Understanding the Role of *Issues in the News* Phone-in programme on Liberty FM Kaduna in Amplifying Local Voices and Concerns for Inclusive National Development

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Abstract
This research examined the role of phone-in programmes in shaping public discourse and amplifying local voices and concerns for inclusive national development. The study used *Issues in the News* phone-in programme on Liberty FM, Kaduna to assess the audience level of engagement and participation in the programme, and the audience views about the programme. The study was anchored on Active Audience Theory and Uses and Gratification Theory. Survey method of research was employed and 397 copies of questionnaire were administered online to the respondents. The respondents were selected from the audience population of the programme using purposive and simple random sampling techniques. Findings showed that the programme allowed for inclusivity of representative of diverse local voices from different gender, age, religious and socio-economic backgrounds. It also revealed that there was high level of active audience participation to discuss, comment and exchange diverse perspectives on issues for national development. Some of the participants however complained about the time of airing of the programme. Thus, it was recommended that…

Key Words: Radio Phone-in Programme; Audience Engagement/Participation; Local Voices and Concern; and Inclusive National Development

Introduction

Mass media is the cornerstone of every developed society. O'Shaughnessy (1999) noted that mass media are technologically developed and economically profitable forms of human communication, held in public and private ownership which can transmit information, ideas, entertainment across time and space to diverse group of people. They are popular due to their content, coverage and the leverage of familiarity with the masses and no wonder some consider it as the peoples' media. Mass media channels are grouped into print which covers platforms like newspapers, magazines, books, journals, and broadcast which covers the spectrum of television, radio and film.

Radio as a mass medium channel is generally regarded as a ubiquitous medium which has a greater reach than many other media of communication and in most

situations, is amenable to a varied kind of use and thus, easily adjusting itself into time and convenience (Arens, 2002). It is considered to be one of the most powerful and effective information dissemination tools especially in the rural areas (Ojebode & Adegbola, 2007). It is highly favourable as well due to its capacity to override most barriers of illiteracy. Kuewumi, (2009) describes radio as a local, fragmented, specialized, personal and mobile medium. It provides programmes that put the listener at ease while they carry their day-to-day activities. Radio is a medium that makes the listeners absorb everything (Nwabueze, 2008). It also adopts an interpersonal approach which makes the listeners feel like they are the only object of attention; this is also improved on through the adoption of different programmes that keep the listeners entertained and interested in whatever the medium has to offer.

There are several types of radio programmes which include radio news, documentaries/features, interviews, dramas, commentaries, magazines, announcements, talk/phone-in, etc. All these forms of radio programmes among many others, appeal to the consuming audience in one form or the other (Dantata, 2016). Talk/Phone-in radio is one of the genres of radio programmes that allow for audience participation

The media are useful tools in enlightening listeners and even stimulating their interests by involving them in audience participatory communication (Moemeka, 2012). Karikana (1999) noted that audience participation allows for the possibility of marginalized groups to voice out their opinion without any fear thus, encouraging the freedom of expression. The absence of audience participation does not only affect freedom of expression, but also tamper with the growth of development communication. Bassette (2004) opined that the media serve as a link between the people and the government to boost the process of overall development by fostering the spirit of communication between the two parties. When communication is redundant from one angle, then the development agenda will suffer.

Audience participation within the African continent has been considered an integral part of radio programmes and it involves phone-ins, dedications, text messages, greetings and music requests (Williams, 2013). The predisposition that radio listeners are active participants in mass media has however been challenged by Ziz (2021) and Boateng (2023) who argued that the amount of people who are actively involved in Talk Radio programmes has geometrically decreased as these programmes are not captivating enough to keep the general audience interested.

Dunu (2015) also challenged the predisposition from the angle of gender power which serves as a factor hindering audience active participation in radio programmes where the females are not given equal opportunities to participate.

In contemporary Nigeria, the role of the media in giving a voice to the voiceless, shaping public discourse and facilitating inclusive national development is widely acknowledged. With the proliferation of different media programmes, phone-in radio programmes have emerged as a significant platform for amplifying local voices and concerns. The bone of contention is on the audience level of commitment, engagement and participation in the phone-in radio programmes for inclusive national development. Specifically, the focus of this study is on the audience level of commitment, engagement and participation in the I*ssues in the News*phone-in programmeon Liberty FM, Kaduna.The study covered the audience population of *Liberty 91.7 FM* in Kaduna metropolis and some communities in Zaria that fall under the signal range of the station. The study is of course significant as it contributes to a good understanding of the role of phone-in radio programmes in amplifying local voices and concerns for inclusive national development.

