems. Their creation is never done arbitrarily, instead it is the result of a rigorous but systematic process that spans from the various stages of programme idea, concept and proposal to those of programme packaging, production and presentation. Well crafted radio programmes draw the attention and support of audience which are essential for the sustenance of broadcast stations.

Attracted by impressive radio programmes, some people carry radio set as a family companion. Januert (2018) employs the term “domestication” (p. 259) to express the taming and incorporation of this special electronic medium (radio) in the family household. Domestication of radio is based on the fact that radio programmes are designed to be family-friendly. Radio workers rely on their experience and creativity to innovate attractive programmes that build the reputation of their broadcast stations, which position them for survival in the highly competitive broadcast market. These well-packaged radio programmes make radio “a compelling companion” (Llyod, 2015, p. 2) or an electronic family member.

### **Digital technology**

There is no sector of the society that is completely free from the transforming impacts of digital technology (Ciarli et al, 2021). Even in developing countries like Nigeria, the effects of digital technology is felt in the ever growing speed and ease with which people access and share information (Anyanwu et al., 2024). Anambra State, like the other states in Nigeria, is not exempt from the challenging impacts of digital technology.

Johnstone et al. (2022) define digital technology as “tools, systems and devices that can generate, create, store or process data” (para. 4). Digital technology is, therefore, neither limited to the technology itself, nor the technical process of digitization. It also extends to the various devices and tools through which the technology is actualised.

It is important to note the significance of the concept of data processing or conversion in the definition of digital technology, and how it relates to the existential reality that “digitization ... is changing the scope of radio and television broadcasting” (Orlu-Orlu, 2017, p. 1). Since sharing of information ideas and other contents to a large audience segment through electromagnetic wave is a defining feature of broadcasting (Agbnu & Nwamuo, 2009 cited in Ogu, 2024), digitization which brings greater efficiency in processing and management of information portend great benefits to the broadcast industry.

Heywood et al. (2023) observe that digital technology has led radio to redefine itself appropriating the new elements of online listenership, on-demand radio and personalisation to maintain its relevance in the technology-driven world of today. In this new outlook of radio, Zhang (2016) argues that Radio mirrors the complex world by its own complexity which is manifested in the many ways it provides additional non-audio based services like metadata and visual signals to its audience. Transitioning from analogue to digital radio broadcasting is, however, not an easy project (Alam et al., 2025). It makes heavy demands on the broadcasters, broadcast stations, and audience who have to upgrade to devices that have the capacity for decoding digital signals.

## Empirical review

Epey et al. (2022) did a study on “Determinants of local and foreign TV channels viewership amongst TV audience in the Buea municipality, South West Region, Cameroon”. The study explored audience choice of television programmes to identify the determinants that inform such choices. The study adopted a quantitative research design, and used 326 respondents as data sources. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) test was done on the collected data. The findings of the study indicated that 24.5% of the respondents view foreign programmes always while 11% of the respondents view local programmes always. Although the study focused on television programming, it revealed that interesting broadcast programmes are planned and produced to respond to the genuine needs of the audience.

Ottah (2016) did a study on “Radio listening behaviour among market women in Anyigba, Kogi State”. He explored the radio listening behaviour of market women in Anyigba community. The data for the study were collected from a sample size of 165 market women using questionnaire instrument. The findings of the study revealed that 58% of the market women in Anyigba listened to radio programmes often. Although four radio signals were well received in Anyigba community, majority of the market women preferred the programmes of Radio Kogi, Ochaja because of its predominant use of local dialect in its transmissions. The study’s recommendation that radio programmes that are targeted at market women “should be packaged in the local language of the women” (p. 159), re-echoes the importance of audience in radio programming.

Edegoh et al. (2016) did a work on “Uses and gratification of radio programmes among Anambra youths”. It was a survey study of 210 youths selected from Awka, Onitsha and Nnewi in Anambra State. Uses and gratification theory provided the theoretical framework for the study. It was discovered that majority of young people listen to radio programmes in Anambra State, and are attracted to radio programmes that gratify their needs for entertainment, sports, news and current affairs. The study recommended that other important messages for young people should also be put across to them through these radio programmes that attract their interest.

## Theoretical framework

This study is anchored on uses and gratification theory which was propounded by Blumler and Katz in 1974. The theory posits that media users consciously select the media contents they consume based on their needs for affective, cognitive, and personal satisfaction (Sichach, 2024).

One of the major criticism of the uses and gratifications theory is that it downplays the role of the media in the modification of the behaviour of individuals in the society. The media simply provides options for personal satisfaction of the audience, and the options must be tailored to the needs of the audience to win their support and patronage (Siyabi & Alsiyabi, 2025). The choice of uses and gratifications for this study is based on the emphasis it lays on the needs of the audience, and their active involvement in the selection and consumption of media contents.

