

## Exposure and Utilization of Political Content of UNIZIK 94.1 FM Among Undergraduates of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Nigeria

Henry Chigozie Duru<sup>1</sup>, Nankyen Rinmak and Richard Chinedu Ononiwu

<sup>1</sup>Department of Mass Communication, Faculty of Social Sciences, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Nigeria

Corresponding Authors' Email: [hc.duru@unizik.edu.ng](mailto:hc.duru@unizik.edu.ng)

### Abstract

The media, including radio, serves as an important tool for informing, educating, entertaining and mobilizing the populace. These roles are also evident in the sphere of politics where the media as well avails the public several platforms for political discussions. Anchored on the uses and gratifications theory, this study investigated Nnamdi Azikiwe University undergraduate students' exposure and utilization of political content of UNIZIK 94.1 FM. The study participants were 395 students at the university who were randomly selected across five (5) faculties. Findings showed that majority of the respondents mostly accessed radio programmes through their mobile phones. However, majority were not aware of political programmes on UNIZIK 94.1 FM and were also not exposed to these programmes. Furthermore, only 19.0% of those who were exposed to political content on the radio station indicated a high level of exposure. Majority of the listeners mostly preferred listening to political talk shows and news. In addition, findings revealed that the respondents mostly met their political information and social relevance needs with the political programmes on UNIZIK 94.1 FM. Data further indicated that age and gender were associated with exposure and gratifications on political content of UNIZIK FM. Based on the findings, the study argued that there is a need to raise awareness among students on why they should listen to political programmes on UNIZIK 94.1FM. The study also recommended the repackaging of the political content to make it more interactive, discursive and exciting to draw the attention of the undergraduate students.

**Keywords:** political content, UNIZIK FM, undergraduates, exposure, utilization

### Introduction

The media serves as an important tool for informing, educating, entertaining and mobilizing the populace. It can play these roles around politics and avails the public several platforms for political discussions. This makes the media a viable tool for influencing political decision-making, creation of political awareness, and shaping of the democratization process generally (Downes & Monten, 2010; Barakat, 2013; Walker & Orttung, 2014; Salgado, 2019). Following the agreement of political scientists and communication researchers that the media can shape the political processes within societies, a stream of research have been conducted (e.g. Amponsah & Okyere, 2024; Van Remoortere & Vliegthart, 2023; Liu & Ibrahim, 2023) to ascertain how exactly this happens by exploring audience gratifications from political content on the media. Research

in this area has shown that the media helps the audience to survey the political environment or be politically informed. Political programmes have also been shown to help reinforce individuals' existing political views and helped them in voter choice making (Jackson & Lilleker, 2007).

One of the very effective media channels used for political content dissemination is the radio because it is a medium that has the capacity to cut through the barriers of illiteracy, poverty, and infrastructural deficits, hence possessing a remarkable ability to reach large audiences. According to Ali, Hamidu and Muhammad (2021) radio still has the largest news reach among different demographics and is a very effective tool for improving political awareness among those with no strong ties to a political party. This strong power of penetration associated with radio is the reason it has been considered as a particularly influential medium for public information and enlightenment in developing climes such as Africa and Nigeria (Krishnan & Hemmige, 2022; Okunna & Omenugha, 2012). Egbuchulam (2002) considers radio as a mobilizer and a formidable factor in the new world order – in economy, technology, and politics.

The audience uses and relates to radio messages in different ways. These uses basically correspond to the three fundamental roles of the media in society – information, interpretation and entertainment (Baran, 2023). These roles are realized in the various content genres offered by radio including news, music, drama, talk shows etc. Genres like news, interviews and discussion programmes among others may embody political content from which audience may gain information and knowledge regarding political issues, which in turn may help in their opinion formation and may guide political action (Krishnan & Hemmige, 2022). The above political role of radio is quite significant in view of literature evidence suggesting that audiences lack basic knowledge on how to participate in political activities. Individuals have voted in the past while possessing limited information about the various contenders. Here, a medium like radio plays an important role in educating the audience on how to engage with political life (Olaniru, Olatunji, Ayandele & Popoola, 2020). Studies (e.g. Badaru & Adu, 2020) have found that media exposure is positively correlated with political knowledge in Africa, lending credence to the belief that radio is a powerful agent of political enlightenment.