The findings of this study can inform media practitioners, policymakers, and development agencies on strategies to leverage phone-in radio programme as a tool for promoting inclusive national development agendas and fostering participatory democracy. Additionally, the findings of the study will contribute to academic scholarship by expanding knowledge on the role of media for inclusive development in the society.

Research Questions

The study therefore, attempted to provide answers to the following research questions:

1. What are the demographic characteristics of the audience of *Issues in the news*phone-in programmeon Liberty FM, Kaduna?
2. What is the audiences' frequency of exposure to *Issues in the news*phone-in programmeon Liberty FM, Kaduna?
3. What is the audiences' level of participation in *Issues in the news*phone-in programmeon Liberty FM, Kaduna?

Literature Review

This part of the study provides a review of concepts, empirical studies and theoretical frameworks that are related to the study.

The Notion of Inclusive National Development in Nigeria

Inclusive national development is a multifaceted concept that emphasizes equitable distribution of resources, opportunities, and benefits across all segments of society. In the context of Nigeria, a diverse and populous country with significant socio-economic disparities, achieving inclusive development is crucial for sustainable growth, social cohesion, and poverty reduction. Nigeria's journey towards inclusive development has been shaped by its colonial past, post-independence struggles, and ongoing challenges related to governance, corruption and ethno-religious tensions. Decades of oil-driven economic growth have not translated into widespread prosperity due to systemic inequalities and inadequate social policies.

The key components of inclusive development covered economic inclusion which connotes ensuring access to employment, entrepreneurship opportunities, and financial services for all citizens, particularly marginalized groups such as women, youth and persons with disabilities. It also entails promotion of equitable distribution of wealth and income through progressive taxation, social safety nets and targeted poverty alleviation programme. Social inclusion is also a component of inclusive development which has to do with enhancing access to education, healthcare, and basic services, especially in rural and underserved areas, addressing social discrimination, promoting cultural diversity, and protecting the rights of minority groups including indigenous peoples and internally displaced persons. Political inclusion as an aspect of inclusive development means fostering participatory governance, transparency, and accountability at all levels of government, empowering marginalized communities through representation in decision-making processes and inclusive policy formulation.

Local Voices and Concerns as Panacea for Inclusive National Development in Nigeria

Inclusive national development in Nigeria necessitates the recognition and integration of local voices and concerns into the development agenda. Local communities, with their unique perspectives, knowledge, and experiences, play a crucial role in shaping policies, programmes, and initiatives that are responsive to their needs and aspirations. Local voices provide invaluable insights into the socio-cultural, economic and environmental dynamics of specific communities, enabling policymakers to tailor development interventions to local contexts. They highlight grassroots perspectives on development challenges, priorities and solutions that may differ from top-down approaches or national agendas. Engaging local voices fosters a sense of ownership and empowerment among

community members, promoting active participation in decision-making processes and implementation of development initiatives. It strengthens social cohesion, trust, and solidarity within communities, leading to more sustainable and inclusive development outcomes. Local voices often contribute innovative ideas, indigenous knowledge, and adaptive strategies that are essential for addressing complex development issues, such as climate change, food security and healthcare delivery. By leveraging local expertise and resources, development interventions can be more effective, culturally appropriate and resilient to external shocks.

Local concerns often revolve around access to basic services such as clean water, sanitation, healthcare, education, and electricity, which are critical for improving quality of life and human development outcomes. Addressing these concerns requires targeted investments in rural and underserved areas, as well as decentralized governance structures that prioritize local needs and allocate resources accordingly. Economic concerns, including unemployment, poverty, and lack of livelihood opportunities, are prevalent in many local communities, particularly in rural and informal urban areas. Promoting inclusive economic growth through entrepreneurship support, vocational training, value chain development, and access to markets can address these concerns and enhance local prosperity.

Radio Programmes and Audience Participation

Mass communication occurs through many channels, one of which is the broadcast media. The broadcast media simply put, is the gateway through which a large number of people receive information, entertainment and even socialize simultaneously. According to Onabajo (2003), broadcasting encapsulates the idea of transmitting information through waves to audience irrespective of geographic locations.Adegbija et al (2013) explain that broadcast media is the primary means by which information, opinions, ideas and entertainment are delivered to the public in virtually every nation around the world. Jegede (2015) notes that broadcast media is the most convenient means to reach a large volume of people.

Broadcast media channels are generally grouped into television and radio mediums. Both mediums appeal to the audience through electromagnetic waves. However, while television delivers audio and visual contents to the consumers of media contents, radio transmits only audio contents that allow the listeners to tune in to different stations and listen to different radio programmes. Coyle (2001) submits that radio has a wider audience reach, and Sally (2020) explains that radio

feeds its audience with programmes ranging from news, entertainment and other informational programmes. McNair (2021) described radio as a medium that is easily accessible and allows for audience interactivity and participation. Radio performs numerous functions which include; news and information dissemination, education and entertainment function, socialization function among others. This may be some of the reasons why radio had been recognised for decades as a tool to promote and support nation building through its programmes especially in developing countries (Aspinall, 1971).