## Methodology

The study adopted quantitative survey design and used 380 radio workers in Anambra State as an estimated population of study. Krejcie and Morgan table was then used to determine a sample size of 196 radio workers for the study. There were 20 functional radio stations in Anambra State as at the time of the study. They were grouped into three based on their status of ownership. The privately owned radio stations were 14, the stations owned by government were three, while those owned by educational institutions were three. From these three categories of radio stations, six, two and two radio stations were respectively chosen to make a sample of 10 radio stations (Udala 104.7FM Onitsha, Kpakpando 101.9FM Mbaukwu, Odenigbo

99.1FM Obosi, Choice 97.1FM Nnewi, Wazobia 93.7FM Onitsha, Authority 91.9FM Nnewi, ABS 88.5FM Awka, Purity 102.7FM Mgbakwu, Unizik 94.1FM Awka, Moment 98.7FM Oko). Qouta sampling technique was used to select 196 radio workers from the sample radio stations. The data for the study were collected with questionnaire instrument, and analysed using mean and standard deviation.

**Data presentation**

In this study, 196 copies of questionnaire were shared to the sample population. A total of 184 copies of the questionnaire were returned. Four copies of the returned questionnaire were wrongly filled. Data analysis was, therefore, done based on 180 copies of the questionnaire which is 91.8% of the targeted responses, and acceptable in research.

**Table 1: Mean and standard deviation showing the principal determinant of radio programming in Anambra State.**

No	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Std dev	Rks
1	In radio programming, primary consideration is given to audience needs	134 74.4%	41 23.1%	3 1.5%	2 1.0%	3.7	0.56	agree
2	Radio stations undertake audience research to discover audience needs	74 41.1%	91 50.7%	7 4.0%	8 4.1%	3.3	0.74	agree
3	Radio stations use audience mapping in programme planning.	79 44.2%	94 52.2%	4 2.0%	3 1.6%	3.4	0.62	agree
4	Audience feedback is not used in radio programming	1 0.5%	6 3.5%	91 50.3%	82 45.7%	1.6	0.59	disagree
5	Radio stations reflect audience interest even when there is little financial incentive.	60 33.4%	108 60.1%	7 4.0%	5 2.5%	3.2	0.66	agree
6	Radio audience have little or no opportunity to contribute to programme contents.	2 1.0%	5 2.5%	77 43.2%	96 53.3%	1.5	0.61	disagree
	<b>Cluster mean</b>					<b>2.8</b>	<b>0.63</b>	

*Source: Field work 2025*

The values of the six items reveal the centrality of audience factor in radio programming. The pooled standard deviation value of the six items indicates a deviation from the cluster mean by 0.63 units which is a moderate dispersion around the mean. Although there were some variability in the responses given by the respondents, they maintained some consistency on the status of audience as primary determinants of radio programmes.

**Table 2: Mean and standard deviation showing other determinants of radio programming in Anambra State**

No	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Std dev	Rks
1	Radio station owners influence radio programming.	21 11.6%	71 39.7%	49 27.1%	39 21.6%	2.4	0.96	agree
2	Attention is paid to commercial issues in radio programming.	93 51.8%	77 42.7%	8 4.5%	2 1.0%	3.5	0.64	agree
3	Accessibility of radio equipment and new technology influence radio programming.	100 55.8%	63 35.2%	12 6.5%	5 2.5%	3.4	0.74	agree
4	The regulations of Nigeria Broadcasting Commission influence radio programming	129 71.9%	41 22.7%	7 4.0%	3 1.4%	3.6	0.64	agree
5	The vision and mission of the station is considered in radio programming.	105 58.8%	53 29.2%	13 7.0%	9 5.0%	3.4	0.83	agree
6	Radio staff strength and competence do not influence radio programming.	2 1.0%	5 2.5%	48 26.7%	125 69.8%	1.4	0.59	disagree
	<b>Cluster mean</b>					<b>3.0</b>	<b>0.73</b>	

*Source: Field work 2025*

The cluster mean of 3.0 indicates the high agreement of the respondents to the reality and influence of other radio programming determinants. Beyond the needs of the listening audience, radio workers also show sensitivity to the desires of radio owners, the financial needs of the station, the availability of radio equipment, NBC regulations and other issues in radio programme planning, production and sustenance. The standard deviation of 0.73 also reflects the majority of agreement responses and the moderate spread of the response data to strongly agree and neutral positions.

### Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study reveal that audience is a key determinant in the entire process of radio programming. Radio broadcasting process is completed and made relevant by the engagement of the listeners in the broadcast contents. This means that the contents of any radio programme, its packaging, scheduling and presentation is of paramount importance for the success of a given radio station. Ramaghani et al. (2025) affirm this when they said that the most significant metrics for assessing the progress of any radio or television station is its broadcast programmes. All these programmes are designed to attract and satisfy the listening audience to earn their followership and support. The findings of the study done by Edogoh et al. (2016), that young people in Anambra State listen to radio programmes that gratify their needs, corroborate this point that radio audience is the primary determinant in radio programming. This explains the reason why radio stations undertake the rigour of audience research, and adopt various mechanisms of feedback collection to harness the needs of the particular audience segment they intend to target in their programming project.

Uses and gratifications theory ratifies the pride of place given to audience needs in radio programming. The theory emphasizes the active participation of audience in the choice and consumption of media contents of all sorts thereby lending great significance to the status of all media users. In uses and gratifications theory, the foundation of what Kuyucu (2019) called the principle of “user sovereignty” was

laid. By this principle, radio programming is tailored to the satisfaction of radio audience. Even the innovations of digital technology which, as Zhang (2016) observes, are driving radio from its linear form of transmission to a more complex one are all driven by this principle with the primary aim of seeking the convenience of the listening audience.

The study also discovers that while audience is the key determinant in radio programming, there are other secondary determinants that influence radio programming decisions. They include ownership of radio stations, commercial issues, accessibility of radio equipment and new technology, regulations of Nigeria Broadcasting Commission (NBC), the vision and mission statements of individual stations, and human resources in terms of staff competence and availability. This agrees with the findings of Epey et al. (2022) that the audience choice of broadcast programme is influenced by the programme's quality and excitement value. Of course, a radio programme with high quality and excitement value will neither ignore the needs of the audience nor overlook other secondary determinants like NBC regulation and staff competence.

Some of the secondary determinants tend to have more direct and recognizable effect than others. The NBC (2016) regulation that words with connotations of violence and immorality are not to be broadcast (NTBB) is directly manifest in the planning and editing of radio programmes in Anambra State. Likewise, the impact of vision/mission statements of individual stations as well as deficiency in the area of human and material resources on programming decisions are most often not hidden. Orlu-Orlu observes that the injunction given at the Regional Radio Communication Conference to implement the directive of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) that all broadcast channels should transit from analogue to digital transmission before June 15 2015 has remained unheeded by many broadcast stations. How many radio stations in Anambra State has switched on to digital transmission today in 2026? this gives a picture of the impact of deficiency in human, material and technological resources on broadcast programming. The effect is not covert but conspicuously evident.

Also, beneath the official garb of professionalism and freedom worn by radio workers in Anambra State, there is most often some subtle but significant influence of the radio station owners on the direction of radio programming process. Such influence could be positive when it aligns with the vision and mission of the station properly stated, or negative when it counters the principles of good practice. In either way, it shows the capacity of radio owners to tilt the balance of radio programming decisions in some critical moments of broadcasting.

Furthermore, media commercialisation is one of the sensitive issues in the digital era when followership, listenership, and media content are assessed by their economic value. While radio houses need advertisements, sponsorship and other commercial structures to sustain their broadcast existence, the ethics of the profession and the reputation of the broadcast station must be maintained as sacrosanct.

## **Conclusion**

Radio stations in Anambra State are progressive because they are predominantly audience-centred in the entire process of their programming. This study reveals that audience factor is the primary determinant in radio programming. Radio programmes that are structured to address the needs of listeners elicit strong emotional attachment from the people breeding loyal audience that provide firm support to radio stations in moments of adversity and need. The primary attention given to audience factor in programming reaffirms the privileged status which Blumer and Katz conferred on them by their uses and gratifications theory. The audience through the years have continued to prove the veracity of assumptions of the theory, that they are never passive in their choice and consumption of media contents. Instead, they choose and consume what satisfy their needs. In that choice, the audience have always identified with all those programmes that serve their interest.

The study also shows that there are a host of other secondary determinants of radio programming which include; ownership factor, commercial issues, accessibility of radio equipment, NBC regulations, the vision/mission of a particular station, availability of resources. These must be properly acknowledged and managed in such a way that they do not undermine the needs of the audience but rather work jointly for the realisation of the broadcast objective.

### Recommendations

1. The study recommends that radio stations in Anambra State undertake regular audience research in order to keep pace with the changing interests of radio audience in the state.
2. Radio stations should include more interactive elements in their programmes as a way of accessing the needs of their listeners.
3. Radio workers should acknowledge the presence of the secondary determinants in radio programming so that they can manage their effects without compromising broadcast professional standard or the programme objective.

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