

Broadcast News Cast Priority and Audience's Station Preference in Makurdi Metropolis

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Abstract

This study examines broadcast news cast priority and listeners' station preference in Makurdi metropolis. The study was anchored on agenda setting theory using survey research method which questionnaire was administered to 394 respondents who are residents of Makurdi metropolis. Findings revealed that respondents listen to or watch radio and television at different intervals as news occupy a significant aspect of media content consumed by the audience members. Another finding showed that majority of the audiences preferred listening/watching Channels TV, Arise TV, Radio Benue and Benue Television to other broadcast stations in Makurdi Metropolis. Further finding revealed that the media audiences are more likely to move in between stations for a variety of factors such as balance in their news, fast in news delivery, holding leaders to accountable and accuracy in news reporting. Findings also indicated that audience wants to see radio and television in the lens of improving conditions by being pro people and exposing corruption, see more radio and television focus their reportage on issues that affect the people, and to be less pro government in their routine news coverage. The study concluded that understanding the relationship between broadcast news priority and listeners' station preference in Makurdi metropolis is vital in developing effective communication strategies for broadcasting stations. The study recommended among others that programmes should be designed with the preferences and needs of the target audience in mind, with a focus on local and relevant content.

Keywords: Audience; News; Broadcast and Preference

Introduction

Journalism judgments of news values have often determined the selection of what ultimately is news for the consuming audience. These require placing premium to the plethora of daily occurrences. Stromback, Karlsson, and Hopmann (2012) note that every day, countless events happen, but only a minor share of all these eventually become news stories. The selection of what becomes news is based on several considerations, which are traditionally referred to as news value. Events become new to the extent that they are characterised by a number of news value properties, such as frequency, absolute intensity or intensity increase, meaningfulness, cultural proximity, unexpectedness, composition, and reference to elite nations, elite people, and something negative.

Selection of what is finally presented as news in most media organisations according to Stromback, Karlsson, and Hopmann (2012) does not distinguish between news and news selection, on the one hand, and news values or criteria of newsworthiness, on the other. It is instead assumed that the final news selection reflects the news values or criteria of newsworthiness that journalists hold, and that the news values or criteria of newsworthiness that journalists hold are the major factor deciding what becomes news.

Apart from the traditional determination of news, Michael and Kayode (2014) posit that media ownership is also known to influence journalists' selection, treatment and placement of news. In most countries around the world, ownership of the mass media is either state (public) or private. State or government ownership can be direct or indirect. Direct state ownership is where the media institution is owned, funded and controlled directly by the government while indirect ownership involves the media organization being overseen by a board of governors. While the former model applies to a public media organization like the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN) the latter model applies to the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) which although has a board appointed by the British government, is virtually free from both state and other political controls. On the other hand, private ownership of the media could be by individuals, families, companies and conglomerates.

In whatever form, Michael and Kayode (2014) explain that media owners do strive to exercise some form of control over editorial contents be it news, features or editorial comments. The major mechanism for accomplishing control over editorial content by media owners is the recruitment of carefully selected editors to drive the vision and mission of media owners. Such editors that have successfully executed the mission and vision of the media owners are usually rewarded with promotions and financial incentives. However, in some cases, media owners may interfere directly in the determination of editorial content through reshuffling of editorial staff, reworking as well as killing or stoppage of stories from being published.

Beyond external forces that may shape and determine news content, journalists' professional judgements have always fulfilled a certain reality to society. Welbers, Atteveldt, Kleinnijenhuis, Ruigrok and Schaper (2015) aver that through the process of gate keeping, journalist filters and transform the set of daily world events into a limited number of news articles. Concerns have been raised on the criteria used in this filtering process, and whether these criteria are beneficial or detrimental to society. Welbers, Atteveldt, Kleinnijenhuis, Ruigrok and Schaper (2015) posit that the relevant point of discussion is to what extent the preferences of the audience should be taken into the equation of selecting news for public consumption. One of the most important aspects in the discussion about journalists and media selection of news is a continuum of two opposing views on the role of journalism in society. The first aspect seeks understanding if journalists should determine what news is based on their professional judgment or should they let the audience decide what it should consume as news.

Broadcast news in Nigerian, like elsewhere in the world has enormous influence on its audience. Hanner (2013) posits that media messages abound and they permeate to every sector of the population. With such a grasp on the public's attention, one can only assume that the media promulgates certain responses from the public. From one crisis to the next, the media shifts its interest to the next big story and in doing so, also captures the public's curiosity and attention and causes it to shift as well. It can only be ascertained then, that the media does influence public opinion. It become imperative what news priority the news media especially broadcast stations consider topmost important for its audience.