Dunu (2015) described programme as various types of media contents created in a radio or television station with a specific message which aims to communicate meanings to the target audience. Dantata (2016) recognized eight forms of radio programme, namely; news, documentaries/features, interviews, dramas, commentaries, announcements, magazines and talk/phone-in programmes.

Phone-in programme is a participatory programme where the audience is involved via phone calls to make comments or observations etc on the issue or topic of discourse. For the radio medium to survive, the audience must be actively involved. There is no mass media without the audience. Dijk (2003) considers the audience to be a pivotal aspect of the media. In media studies, the audience are considered as the consumers and contributors to media contents such as news, films and radio programmes. According to Bridget (2019), participation in Radio programme is a crucial process of understanding the dynamics of society.
In Nigeria, radio brings together the opportunity for individuals to participate by giving their opinions on trending issues through debates with experts, phone calls, commenting or even text messages. This is a glaring feature of the Talk Radio programme that has become an inclusive aspect of the media industry (Dunu, 2015).

For a while, many Nigerian radio stations have adopted this practice with the intention of extracting tentative feedback from the grass root level, which Adeyeye et al (2020) posit that it is heavily plagued with a lot of challenges. Some examples of these audience participatory programme are *Issues in the news* by *Liberty 91.7 FM, Wetin dey* by Correct 94.3FM, *Oga driver* by KSMC 90.9FM amongst others. Typically, *Issues in the news* is a weekly Talk Radio programme that provides information on trending political matters around the country and give the listeners the liberty to participate by sharing their opinions.

Radio Phone-in Programme and Inclusive National Development in Nigeria

Talk/phone-in is a radio programme that allows for the broad exploration of issues by allowing the audience to be immersed in the process through expert interviews, discussions as well as text messaging and call-in sessions. Here, there is an audience participatory approach where the presenter gets to hear opinions of listeners. Radio talk programme emphasizes on various sectors such as sports, politics, health, entertainment, economy etc. Talk radio hosts also make efforts to incorporate an informal atmosphere when presenting the news so that the target audience feel comfortable enough to share their opinions on air. It comes in different forms such solo sessions where a single presenter carries the whole session. It could also be co-hosts or panel discussions; experts could also be invited for an interactive interview session. Talk radio programme is an impressive way to communicate with the grass root on matters of societal relevance as the perspective of the masses can be given significance. Also, it is a form of programme that largely constitutes dialogue, debates and discussions on variety of contemporary local, national or even international issues affecting majority of the society (Nwabueze, 2008). It is a programme that provides insight and allows for thorough analysis of events by featuring specialists, hosts and mostly participants from the audience population. Ziz (2021) identifies some sub-categories of the talk or phone-in radio programme, which covers the areas of news, politics, celebrity gossip, gender, sensitization topics, health, current affairs, and others.

Radio phone-in programme plays a significant role in facilitating inclusive national development by providing a platform for citizens to voice their opinions, share experiences, and engage with policymakers on issues relevant to their communities. In the Nigerian context, where access to traditional media remains widespread, radio phone-in programmes have emerged as a powerful tool for promoting dialogue, fostering civic participation, and influencing policy outcomes.

Radio phone-in programmes serve as a vital source of information for citizens, especially those in rural and remote areas with limited access to other forms of media. They provide updates on government policies, community initiatives, and development projects, empowering citizens to make informed decisions and participate in local governance. The programmes are also means of community engagement whereby listeners are allowed to call in, ask questions, and share their perspectives. Radio phone-in programmes therefore, foster community engagement and grassroots activism by providing a platform for marginalized

groups such as women, youth, and ethnic minorities, to voice their concerns, articulate their needs, and influence public discourse. Theseprogrammes equally serve as catalysts for policy advocacy and social change by amplifying the voices of citizens and mobilizing public opinion on pressing issues.

Issues in the News Phone-in Programme on Liberty FM Kaduna

In Nigeria, radio is seen as a pervasive medium that offers the opportunity for listeners to express themselves, thus encouraging the spirit of participation. Talk/phone-in radio programmes are therefore considered as a means through which the general public are given a window for their voices to be heard, for them to discuss and share their views about issues that bother on their life. An example of this is the programme, *Issues in the news* on *Liberty 91.7 FM*, which is a programmes that provides information on trending issues in Nigeria and then gives the listeners the liberty to call in and share their opinions. Liberty Radio 91.7FM is a news, current affairs, entertainment, sports and Talk radio station located in Unguwan Rimi area of Kaduna State, Nigeria. The station with the slogan, *voice for all*,got the license to begin broadcasting in 2011 and then started operations in 2012.

