

Original Research Article

Getting out of the Dark: Assessing the Role of Radio Political Programmes in Improving Political Awareness among Residents of Owerri

ABSTRACT

This study assessed how radio political programs influenced the people of the Owerri metropolis' level of political awareness. The Agenda-setting theory served as the foundation for the investigation. For this study, the descriptive survey research methodology was used. The Wimmer and Dominick online sample size calculator was used to get a sample size of 384 from the population of 555,500 people in the Owerri metropolitan area. In this investigation, a multi-stage sampling technique was adopted. The instrument used to collect the data was a questionnaire, and percentages were used to assess it. The results showed that 44.0% of the respondents in Owerri metropolis are aware of radio political programs to a large extent. On average, 68.4% of the respondents have the following perceptions: that radio political programs make them politically alert and that this gives them the opportunity to contribute to the political issues in Nigeria. Furthermore, 47.0% of respondents confirmed that exposure to political programs has significantly increased their level of political awareness. Based on the findings, it was recommended that the fact that just 44.0% of the respondents in Owerri metropolis are aware of radio political programs to a large extent is not enough. Hence, radio stations should intensify their efforts in carrying out political programs so that more people will get to know about different political programs that will help them make wise decisions when participating in politics. Producers of political programs should be innovative or creative in the production of their programs so as to keep improving the political awareness of residents with the intention of getting them involved in the political affairs of their locality and, by extension, the country.

Keywords: Political programs, awareness, radio, political awareness, Owerri

Introduction

The concept of politics has been seen from a variety of angles by academics who have written about the topic. Politics has thus been characterized in a variety of ways in this line. Politics is the "master of science" because it deals with the complexity of conflicts and conflict resolution in the distribution of power and resources in society, according to Aristotle's theory that "man is by nature a political animal" (Obi, Okoli, Chiaghana, & Ono, 2022). Politics is the struggle for control and authority within a government between opposing interest groups or individuals.

Political awareness programs cannot reveal these dynamics of power struggles. People are politically engaged through the process of political programming to achieve their goals using political strategies. Therefore, political awareness campaigns are a forceful means of advancing and achieving goals in politics and leadership (Obi, Okoli, Chiaghana, & Ono, 2022).

The media has a significant role to play in promoting political awareness. The general population often relies on the mass media to offer information about political issues, social issues, entertainment, and pop culture news (Olaniru, Olatunji, Ayandele, & Popoola, 2020). As a result, the media has always played key roles around the world. One of the mass media outlets that is used to carry information from one geographical area to another is radio. Compared to other media like television, newspapers, magazines, the internet, etc., it is claimed to be the most effective (Chiamaka, 2018). Because it overcomes the literacy barrier and reaches a large geographic area, radio is recognized as the most successful medium. Thus, when used skillfully, radio broadcasts have proven to be the most successful way to communicate with the public, particularly when discussing politics (Oyesomi & Okorie, 2015).

It is crucial for a radio station to be independent, free, and responsible to the public in order to raise awareness and help citizens become aware of the problems and issues facing the state, as well as potential solutions and outcomes (Chiamaka, 2018). Radio also stimulates political participation and fosters economic development. Therefore, radio programming serves as a means of disseminating an idea by attracting and maintaining listeners. Due to its ability to span time and geographical barriers and overcome difficulties related to illiteracy, it is an effective tool for communicating with many individuals at once (Onabajo, 1999; cited in Oguchi, Obafemi, & Melody, 2015).

According to research, radio creates a significant amount of power for social change through its programming. According to Adekoya, Akintoye, and Adegoke (2015), radio has the ability to hold the government responsible and to inspire the public, particularly those living in rural regions, to work together to achieve a common social, political, economic, or cultural objective.

This study focuses on how radio political programs have affected the electorate's political engagement and knowledge in Imo State. The primary claim made here is that the public in Imo State would be made aware of the importance of actively participating in the electoral process through the right framing of political issues or events in the program.

Statement of the Problem

Any radio promotion designed to create political awareness and encourage participation among the people should increase knowledge, foster positive attitudinal change, and encourage mass participation. Without this, the whole promotion is useless and meaningless (Oke, 2010). From observation, there are a lot of political programs running on air in different radio stations in Owerri. For instance, Hot FM 99.5 has "The People's Assembly," and Groove FM 98.1 has "Face Off." Despite these political programs, political participation in Imo State still appears to be low. Could it be that residents are not aware of these programs, or could it be that they are not influenced by the programs?

Research Question

The study is guided by these questions

1. To what extent are Owerri metropolis residents aware of radio political programs?

2. What is the perception of Owerri metropolis residents towards radio political programs?
3. To what extent has exposure to political programs improved Owerri metropolis residents' political awareness?