News selection for transmission for broadcast journalists and their stations go beyond professional considerations of the traditional news values thus, drawing conversations for ethical and moral issues. Chioma (2013) provides an illustration about how commercial interest influence news cast priority with the analysis of the inability to pay salaries of workers, produce or service available equipment and myriad of other problems occasioned by the decline in government subvention, the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) and Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN) devised several other means to make money. One of such ways is the commercialisation of news. For a prescribed fee, news broadcast become a media relations

platform for individuals, communities, private and public organisations, government, and ministries to send messages to its various audience. These messages are presented as part of the news bulletin in the forms of straight news reports, news analysis, or commentary after the news.

The broadcast news media plays a vital role in disseminating information to the public, and radio and television remain significant platforms for delivering news updates. In Makurdi metropolis, radio stations dominate the broadcast news media, and they differ in form and content to meet the preferences of listeners. As such, it is important to understand how listener's station preference affects their news consumption behavior. Several studies have been conducted on broadcast news media and listeners' station preferences. In Nigeria, some researchers have investigated the factors that influence radio listeners' preference for news stations. For instance, a study by Yekinni and Olugbuyi (2017) found that trustworthiness, comprehensibility, and relevance of news content were key determinants of listeners' preference for news stations.

However, there is a need for more studies that focus on specific locations to examine how various factors affect the preferences of listeners. This research will investigate how broadcast news media influence the station preference of listeners in Makurdi metropolis, Benue State. It will help to understand the various media channels with news content popular among listeners and the factors that influence listeners' choice of these stations.

This study focuses on broadcast news cast priority and audience preference of stations in Makurdi Metropolis. Specifically, we examined how frequent the audience listen to or watch radio and television news and determine indices for audience preference of radio and television news in Makurdi metropolis as well as ascertain the main reason for viewership or listenership of certain television or radio broadcast news within Makurdi. The study also ascertain audience attitudes towards broadcast stations and their expectation from broadcast stations.

Review of Literature

News selection for most media operators (journalists and editors) according to Caple and Bednarek (2013) follows a set of criteria that help to determine the likelihood of an event being reported as news. News factors (also subsequently called *news values*, with the two terms having become synonymous for most researchers, although some do distinguish between them) are widely conceived of as *selection criteria* that are equally applied first to the 'event' that has taken place and whether it is to be selected for investigation by a journalist, and second to the 'story' as it competes with other stories to be selected for publication in the limited spaces of print newspapers and TV/radio bulletins.

News values are also commonly regarded as *properties or qualities* of events. It takes the event as the departure point in assessing the 'universal' criteria of newsworthiness, but stresses the importance of context in assessing the relevance of these criteria to the

structures of particular events. In other words, 'news value consists of that aspect of an event which is in accordance with the timeliness, interest, and importance of the event's relationship to its context. For Caple and Bednarek (2013), news values exist in the chemistry of an event, comment or circumstance that combine to produce news.

In an increasingly internet world even for news consumption, Engelmann, Luebke and Kessler (2021) observe that news cues in traditional mass media are products of journalistic actions, as journalists (un-)intentionally present news with more or stronger news factors in a more prominent or more detailed way. The influence of news cues on users' news selection processes may be even stronger on news aggregators than in traditional media or on online news websites, because users are exposed to a vast amount of information in this high-choice news environment.

Broadcast media news selection values may also determine how it audience respond to content by way of listening or viewing. Asodike and Udoh (2014) note that both private and public electronic media affect the public by helping them to form opinion and at the same time help them to change it. They do this by helping to give the media consumers what to think about. Broadcast media's pictures created by human beings in their heads, the purpose and relationships are their public opinions. Radio and television help to create these pictures through

their messages and news. Public opinion is not only affected by the pictures in our heads. They believe that economic position and property acquired account for differences in opinion held over an issue. Opinion formation is also dependent on the use the individual want to put to the message. The use which one will put information to is conversely determined by his "ego" involvement, perceptions, judgment, social and educational background, among other things. How broadcast stations influences public opinion depends on whether the audience have confidence in it. The confidence in any station is a function of how credible its message are and how it is dedicated to truth and facts.