Issues in the news is a talk/phone-in programme that is topical and audience participatory in nature. It picks trending headlines on politics, governance and some other contemporary national issues and then gives the listeners the opportunity to make their contributions regarding their opinions on such issues. The programmeis aired every weekday from six am to seven am and on Sundays, an extra thirty minutes airtime is added to accommodate further opinions of the callers. The programmeaims to build the spirit of integration as well as political enlightenment and efficacy. This informative cum interactive programme has created a sense of socialization and sensitization within diverse listeners and callers from all corners of Kaduna Metropolis and some parts of Zaria communities. This highlights the cause of participatory communication in radio programme.

Review of Empirical Studies

Boateng (2023) conducted a study on the listenership of rural FM radio in Northern Ghana. The findings showed that audience participation through Phone-ins is relatively low with most of the participants being males while the females prefer to quietly listen to the programme. However, they complained that the timing of the programmeis inconvenient for the audience thus, they cannot actively participate even if they want to.

Bmig and Osune (2021) conducted research to explore the listeners' participation in media content of a community radio. The focus of the research was to analyze the level of audience participation in the content creation of these radio programmes. The findings of the study showed that the audience were actively engaged in the media content development of the station and that the station accommodates and encourages audience participation through phone-ins, text messages and shout-outs.

Heywood (2021) investigated the significance of loud and quiet forms of audience participation in radio programme. Findings showed that the audience had a preference for mobile technology as well as internet facilities as ways of accessing their favorite radio programme.

Bamigboye (2019) investigated audience listenership and participation in a community radio. The findings showed that phone-in or talk-back radio programmes encourage audience participation, which paved way for mobilization of listeners. Also, most of the respondents participated via phone-ins although the participation of women is less than men.

Apata and Azeez (2019) conducted a study on the motivations for engaging in radio phone-in programme among radio users in Oshobgo. The findings of the study showed that majority of the callers were motivated to participate in the programme because they got to interact with their favorite hosts.

Faisal and Alhassan (2018) in a study on community access and participation in radio broadcast with a focus on radio Garrki. Ghana, found that majority of the respondents participated in the radio talk programme of the station via phone calls and also showed satisfaction with the programme content.

Other related empirical studies such as Bodaga (2019), found in a survey that radio phone-in programme are popular among radio listeners. Gordon (2019) highlighted the increasing use of smartphones in accessing radio talk programme. Sriram (2020) found that majority of radio audience preferred to listen to radio programme through their mobile phones. Lopes (2015) noted that calling in to the studio is the most frequent form of engagement in radio programmes.

Theoretical Framework

The study was anchored on two theories, namely; The Active Audience theory and the Uses and Gratification theory. The active audience theory which is also

known as active audience perspective is a theoretical framework in media and communication studies which posits that audience are not passive recipients of media messages and they can choose to actively engage with mass media and interpret media content. The theory was propounded by Stuart Hall in his work, "Encoding and Decoding in the television discourse (1973)" as a criticism to the initial predisposition that media users are only passive audiences and consumers of media content. This theory explores how the users of media content take an active stance in media consumption and interpretation.

Naturally the theory is guided by some assumption such as the supposition that the audience are not passive receivers but active interpreters of media contents. Also, different audience members can have diverse interpretation and reactions to the same media contents based on their backgrounds, beliefs and experiences. The theory also assumes that the audience can construct and negotiate meanings from media content by combing through their existing knowledge with the information presented in the media. Lastly, Active audience theory assumes that the audience can choose the media content they want to consume and how to engage with it based on their preferences and interests.

The Uses and Gratifications Theory posits that audience members are active seekers of media content to satisfy specific needs and desires. Instead of being passively influenced by media, individuals make conscious choices about what media they consume and how they engage with it to achieve particular gratifications. Key assumptions of this theory include: Audiences are active (Individuals actively choose media content). Media use is goal-oriented (People use media to fulfill specific needs). Social and psychological factors mediate media effects (Individual characteristics influence how media is used and its potential effects). Media compete with other sources of need satisfaction (Media is just one-way individuals can meet their needs).

The two theories are related to the research in that they both explore human interaction with mass media and particularly in explaining the motivations behind audience interaction with radio programme.