However, despite the above role of radio, media consumption patterns among youths in Nigeria reveal a significant preference for entertainment over political content, a trend shaped by socio-economic, cultural, and technological factors (Mande, Mustapha, Omar, Mustapha & Ahmed, 2022; Jegede, Akintayo & Okechukwu, 2015). This preference is particularly evident across social media platforms, where music, comedy, and celebrity news consistently outperform political discourse in engagement metrics. Apart from the sheer allure of entertainment content, the general disillusionment with the Nigeria's political landscape appears to be another major factor engendering this tendency. Years of systemic corruption, governance failures, and a lack of youth representation may have fostered skepticism toward political messaging (Ezeigbo, 2024). Moreover, entertainment content offers an accessible escape from socio-economic hardship, providing emotional

relief and a sense of community (Ahuja, 2021). The virality and relatability of entertainment media contrast starkly with the often rigid and elitist tone of political communication, which may fail to engage the youth effectively (Schneider, Bartsch & Leonhard, 2020). Nonetheless, this apathy towards political content has serious implications for civic participation. Limited exposure to political content can impede the development of informed citizenship and reduce youth engagement in democratic processes (Ezeigbo, 2024).

This study, therefore, was a contribution around audience exposure and gratifications on political content of the media. It empirically accessed the extent to which youths were exposed to political content on radio and the various needs they met while exposing themselves to this content. The study focused on the undergraduate students of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, where the UNIZIK FM 94.1FM stands as a popular, proximate, and accessible medium for the campus community. The station owned by Nnamdi Azikiwe University was licensed by the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) on 8<sup>th</sup> February 2007 and operates according to the philosophy of community radio as a non-profit organization as well as serving the purpose of training students in broadcasting and other related fields (Nnamdi Azikiwe University, 2025).

### **Statement of the Problem**

In a democratic society, political awareness and participation are crucial components of nation-building, particularly among the youth. As future leaders and a significant segment of the electorate, university students play a vital role in shaping political discourse and decision-making. Radio, as a traditional yet widely accessible medium, remains an important source of political information, especially through campus-based radio stations that cater directly to student audiences. UNIZIK 94.1 FM, the campus radio station of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, has the potential to significantly influence students' political awareness and engagement by broadcasting political content tailored to their interests and needs. However, the fact that young people tend to show apathy towards political content of the media in favour of its entertainment content (Mande et al., 2022) stands as a potential obstacle to the optimal realization of this role of radio as a source of political information and education. This reality made this study significant. Furthermore, there appears to be limited empirical data on the actual level of exposure undergraduate students have to such political programmes, the specific political genres they consume, the gratifications they seek, and how demographic factors influence their consumption behaviour.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to investigate Nnamdi Azikiwe University (UNIZIK) undergraduate students' exposure and gratifications from political content of UNIZIK 94.1 FM. More precisely, the following were the specific objectives of the study:

1. To investigate the extent to which UNIZIK undergraduate students were exposed to the political content of UNIZIK 94.1 FM.
2. To find out the political genres UNIZIK undergraduate students were exposed to on UNIZIK 94.1 FM.
3. To ascertain the gratifications sought by UNIZIK undergraduates from the political content of UNIZIK 94.1 FM.
4. To find out demographic variables that affected the undergraduates' utilization of the political content of UNIZIK 94.1 FM.

## **Literature Review**

### **Mass Media and Politics**

The mass media has always played an important role across the globe as audiences rely on it for information regarding political issues, social issues, entertainment and news in pop culture (Ajaegbu, Akintayo & Akinjiyan, 2015; 2012). The media is seen as the fourth estate of the realm and the watchdog of society. This means that the media (including radio) plays a vital role in keeping the audience abreast of political issues and improving awareness of various events (Chioma, Solo-Anaeto & Jegede, 2015). Politics is the total complex relations of power among people in a society. It is the whole sphere of activities in which individuals, groups, bodies, institutions and nations struggle to get, exercise and retain power. Politics impacts our lives every day as everything about our lives is affected by politics and the government (Duru, 2021).