News media coverage and selected emphasis on certain events or occurrences for placement in bulletin may not always be based on enshrined principles as explain by Hanner (2013) that increasingly, it seems that the media's purpose is to serve the interests of the government and large corporations, instead of serving the public. The media's lofty aspirations to be information-providing body seem like an excuse to "out-scoop" industry competitors. The media is a machine, churning out ideas and information, but in such a way as to draw-out a certain, expected response from the public. By presenting political views not too far to the left or right, the media frequently sits on the fence on many issues but does so under the guise that they are being objectionable. However, though certain verbal and nonverbal cues, broadcast journalists are able to coerce ad implant thoughts into the public's minds, thereby resulting in a specific response.

Other instance of how vested interest can direct the priority of news as noted by Adelabu and Onwuka (2022) is the commercialisation of broadcast news in Nigeria. This is the subtle payment for items to appear as news bulletin. Commercialisation in broadcast industry was meant to improve the financial status of stations in the country but the consequences of what looked like a succour and relief to the financial incapacity of media institutions was a change from the ethical, objective, timely and accurate report of news to the new norm of sponsored news stories. The implication of this is that only the rich will get their ideas communicated. It goes further to say that media practitioners who provide information in the form of news that is based or determined by financial prompting and rewards, negate the recommendations of the social responsibility theory as well as the objectives of the professionalism. The consequence of such thought is that when news is paid for either at a billed rate by the media organisation or as compensation for the journalists, such a report is bought and forced on the audience.

Apart from vested commercial interest, Michael and Kayode (2014) noted that media owners do strive to exercise some form of control over editorial contents be it news, features or editorial comments. The major mechanism for accomplishing control over editorial content by media owners is the recruitment of carefully selected editors to drive the vision and mission of media owners. Such editors that have successfully executed the mission and vision of the media owners are usually rewarded with promotions and financial incentives. However, in some cases, media owners may interfere directly in the determination of editorial content through reshuffling of editorial staff, reworking as well as killing or stoppage of stories from being published. It has been asserted that information is power. This implies that the capacity of an individual to act or take rational decisions is to a large extent dependent on information available to him. The major sources of information to most people today are the mass media. As a result of this perceived influence of the mass media, several national governments have stepped in to influence news selection and dissemination through the mechanism of national communication policy.

News Broadcast and Agenda Setting Theory

This study examined Agenda-Setting Theory as propounded by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Lewis Shaw in 1968 and how it is reflected in news selection priorities in broadcast stations in Makurdi metropolis in central Nigeria. This theory suggests that media outlets, particularly news organizations, have the power to influence the importance and salience of certain issues in the minds of their audience. Agenda setting for broadcast news stations according to Chukwu (2023) has taken a professional dimension and broadcast stations are increasingly unable to clearly separate comments from facts. It is also witnessed by the dominance of popular talk

shows anchored without recourse to professional consideration which are seemingly becoming ubiquitous across many broadcast outlets. These popular formats in news and current affairs programming find appeals to the audience.

The early envisaged role the media plays in public discussion and understanding of issues were explained by McCombs and Shaw (1972) who averred that in choosing and displaying news, editors, newsroom staff, and broadcasters play an important part in shaping political reality. Readers learn not only about a given issue, but also how much importance to attach to that issue from the amount of information in a news story and its position. In reflecting what candidates are saying during a campaign, the mass media may well determine the important issues—that is, the media may set the *agenda* of the campaign. Although there are substantial arguments to how news media set agenda, evidence still point to media's influence to modelling thoughts among audience members as observed by Asemah and Amah (2021) that the media set agenda by raising salient issues in our society, thereby making people to think along that line. The media raise salient issues as they happen in the society, so as to affect people about the issue, either positively or negatively, with a view to bringing about social change.

Within the context of Makurdi metropolis, Agenda-Setting Theory suggests that the news prioritisation of certain events or topics by broadcast stations could have a direct influence on the preference of listeners. For example, if a broadcast station prioritizes reporting on crime and safety concerns, listeners may perceive crime as a more significant issue in the community, and could choose to tune in to that station more frequently for updates on that issue.

Method

This study adopts the survey method to evaluate what audience members make of the news cast priority in broadcast stations across Nigeria. Survey design is considered appropriate for this study because it affords this study the opportunity to examine how frequent the audience listen to or watch radio and television news as well as ascertaining the seeming reactions of the audience to certain news stations. The survey solicited responses from radio listeners and television viewers. The use of questionnaire is to collect data for the purpose of describing, interpreting, evaluating and analyzing existing conditions or variables, and prevailing situation.