Research Methodology

The study employed quantitative survey research method. Bamigboye (2019) define survey as a method of data collection that is used to assess thoughts, opinions and feelings. It is simply a quantitative method whereby a researcher decides to direct some set of predetermined questions to an entire group or sample

of a population in order to find the answers to certain questions. The survey method is chosen because it allows the researcher to collect data from a large number of people in a swift and efficient manner.

The population of the study are the listeners of *Liberty 91.7 FM* To ease the selection of participants in the study, audience of the station on the station's Facebook account, which amounted to about 41,000 followers were purposively used. The study employed the use of Taro Yamane'ssample size table at confidence level of 95% and margin of error of 5%,and 397 was arrived at as the sample size for the population. Online questionnaire was used as the research instrument and it was validated by research experts and its reliability was determined through a pilot study.

Data Presentation and Analysis

A total of 397 copies of the questionnaire were administered online and 271 were returned valid. The data gathered were presented in charts and tables, showing frequencies, percentages and responses provided by the respondents.

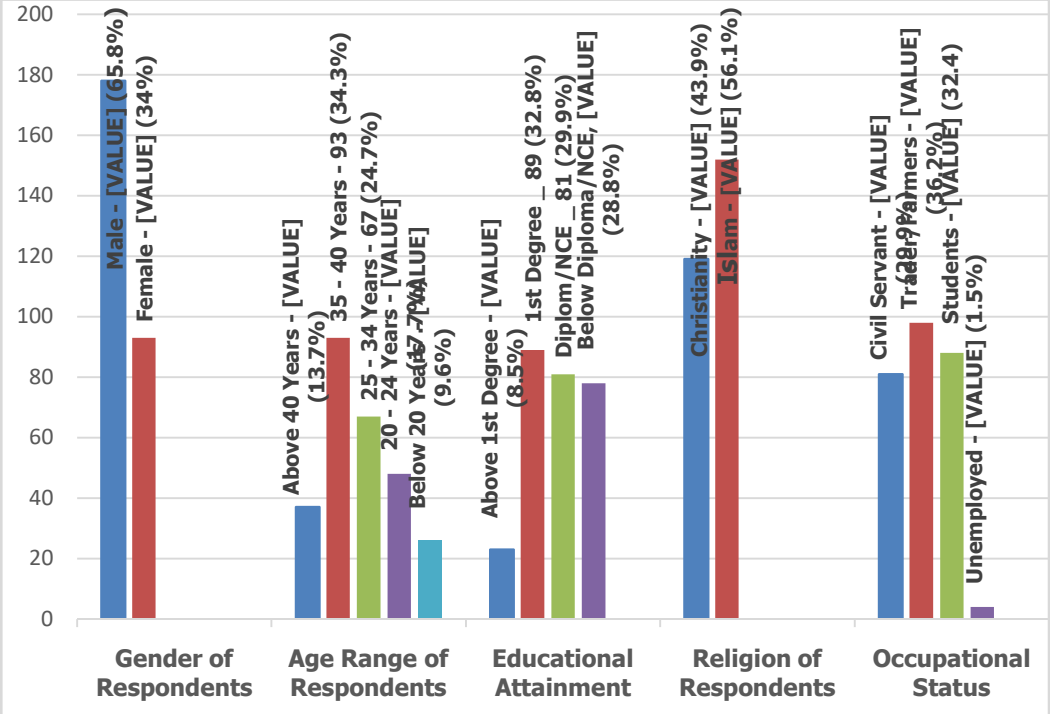

Figure 1.1: Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

The results in figure 1.1 show that majority of the respondents represented by 178 (65.8%) are male while the remaining 93 (34.2%) are female. The respondents

within the age range of 25 - 40 years constituted the largest majority represented by 160 (59%). Also, there is a reasonable number of those within the age brackets of 20-24 years represented by 48 (17.7%) and those above the age of 40 represented by 37 (13.7%). Only 26 (9.6%) of the respondents are below the age of 20 years. There was almost a striking balance between the respondents that practice Islamic religion, 152 (56.1%) and those that practice Christianity, 116 (43.9%). Majority of the respondents are traders/farmers, 98 (36.2%) followed by students, 88 (32.4%), then civil servants, 81 (29.9%), and only 4 (1.5%) are unemployed.