Review of Related Literature

Concept of Radio

Radio is a channel for projecting personality, via which it attracts and retains an audience, according to Onabajo (1992), cited in Adekoya, Akintayo, and Adegoke (2015). Radio is a highly effective medium for simultaneously reaching a huge number of people with a message. In the field of public education, radio is a potent tool. Because radio is simple to set up, own, operate, and maintain and requires little intellectual effort from listeners, it is one of the best means of mass communication in both developed and developing societies because it is not constrained by the limitations of time, space, illiteracy, and electricity supply. It has the capacity to provide tutorial assistance and materials to encourage debates, reflections, and hands-on learning about the socioeconomic, sociopolitical, and cultural activities of a community or a nation.

The radio serves a variety of purposes, among them: (a) Informing Role: The radio serves to keep listeners informed. It has a significant role in educating people about politics. (b) Influencing Role: The media generally succeeds in informing the public about what to think about, but they may not always be successful in influencing their opinions. Schedule-setting theory (c) Motivating people: Radio commentary and broadcasts serve as auxiliary mobilizing agents. Individuals can participate in group decision-making more easily and effectively thanks to the radio. According to Adekoya, Akintayo, and Adegoke (2015), radio adapts this function by airing political programming that encourages involvement.

Radio as a Significant Channel for Creating Political Awareness

For stakeholders, broadcasting is essential for raising awareness and promoting participation in various aspects of life. According to Roskin, Cord, Medeiros, and Jones (2003), cited in Arede and Oji (2022), the media is a well-known aspect of politics around the world and has been utilized to simultaneously reach millions of people. In a similar vein, Ojebode (2003, pp. 89–91, as cited in Arede & Oji, 2022) found that Radio Kaduna's Don Makiyae Ruga program effectively mobilized previously nomadic nomads to participate in nomadic education and that 83% of respondents claimed that radio had an impact on their decision to enroll in nomadic education classes. According to Tham, Wenn, Ong, & Lim (2020) and Aririguzoh (2011), radio broadcasts have a significant impact on listeners during election campaigns and when candidates deliver their manifestos. While Newton (2009) and Okinda, Nyambuga, and Ojwang (2020) concur that radio, among other mass media, has an impact on politics and the government, they maintain that this influence is influenced by a number of other elements. Radio is not the only intervening factor that might influence people's knowledge, consciousness, and participation in political activities, according to Durante and Gutierrez (2014). Consequently, the political mobilization of citizens is influenced by their exposure to various sources of information on political activity, resources, perceived benefits to communities, and other individual traits.

Bosch (2020) and Heywood (2020) concur that radio plays a significant role as a communication tool in Africa due to low literacy rates when analyzing broadcast media on that continent. According to data from Ephraim (2020) and Ladigbolu, Olajide, Badiru, and Yekinni (2020), radio is the primary source of information for Nigerians. Considering the aforementioned analysis, it is obvious that radio plays a crucial role in many political campaigns. The majority of people understand the language spoken by radio (Anderson, Masocha, & Sharma, 2019). The

logical conclusion from the foregoing is that radio is essential for political mobilization and involvement in issues (Iheanacho, Okoli, Agbim, Oga, & Etumnu, 2021).

Political Awareness

Political awareness is the degree of information that voters and other interested parties have access to. Low levels of knowledge leave a lot to be desired. According to Zaller (1992, p. 21; cited in Obi et al., 2022), political awareness is a gauge of media consumption. Receiving a message involves both cognition and reception. Receiving political knowledge will probably make the audience more conscious of these issues. It is important to educate people, especially women, on the political parties' platforms before they go door-to-door asking for votes and to make them aware that they may not be successful without the electorate's active engagement. People should be educated on the importance of voting and participating in elections for various government positions. It is crucial to emphasize how crucial their participation is to the nation's overall well-being. Their political participation may be influenced by raising awareness through numerous means, such as the media, workshops, and diverse movements (Obi et al., 2022).

Empirical Review

Emecheta and Onyebuchi (2021) carried out a study on the influence of Hot FM's "People's Assembly" radio programs on the political participation of the electorate in Imo State. The results showed that the electorate in Imo State has a high exposure rate to "The People's Assembly" program on Hot 99.5 FM, a high level of political awareness as a result of this exposure, and a high degree of political participation as a result of "The People's Assembly" program, which is at 66.8%. A study by Obi et al. (2022) revealed that there has been a low level of female participation in politics in Nigeria. By developing political awareness initiatives that support increasing women's participation in politics, government, and non-government organizations

have attempted to close this gap. This study looked at the impact of political campaigns on Anambra women's involvement in politics. The survey's results show that Anambra women's political participation is still severely limited by their religious beliefs and their dread of being called names. They also show that these women are not always swayed by awareness initiatives but rather by their own personal choices. The study came to the conclusion that economic and cultural hurdles still prevent Anambra women from participating in politics.