In order to probe how news audience reacts to broadcast station selection of news, this study relies on the general population of Makurdi. The National Population Commission (2020) projected that Makurdi; the Benue State Capital has a population figure of 407,000. Makurdi has a mix of all people from different background. It is the capital and commercial nerve centre of Benue State. It is located on the highest peak on the bank of the Benue River, in the open savannah of the Middle Belt of Nigeria. It is approximately 100 kilometres to Lafia which links to northern Nigeria, 80 kilometres to Gboko in the east, 120 to Otukpo in the south and 40km to Naka in the west. It is an important point on the north - south parallel roads in Nigeria

Sample Size

Sample for this study was statistically determined using formular. Taro Yamane formula for sample size determination. Araoye (2004) explain that the formular can be used provided the population is greater 10,000. Using this formula, this study arrived a sample figure of 394:

Data Presentation and Analysis

This study administered a total of 394 questionnaire based on the calculated sample size. However, 392 questionnaires were properly filled by respondent and returned for analysis. This accounted for 99.49% return rate which is adequate to form the basis for analysis.

Table One: Frequency of audience access to News

Description		Freq.	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	More than once a day	104	26.5	26.5	26.5
	Once everyday	88	22.4	22.4	49.0
	A few days in a week	160	40.8	40.8	89.8
	Rarely Watch or listen to news	40	10.2	10.2	100.0
Total		392	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Work, 2023

Table one provides insights into the frequency at which audience members access broadcast news as routine media activity. Data reveal that majority of respondents (40.8%) engaged in watching or listening to broadcast news a few days in a week. This followed by a segment of the audience that access broadcast news more than once a day with 26.5 % occurrence rate. Another category is those who access news at least once every other day with 22.4 %. On a whole only 10.2% of respondent indicated that that they rarely engaged themselves in accessing broadcast news. Cumulatively however, about 90% of respondents listen or watch broadcast news every other week but varying degree. This shows that radio and television news occupy a significant aspect of media content consume by the audience.

Table Two: Audience most preferred radio or Television news

Description		Freq.	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Radio Benue/Benue Television	136	34.7	34.7	34.7
	Radio Nigeria/NTA	80	20.4	20.4	55.1
	Channels TV/Arise TV	144	36.7	36.7	91.8
	TVC/AIT	32	8.2	8.2	100.0
	Total	392	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field work, 2023

Data presented in Table Two explains audience most preferred radio and television news. Channels Television and Arise Television news rank top among audience members. They account for 36.7 % of broadcast news audience. They are closely followed by Radio Benue and AIT has 8.2 % of the audience members relying on them for news. This data show that there is mix spread of choice by the public for their news needs. This means that audience members are likely to alternate in-between different news outlet. It is also significant to not both private and public media outlets have a market share of audience to rely on them for their news needs. The least attractive outlets in terms of news choice is TVC and AIT with 8.2 % of respondents preferring those medium for news. This means that media audiences are nearly five times less likely to choose TVC and AIT than would choose Channels TV and Arise TV for news. The data further reveal that the audience is more likely to watch Channels TV than they would watch NTA news. It further indicates that although Radio Benue and Benue Television have less coverage, respondents are relatively disposed to their news as they would to Channels and Arise news.

Table Three: Reason for audience choice of news sources

		Freq.	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	They are more balance in their news	144	36.7	36.7	36.7
	They are fastest in news delivery	96	24.5	24.5	61.2
	They hold leaders to account	64	16.3	16.3	77.6
	They are more accurate in news reporting	88	22.4	22.4	100.0
	Total	392	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Work 2023

Table Three provides perspectives on audience preference of certain stations. Result show that the audience prefers certain stations for the balance coverage of events. Balance reporting account for 36.7 % as reason for choosing a particular station for news. Apart from balance reporting, the speed of news delivery account for 24.5 %, followed by accuracy of reports with 22.4% of audience. This data is significant as it shows what sway audience members to a particular medium. The viewing or listening audience is less likely to choose a station for news when it holds leaders to account. They are more incline to choose a station that balances its report than one is fastest in breaking news.

Table Four: Audience Attitudes towards Broadcast Stations

		Freq.	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	I do not listen or watch pro-government stations	48	12.2	12.2	12.2
	I watch or listen to stations that are truthful with news	120	30.6	30.6	42.9
	I watch different stations for balanced news	144	36.7	36.7	79.6
	I am only concerned about entertainment	80	20.4	20.4	100.0
	Total	392	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Work, 2023

Table Four measures audience likely reactions to stations based on the pattern of news presentation. Result indicates that listeners and viewers of news react differently to news situations. Significant in data appearance are those who shuffle between stations with 36.7% who say they watch or listen to different stations get balance views on issues. Other listening or viewing segments of the audience choose stations that are perceived to be truthful with news reportage. This category account for 30.6 % audience members which is three times more than those who do not listen or watch news who are 12.2%. Another category is the 20.4% of respondents who are only concerned about entertainment content and shutting out news as a media product of choice on broadcast stations.