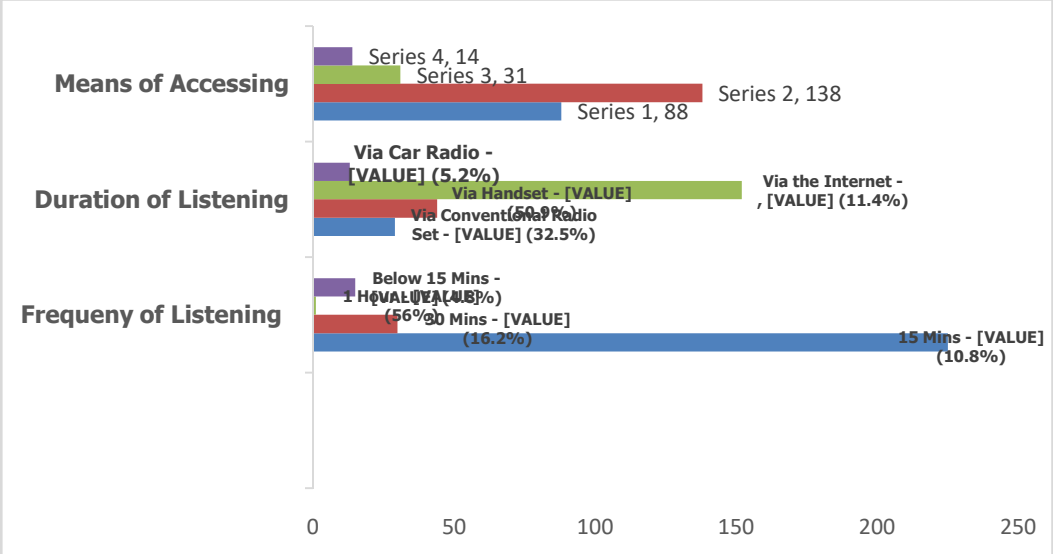

Figure 1.2: Frequency, Duration and Means of Listening to the Programme by the Respondents

The results of the data analyses in figure 1.2 revealed that the largest majority of the respondents represented by 185 (68.3%) listened to the programme on daily basis followed by those that tuned in to the programme once in a week represented by 41 (15.2%), and 30 (11%) who listened rarely. Only 15 (5.5%) said they never listened to the programme. Similarly, more than one-third of the respondents represented by 152 (56%) spent about an hour listening to the programme, 44 (16.2%) spent about 30 minutes to listen to the programme, while 29 (10.8%), and 13 (4.8%) said they spent either 15 minutes or below to listen to the programme. More so, about half of the respondents represented by 138 (50.9%) used their handset to access or listen to the programme, 88 (32.5%) used conventional radio set, 31 (11.4%) agreed to use the internet, and only 14 (5.2%) used car radio to listen to the programme.

Table 1.1: Audience Views about the Programme

1	Audience Means of Participation in the Programme	Via Phone-in 138 (50.9%)	Via Text Message 30 (11.1%)	Via Social Media Chat 101 (37.3%)	Via Mail 2 (0.7%)
2	Rating Audience Participation in the Programme	Very Active 34 (12.5%)	Active 96 (34.4%)	Neutral 80 (29.5%)	Weak 41 (15.1%%)
3	Audience Reason for Participating in the programme	To share Views 139 (51.3%)	To Hear their Voice on Radio 14 (5.2%)	To defend their Group 78 (25.1%)	To connect with like-minds 50 (18.4%)
4	Rating the Audience Level of Freedom of Participation in the Programme	Very High level of Freedom 92 (33.9%)	High level of Freedom 112 (41.3%)	Low level of Freedom 45 (16.6%)	Very Low level of Freedom 22 (8.2%)
5	Main Issues Focused in the Programme	Politics 146 (53.9%)	Education 79 (29.2%)	Health 25 (9.2%)	Agriculture 21 (7.7%)
6	Rating the Programme's Focus on Development Issues	Very Highly Focused 92 (33.9%)	Highly Focused 45 (16.6%)	Low Focused 112 (41.3%)	Very Low Highly Focused 22 (8.2%)

The results in table 1.1 show that a little above half of the respondents represented by 138 (50.9%) preferred to call the studio live to offer their contributionsin the programme and about 101 (37.3%) said they preferred to use social media platforms to participate in the programme. The remaining 30 (11.1%) preferred to use text message and only 2 (0.7%) said they used mail to participate in the programme. The results revealed that 34 (12.5%) and 96 (34.4%%) of the respondents were very active and active participants in the programme. However, 41 (15.1%) said participants in the programme were weak, while a good number of the participants represented by 80 (29.5%) were neutral. Similarly, 139 (51.3%) of the respondents said they participated in the programme in order to share their views, 78 (25.1%) said they participated to defend the position of their group, or defend their group from criticism, 50 (18.4%) said they participated to connect with like-minds. Only 14 (5.2%) said they participated in the programme

to hear their voice on radio. In response to the audience level of freedom of participation in the programme, 92 (33.9%) and 112 (41.35) said there was a guarantee for a very high level of freedom and a high level of freedom of participation, respectively. However, 22 (8.2) and 45 (16.6%) said there was very low or low level of freedom of participation in the programme, respectively. The results in the table further show that politics was the main focus of the programme having 146 (53.9%), then education 79 (29.2%), health issues 25 (9.2%), then agricultural issues 21 (7.7%). Also, some respondents represented by 137 (50.5%) agreed that the programme highly focused on developmental issues while 134 (49.5%) did not strongly accept that the programme focused on development issues.