Olaniru et al. (2019) conducted a study to look at how frequently Nigerian students access different media and their level of political understanding. Additionally, it evaluated the connections between political awareness and access to radio, television, newspapers, and social media. Additionally, it looked into how frequently students in Nigeria were exposed to the media in relation to their political knowledge. The most frequently used media, according to the findings, is social media, which is followed by radio, television, and newspapers. While only 3% of respondents had no political awareness, 31% of them had very high political expertise. Despite the fact that access to radio, television, newspapers, and social media are all significant joint predictors of political knowledge ($R^2 = .18$, $F(4, 241) = 4.32$), access to radio is the only significant correlate ($r = 0.42$, $p = 0.05$) and independent predictor ($\beta = 0.43$, $t = -3.98$, $p = 0.05$) of political knowledge.

La'aro, Mahamood, and Bamigboye (2021) examine the role that community radio plays in Nigerians' practice of democracy, paying particular emphasis to rural residents. In order to collect data from the general public, this study made use of the launch of Kakaki Radio in the Ondo West Local Government Areas of Ondo State, Nigeria. It gathered the information necessary for calculating the impact of community radio broadcasts on political engagement by using a quantitative design and survey approach. The results showed that news, current affairs,

commentary, and phone-in programming on Kakaki community radio programs enhance their degree of political participation. Additionally, there is a correlation between how frequently inhabitants of Ondo West Local Government Area tune in to Kakaki community radio broadcasts and their level of political engagement. The study came to the conclusion that community radio is crucial to the political climate of rural communities.

Giginyu, Jada, and Mutah (2021) undertook a study to evaluate the influence of radio political shows on the general public's understanding of politics in Jigawa State, Nigeria. The particular goals were to assess the level of political knowledge attained by radio listeners, ascertain the level of audience motivation for listening to the RPP, and assess the level of influence of the RPP on audience political decisions in Jigawa State, Nigeria. Descriptive statistics, such as frequency distribution and percentages, were used to analyse the data. Jigawa State, which has a population of 5,368,612, is included in the study's population. The sample size for the study was estimated using the Research Advisor's (2006) sample size table. 384 were therefore chosen as the study's sample size. According to the study's findings, 70% of those surveyed said they listened to radio political programs broadcast in Jigawa State, and they acknowledged their power to influence listeners. Therefore, it is important to maintain public political awareness in Jigawa State while also making proposals to enhance radio broadcasting, informational balance, radio teaching and learning, and community involvement in radio program sponsorship. The study could act as a document and a guide for decision-makers developing radio political programming, providing crucial data for Jigawa State, Nigeria's "Kowane Gauta," "Baki Kan Yanka Wuya," and "Kowa Ya Dakko Da Zafi" radio political programs.

Arede and Oji's (2022) study looks into how radio broadcasting affects political engagement in South-South Nigeria. Scholars have established the value of radio in promoting political involvement. The purpose of this study is to see whether the same outcome can be achieved in South-South, Nigeria, building on the success of radio in this region. A cross-sectional research design served as the study's foundation, and 400 participants were surveyed. To evaluate the proposed hypotheses, descriptive statistics like mean and standard deviation as well as Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) inferential statistics were used. The study confirmed the scholarly consensus on the topic of examination, showing that radio broadcasts have a significant impact on how South-South individuals behave towards political activities ($r=3760.878$; $p=0.000$ finds).

Adekoya, Akintayo, Johnson, and Jesulayomi (2015) conducted a study to look into the significance of women's political engagement and how the radio has been used to help or improve it. The survey research design was used, and the instrument for gathering data was a questionnaire. A basic frequency percentage table and charts were used to analyze the field data. Results of the data collection showed that radio may be a powerful medium for promoting the advancement of women in politics in Nigeria. Radio can undoubtedly have a positive impact on encouraging women to participate in politics. Utilizing the radio medium, much more advancement can still be made beyond what has already been accomplished. Regardless of gender inequalities, all hands must be on deck to lead the country to the desired political condition. Based on this premise and the results of the data analysis, the study suggested strategies for encouraging more female engagement in Nigerian political arenas.