Table Five: Audience news expectation from broadcast stations in Nigeria

		Freq.	%	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Radio/Television stations should focus on the people	184	46.9	46.9	46.9
	Radio and Television news should expose corruption	112	28.6	28.6	75.5
	Radio and Television should support government	24	6.1	6.1	81.6
	Radio and Television are for entertainment	72	18.4	18.4	100.0
	Total	392	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Work, 2023

Table Five reveals audience expectations from their preferred news stations. Data on Table Six shows that 46.9% of audience members would want to see more radio and television focus their reportage on issues that affect the people. This is followed by 28.6% of the audience who want radio and television news to be more frequent in exposing corruption. Another important aspect of data in Table Six indicates that less respondents (6.1%) want radio and television to be pro government in their routine news coverage. A third of that percentage (18.4) however, sees radio and television as tools for entertainment. This however does not take the majority respondents who see radio and television in the lens of improving conditions by been pro people and exposing corruption.

Discussion of findings

This study has attempted to establish broadcast news priority among broadcasting stations in Nigeria and Benue State in particular. The choice of news item in Nigeria is expected to be decided by the editorial team devoid of external influence. On the frequency of how audience listen/watch radio and television news, the study found that audience listen to or watch radio and television at different intervals as news occupy a significant aspect of media content consume by the audience members.

As regards the audience preference of radio and television news in Makurdi metropolis, the study found that majority of the audiences preferred listening/watching Channels TV, Arise TV, Radio Benue and Benue Television to other broadcast stations. This could stem from the fact that audience belief news or messages coming from those channels. The findings reaffirmed what Dunwoody and Griffin (1996) found that viewers prefer news stories that are relevant to their lives and that include human interest elements.

Another finding revealed that the media audiences are more likely to move in between stations for a variety of factors such as balance in their news, fast in news delivery, holding leaders to accountable and accuracy in news reporting. This is in clear departure from the previous study by Hanner (2013) who avers that news media coverage and selected emphasis on certain events or occurrences for placement in bulletin may not always be based on enshrined principles as it seems that the media's purpose is to serve the interests of the government and large corporations, instead of serving the public.

On audience attitudes towards broadcast stations, findings showed that members are three times more incline to choose a trusted news station that is balanced and accurate than the stations that are not. Other audience members who developed trust issues with a station may decided not to listen or watch news but choose to focus on entertainment content all together and then shut out news as a media product of choice on broadcast stations. Significantly, it appears that the audience device means to hold news stations accountable by abandoning stations that appears not to be balanced with views on issues. This is thus, reflected in the principles of Social Responsibility Theory which is based on the strategic importance of the mass media in the society as noted by Merrill (2012) who opined that the power and near monopoly position of the media impose on them an obligation to be socially responsible, to see that all sides are fairly presented and that the public has enough information to decide; and that if the media do not take on themselves such responsibility it may be necessary for some other agency of the public to enforce it.

Analysis also revealed audience expectations from their preferred news stations. Findings indicated that audience wants to see radio and television in the lens of improving conditions by been pro people and exposing corruption, see more radio and television focus their reportage on issues that affect the people, and to be less pro government in their routine news coverage.

Conclusion

In conclusion, understanding the relationship between broadcast news priority and listeners' station preference in Makurdi metropolis is vital in developing effective communication strategies for broadcasting stations. With insightful knowledge of the audience needs and preferences,

broadcasting outlets can tailor their news coverage to reflect the issues and topics that are relevant and more appealing to the audience.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study and the conclusion derived, the study makes the following recommendations.

1. Programmes should be designed with the preferences and needs of the target audience in mind, with a focus on local and relevant content.
2. Stations should invest in building strong brand reputation and a loyal following, as this could be a key factor in determining station preference.
3. Regular audience feedback should be solicited and used to tailor programming and news content to listener preferences.
4. Regulatory agencies in the media industry should ensure a plurality of media as this will ensure that the public can freely choose any media to rely on for news.
5. Finally, future research should explore the impact of digital media platforms on broadcast news priority and listeners' station preference in Makurdi metropolis.

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