Discussion of Findings

This section of the study attempts to provide answers to the research questions earlier set in the research:

RQ1: What are the demographic characteristics of audience of *Issues in the News* the phone-in programme of *Liberty 91.7 FM*?

The demographic data and the results of the analyses revealed that *Issues in the news*programme has more male audiences than female and that the programme attracted audience from different age groups particularly from the youths who constituted the larger majority of the programme audience. Similarly, majority of the audience of the programme obtained a minimum of a degree or diploma certificate and that they were either employed as civil servant or were still in school as students. Also, there are good representatives of Islamic and Christian religions in the demographic distribution of the programme audience.

To relate the relevance of the theoretical framework, one of the findings revealed that there were more male than female audience. This suggests that the content or format of *Issues in the News* might be fulfilling needs or offering gratifications that are perceived as more relevant or appealing to men. Perhaps, the topics discussed, the style of presentation, or the opportunities for expressing opinions resonated more strongly with male listeners. This could be related to perceived information needs, social interaction opportunities (through calling in), or even identity reinforcement.

It was revealed that the programme attracted audiences from different age groups, particularly the youth. The strong youth presence indicates that the programme is likely gratifying needs relevant to this demographic. This could include a desire to

stay informed about current events that impact their future, engaged in discussions with peers and authority figures, or developed their understanding of societal issues. The phone-in format might offer a platform for young people to voice their opinions and feel heard, satisfying needs for social interaction and self-expression.

Similarly, it revealed that the majority of the audience have at least a degree or diploma and employed as civil servants or students: This suggests that the programme catered to an audience that valued information and civic engagement. Individuals with higher education are likely to have a greater need for in-depth understanding of complex issues. Civil servants, whose work is often intertwined with public affairs and students, who are in a learning and formative stage, might turn to *Issues in the News* to stay informed, gain different perspectives and potentially participate in public discourse. The programme could be gratifying their needs for knowledge acquisition, professional development (for civil servants), and civic awareness.

Furthermore, it disclosed that there was a good representation of Islamic and Christian religions: This indicates that the programme likely addressed issues of concern or interest across different religious groups in the community. It suggests that the discussions were either inclusive of diverse perspectives or that the topics covered were relevant to the shared civic life of both Muslim and Christian listeners. The programme might be gratifying their needs for understanding societal issues from their respective viewpoints or for engaging in inter-religious dialogue (even indirectly by listening to others' perspectives).

RQ2: What is the Frequency of Audiences' exposure to the phone-in programme, *Iissues in the News* of *Liberty 91.7 FM*?

The results of the data analyses showed that majority of the programme audience listened to the programme once in every weekday which coincided with the days allotted to the programme in the radio station. Also, majority of the audience said they listened to the programme for one complete hour which also iscoincided with the time allotted to the programme by the station.

The result also provided relevant information concerning the accessibility of the programme by the audience where majority of the respondents accessed the programmes through the means of mobile handsets (android) followed by radio sets. Perhaps, because mobile phones are portable and easy to carry about and it is a reasonable deduction that the listeners of *Liberty 91.7 FM* are able to frequently

listen to *Issues in the News*programme. This goes in direct agreement with the findings of a previous study by Pilitsidou (2019) who found that most radio listeners use mobile technology to access their favourite radio programmes.

The findings also show that majority of the audience were youths and students which is a viable reason as to why there is a high frequency of exposure to *issues In the News*programme. According to O'Connor (2004), young adults and youths were active individuals who share with a similar pattern of doing things.

The findings highlighted that majority of the audience of *Liberty 91.7 FM* used discussions from *Issues in the News*programme as a reference for their political actions. This automatically indicates that many of them were exposed to the programme and had a positive attitude towards it. In essence, the majority of the station's audience had a high frequency of exposure towards *Issues in the News*programme because it satisfied their need of obtaining relevant political information. This correlates with the Active Audience theory which posits that media consumption is selective and the active audience willingly consume these contents if it aligns with their preference or interests such as provision of information, education, entertainment and others. The audience of *Liberty 91.7 FM*were active role players who chose to listen to *Issues in the News*programme because it aligned with their preference and interests. The findings are also in agreement with a previous study conducted by Ziz (2021) which found that there is a high exposure to phone-in radio programmes among youths

RQ3: What is the audience level of participation in the "*Issues in the News*"phone-in programmeof *Liberty 91.7 FM*?