Onyenadum (2018) conducted a study on political education and radio broadcasts, and it was discovered that these programs boosted the Imo electorate to vote in the general election of

2015. This study found that people's exposure to radio political education programming affected how they voted in the general election of 2015. The researcher also found that religious affiliation, zoning, and politicians' charisma, popularity, and notoriety were additional factors that affected the Imo State electorate.

Okolie (2015) conducted a study on radio programs and mass mobilization in a democratic society, and the results showed that radio, as a mass communication medium, significantly influenced how Imolites felt about taking part in the state's democratic process. The findings indicated that Imolites' engagement was influenced by political radio messaging. It was also discovered that there was a connection between Imolites' involvement in the democratic process and political statements broadcast on the radio. Similar research was done by Gowon (2019) on radio listening, TV viewing, and development in senior secondary school pupils. It was discovered that exposure to TV and radio shows negatively impacted the development of higher levels of comprehension while favorably influencing lower levels.

Theoretical Framework

The agenda-setting theory served as the theoretical underpinning of this study. The word "agenda setting" was first used by Walter Lipman in 1922 in his book *Public Opinion*. The concept was later developed into theory by McComb and Shaw in 1960 (Asemah, Nwammuo, & Nkwam-Uwaoma, 2017; Alphonsus, Etumnu, Talabi, Fadeyi, Aiyesimoju, Apuke, & Geveer, 2022). This theory proposes that the facts that people know about public issues tend to be those that the mass media have presented to them or have given prominence to in their coverage. Experts in communication have always agreed that the audience will always attach importance to issues in

the domain of public discussion because the mass media have brought them into public focus. It, therefore, implies that the media set the agenda for public discussion(s).

Asemah et al. (2017), Nwamara, and Etumnu (2022) did note that the media may not be successful in telling people what to think but what to think about. In this scenario, the radio, through its health programs, will influence what the audience thinks rather than what they think. This theory is relevant based on the fact that it sheds light on the role radio programs play in trying to raise the consciousness of people towards political issues, thereby raising the level of awareness for possible political participation.

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey research approach, employing a questionnaire as the instrument for data collection. This method is ideal when you want to elicit responses from respondents (Iheanacho, Jumbo, & Etumnu, 2021). Owerri Metropolis has 555,500 residents, according to the National Bureau of Statistics (2017) bulletin. Using the Wimmwer and Dominick online sample size calculator, the sample size was established. Consequently, 384 people made up the study's sample size. Using the multistage sample technique, copies of the questionnaire were given out to residents of Owerri Metropolis in Imo State. Owerri, which is a cluster, has already been separated into three areas in the first stage: Owerri North, Owerri West, and Owerri Municipal. Two communities from each local government area were purposefully chosen for the second stage because it is possible that they could be exposed to radio station messages. These communities are Orji, Amakohia, Umuguma, Nekede, Umuoyima, and Umuororonjo. In stage three, the researchers chose six villages and distributed the questionnaire proportionately to each community ($384/6 = 64$). As a result, the researcher purposefully

distributed 64 copies of the questionnaire to respondents in these communities. Simple percentages and a table were used to assess the data.

Data Analysis and Presentation (Result)

Analyzing and presentation of data are the focus of this section. The researcher distributed 384 questionnaires in the targeted locations, and 368 (94.8%) of those were recovered and deemed usable, while 16 (4.2%) were deemed invalid for the study. The 368 copies of the questionnaire were used for the analysis.

RQ1: To what extent are Owerri metropolis residents aware of radio political programs?

Table 1: Respondents' response on the extent Owerri metropolis residents are aware of radio political programs

Options	Frequency	Percentage
Very large extent	66	17.9%
Large extent	162	44.0%
Moderate extent	95	25.8%
Low extent	45	12.2%
No extent	-	-
Total	368	100

Created by the authors (Field survey, 2023)

Data analysis revealed that 44.0% of respondents in the Owerri metropolitan area are very familiar with radio political shows. This suggests that the majority of those surveyed in the city of Owerri are heavily exposed to political radio shows.

RQ2: What are the perceptions of Owerri metropolis residents towards radio political programs?

Table 2: Respondents' response on radio political programs makes me the political alert

Options	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	247	67.1%
No	96	26.0%
Can't say	25	6.7%
Total	368	100

Created by the authors (Field survey, 2023)

Data analysis revealed that 67.1% of respondents said that listening to political radio programming makes them politically aware. This result implies that the majority of respondents believe that listening to political radio shows keeps them politically aware.