The findings indicated that the males had a high level of participation which is represented by 65.8% while the females had a low level of participation which is represented by 34.2%. This showed that the male audience had more participation in *Issues in the News*phone-in programmethan the female audience. This aligns with the findings of a previous study by Bamigboye (2019) which showed that the participation of women in radio programmes is very low.

The findings also revealed that majority of the audience of *Liberty 91.7 FM*were active participants in *Issues in the News*programme. This was indicated by the 35.4% and 12.5% of respondents who agreed and strongly agreed on this notion. This finding directly contradicts the findings of Ziz (2021) who found that the audience level of participation in phone-in programmes is low.

In the same vein, the finding disclosed that the most popular mode of audience participation in*Issues in the News* programme is via audience phone-ins during the airing of the programme. This correlates with the findings of Bamigboye (2019) who discovered that most participants of radio programmes prefer to use the phone-in method as a means of participation.

Furthermore, the findings revealed that majority of the listeners of the phone-in programmewere influenced by it especially regarding their political decision making. Thus, active participation can be measured by it. It can therefore be inferred that the majority of the respondentswere immersed in the programme and were active consumers of the programme who, willingly, used discussion from the programme to guide them in their political actions. The findings of this study agreed with Heywood (2021) who posits that radio programmes can influence the decisions of the listeners, but disagreed with Ajaegu (2015) whose findings showed that the audience of radio phone-in programmes do not consider it as influential enough to impact on their political decisions.

The finding which revealed that a majority of the respondentswere active participants, directly supports one of the assumptions of uses and gratification theory. It shows that a significant portion of the listeners were not just passively receiving information, but were actively engaging with the programme. The identification of phone-ins as the most popular mode of participation further underscores audience activity. Individuals are taking the initiative to call in and contribute to the discussion. Also, the finding that majority of listeners were influenced by the programme, especially in their political decision-making, strongly suggests that a key gratification sought by the audience was information and guidance related to current affairs and political issues. They were actively using the programme to fulfill a need for understanding and potentially informing their political choices.

The high male participation (65.8%) compared to female participation (34.2%) could also be interpreted through this lens. It might suggest that, for various social or psychological reasons (as the theory suggests), males in this study's context may have a stronger goal orientation towards engaging in public discourse on news and political issues via this platform. The gender disparity in participation (higher male participation) aligns with the assumption of the theory. Social and psychological factors, potentially including societal norms, confidence levels in public speaking, or differing levels of interest in the specific topics discussed, could be mediating the extent to which men and women choose to participate. The

reference to Bamigboye's (2019) previous study reinforces the idea that this might be a broader trend influenced by such factors.

In summary, the research findings provide strong support for several key assumptions of the Uses and Gratifications Theory. The active participation of a majority of the audience, their preference for phone-in as a mode of engagement, and the programme's influence on their political decision-making, all point towards an audience that is actively seeking specific gratifications from the *Issues in the News*programme on *Liberty 91.7 FM*. The gender disparity in participation highlights the role of social and psychological factors in shaping media use and engagement, another key tenet of the theory. The contradiction with Ziz's (2021) findings suggests that the specific context and format of a programme can significantly influence audience activity levels and the gratifications sought.

Conclusion

This study investigated the Audience level of participation in *Issues in the News* programme by *Liberty 91.7FM*, Kaduna and in relation to the findings from the study, it can be concluded that the study highlighted the high frequency of exposure and impressive level of audience participation in the programme. Also, respondents had a good impression of the programme and had adopted a positive attitude towards it. This is evident in the fact that the audience agreed to use the discussions in the programme as a reference for their political discussions. From the findings of the study, it is also evident that there is a high level of participation in the programme and the participation is encouraged by the desire for self-expression and interaction with the hosts. However, some of the listeners had some reservations from participating in the programme and this is due to some complaints of inadequate time and unfavorable timing of the programme. There are other issues such as the attitude of some of the hosts as well as the repetitiveness of the programme which indicates that some of the listeners have reached a point of saturation in listenership and participation pattern towards the programme

Recommendations

The study therefore recommended the following:

i. Addition of more time to *Issues in the News* phone-in programmein order to accommodate more opinions of the participants.
ii. The use of incentives like recharge cards, shout-outs and special invitation to the station for tours should be encouraged by *Liberty 91.7FM* so that more people will be interested in the programme and its affairs.

iii. Audience research should be conducted on a timely basis by *Liberty 91.7FM* in order to know the full capacity of the listeners' expectations and make plans towards the implementations of such expectations.

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