Table 3: Respondents' response on radio political programs gives the opportunity to contribute to the political issue in Nigeria

Options	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	257	69.8%
No	91	24.7%
Can't say	20	5.4%
Total	368	100

Created by the author (Field survey, 2023)

Analysis of the information in Table 3 above showed that 69.8% of the respondents said that radio political broadcasts provided them with the chance to participate in Nigeria's political debate. This indicates that they believed they had the chance to influence Nigerian politics by listening to political radio shows.

RQ3: To what extent has exposure to political programs improved Owerri metropolis residents' political awareness?

Table 4: Respondents' response on the extent exposure to political programs has improved Owerri metropolis residents' political awareness

Options	Frequency	Percentage
Very large extent	78	21.1%
Large extent	173	47.0%
Moderate extent	85	23.1%
Low extent	32	8.6%
No extent	-	-
Total	368	100

Created by the author (Field survey, 2023)

Data analysis revealed that 47.0% of respondents said that exposure to political programs significantly increased their degree of political awareness. This indicates that those who are frequently exposed to radio political broadcasts have seen a significant improvement in their degree of political awareness.

Discussion of Findings

Findings revealed that 44.0% of the respondents in Owerri metropolis are aware of radio political programs to a large extent. From the indication of the finding, it is quite obvious that residents in the Owerri metropolis are largely exposed to radio political programs. This finding is consistent with the finding of Emecheta and Onyebuchi (2021), who found that the exposure of the electorate in Imo State to "The People's Assembly" program on Hot 99.5 FM was high. Also in tandem is the study of Olaniru et al. (2019), who revealed in their study that social media was the most frequently used media, followed by radio, television, and newspapers and that 31% of the respondents had very high political knowledge. The study of Giginyu et al. (2021) revealed that 70% of the respondents who listened to the radio political programs aired in Jigawa State admitted that they were very effective in raising the listeners' public political awareness in Jigawa State. In line with the agenda-setting theory, as the media brings an issue into the public domain, the people will have no choice but to debate about the issue, thereby increasing their awareness of that issue.

Findings revealed that, on average, 68.4% of the respondents have the following perceptions: that radio political programs make them politically alert and that this gives them the opportunity to contribute to the political issues in Nigeria. This finding is in consonance with Emecheta and Onyebuchi (2021), who revealed in their study that "The People's Assembly" made respondents know as well as understand Imo politics and encouraged political awareness and participation. Also in agreement with this finding is the study of La'aro et al. (2021), who revealed that Kakaki community radio programs increase their level of political participation through news, current affairs, commentaries, and phone-in programs. Despite the findings of Obi et al. (2022), who conducted a study to determine the impact of radio on women's political participation, it was found that Anambra women's political participation is still significantly

limited by religious belief and name-calling fear rather than by awareness campaigns. By inference, how politically savvy they are will greatly influence how they perceive things. That is to say, a person's perception is significantly influenced by his or her political awareness.

The result showed that 47.0% of respondents agreed that **listening** to political programming had greatly raised their **level** of political awareness. Radio political broadcasts almost always play a significant part in raising people's political awareness and, as the situation may be, knowledge in society. This result concurs with that of Onyenadum (2018), who discovered that radio political education broadcasts inspired Imo voters to cast ballots in the general election of 2015. This study found that people's exposure to radio political education programming affected how they voted in the general election of 2015. Furthermore, Okolie's (2015) research found that radio, as a mass communication medium, was crucial in encouraging Imolites to participate in the state's democratic process. The findings indicated that Imolites' engagement was influenced by political radio messaging. It was also discovered that there was a connection between Imolites' involvement in the democratic process and political statements broadcast on the radio. The results are in line with those of La'aro et al. (2021), who discovered that community radio is crucial to the political climate of rural areas. However, the research by Arede and Oji (2022) showed that radio broadcasts had a significant impact on how South-South individuals behaved in relation to political activities.

Conclusion

Drawing from the findings, we, therefore, conclude that residents in Owerri metropolis are aware of radio political programs to a large extent. This exposure has helped tremendously in improving the level of their political awareness, which in turn has aided in shaping their

perception of the programs from which they make valuable contributions to several political issues facing the country.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made in light of the findings:

1. The fact that just 44.0% of the respondents in Owerri metropolis are aware of radio political programs to a large extent is not enough. Hence, radio stations should intensify their efforts in carrying out political programs so that more people will get to know about different political programs that will help them make wise decisions when participating in politics.
2. The radio station should not relent in its role of encouraging people to participate actively in the political affairs of their country. In doing this through their political programs, they stand a great chance of influencing their perception of politics positively.
3. Producers of political programs should be innovative or creative in the production of their political programs so as to keep improving the political awareness of residents with the intention of getting them involved in the political affairs of their locality and, by extension, the country.

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