The link between mass media and politics is widely acknowledged and has been confirmed by a significant amount of research (e.g. Olaniru, Olatunji, Ayandele & Popoola, 2019). The media plays various roles in politics. Among these is the agenda setting role which the ability of the media to influence salience of topics on the public agenda. The media helps in shaping the direction of public debates and discussions. The media shows the audience what will be more dominant on an important issue (Duru, 2021). Also, mass media plays an important role in democracy as the vital links between initiators, implementers and consumers of public policies (Suleiman, 2002). The media conveys information to the electorate from politicians and others. This information is very crucial for the electorates to make informed choices. The media in democratic societies serves as a channel for advocacy of political viewpoints (Badaru & Adu, 2020).

Studies have shown that campus radio stations are today an important source of information and entertainment for students in Nigeria (Badaru & Adu, 2020; Osazee-Odia & Ojobor, 2017; Solo-Anaeto & Jegede, 2015) and other parts of Africa (Jegede, Akintayo & Okechukwu, 2015; Anquandah, 2012). And while the information consumed by students on these campus-based radio stations include political messages (Osazee-Odia and Ojobor (2017), there is, however, a dearth of studies on the students' exposure and gratifications on political content of campus radio stations.

### **Audience, Political Content and Gratifications**

Audiences are part of the communication process. They are also known as the receivers of messages who also provide feedback. They do not only consume news, but they also select, analyze, give their own opinion and share comments on issues of interest generally – especially in today's digital media sphere (Baran, 2023). The gratifications audiences seek from political programmes have been of interest to communication researchers for a long time. Blumler and McQuail (1968) found that the most important motivation for watching political election broadcasts (PEBs) in 1964 was surveillance of the political environment. This was also the case with viewers of Watergate hearings on television (Jackson & Lilleker, 2007). There are also findings that suggest that one common gratification from watching political programmes is the reinforcement of individuals' existing political views, while other individuals were of the view that political programmes helped them with voter choice making. Interestingly, there are also respondents who are gratified by the excitement engendered by an election contest. This can be likened to spectators' enjoyment at a sporting event (Jackson & Lilleker, 2007).

For Ohr and Schott (2001), while some individuals feel a duty to be politically informed and others view an election contest as an entertainment event, the most important gratification for political information seeking for some is the social context. According to the authors, an individual's status and social recognition may be influenced by his/her ability to take part in political discussions in an informed manner. Hence, for Ohr and Schott, the expectations of the social environment may encourage even citizens not interested in politics to gather information during an election campaign. For Kaye and Johnson (2002) who conducted a web-hosted survey, during and after the 1996 US Presidential election, with 308 respondents, four primary motives drove voters' access to political websites: guidance; information seeking/surveillance; entertainment; and social utility. According to Jackson and Lilleker (2007), it is clear from previous applications of uses and gratifications theory in a political context that guidance and surveillance are the key motivational factors. Some other scholars focused on the factors that can influence the gratifications audience seeks from political content. Individual motivations, media content, social context, and psychological needs are some of the factors found to have been of influence (Falgoust, Winterlind, Moon, Parker, Zinzow & Madathil, 2022; Egede & Chuks-Nwosu, 2013). According to Sadow (2000), only highly motivated and politically interested citizens seek political information. For Sadow (2000), uses and gratifications should be understood from the candidates' and not the citizen's perspective. However, Jackson and Lilleker (2007) argue that would mean a return to the 'hypodermic needle' view of communication that preceded the development of the uses and gratifications approach which views audiences as active and deliberately seeking gratifications from political content of the media.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study was anchored on the Uses and Gratifications theory propounded by Blumler and Katz (1974). It is one of the theories that came up in the light of the emergence of the active audience perspective which views media audience as actively negotiating with the content of the media as against passively assimilating it (Ojobor, 2002). The theory is based on the

premise that the audience uses the media to gratify certain identified needs (McQuail & Deuze, 2020). The audience selectively chooses, listens to, perceives and retains media messages based on their needs. In other words, the theory is a departure from the old thinking that saw the media as irresistibly forcing itself on the audience. According to Ojobor (2002), before the advent of the uses and gratifications approach, emphasis had been on what the media does to people. However, with the theory, it has shifted to what people do with the media. Writing on the theory, Blumler and Katz (1974) called attention to the need for a functional uses and gratifications approach to understanding media effects. The authors therefore state:

Uses and gratifications theory is concerned with the social and psychological origin of needs, which generate expectations of the mass media or other source, which leads to differential patterns of media exposure (or engagement in other activities), resulting in need gratification and other consequences, mostly intended ones (p.12).

Basically, scholars have identified information, interpretation and escape (entertainment) as three broad gratifications audience seeks from the media (Blumler & Katz, 1974). In relation to political content of UNIZIK FM, the most likely gratifications the undergraduate students may seek from the radio are information and interpretation. Thus, the Uses and Gratifications theory would be useful for understanding why the undergraduates may tune in to UNIZIK 94.1FM for political content – whether for information, education, entertainment, or civic engagement. By viewing their consumption of this content through the prism of the theory, the study was able to focus on audience choices and preferences as the major determinant of their media use.

## Method

This research adopted a quantitative design involving the survey method. The area of the study was Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka Anambra State, South-East Nigeria. The study population was the undergraduate students at the university numbering 30,917, according to information supplied by the Academic Planning Unit. A sample of 395, as determined using Yamane's (1967) formula, was selected using a multistage sampling procedure. The instrument of data collection was a structured questionnaire, and data was analysed using simple percentages.

## Result

A total of 395 copies of the questionnaire were distributed in five randomly selected faculties in Nnamdi Azikiwe University. Out of this number, 378 (95.7%) were completed and returned, while 17 (4.3%) were lost. In other words, 95.7% response rate was recorded. Data further showed that 60.2% of respondents were males, while 39.8% were females. Similarly, 6.8% of the respondents fell between 16 and 20 years, while 72.8% were between 21 and 25 years. Also, 20.4% of the respondents fell between 26 years and above. These figures indicate that the respondents' modal age bracket was 21-25 years.

Regarding level of study. 5.9% of respondents were in 100 level, 10.8% were in 200 level, 28.4% were in 300 level, while 39.2% and 15.7% were in 400 and 500 levels respective. Thus, the modal year of study was 400 level. Also, 24.3% of respondents lived on campus, while 75.7% lived off-campus. These data revealed that majority of the respondents live outside the campus.

### **Exposure to Political Content of UNIZIK FM**

Data indicate that 96% (n=361) of respondents owned a radio device, while 4% (n=17) did not. This implies that majority of the respondents owned a radio device and could be exposed to political content of UNIZIK FM. Furthermore, 98% (n=370) of the respondents mostly accessed their radio through their mobile phones, while 2% (n=8) of respondents mostly accessed radio signals through transistors radio. This showed that majority of the respondents accessed the radio through their mobile phones. The implication of this result is that the respondents could access the radio anywhere, since their phones were mobile. In the same vein, 71% (n=269) of the respondents knew about UNIZIK 94.1 FM, while 29% (n=109) did not. This indicates that majority of the respondents knew about UNIZIK 94.1 FM.

Data further showed that 20% (n=76) of respondents listened to UNIZIK FM, while 80% (n=302) of respondents do not listen to it. This result indicates that majority of the respondents were exposed to the station.

Regarding exposure to political programmes of UNIZIK FM, 42.0% (n=32) of those who indicated that they listened to the station were exposed to its political programmes, while 58.0% (n=44) were not. These data indicate that majority of the respondents who were exposed to UNIZIK 94.1 FM were not exposed to its political programmes. This suggests that the respondents preferred other genres of programmes on the station. Figures further show that 19.0% (n=6) indicated a high level of exposure to political content on the radio station, while 31.0% (n=10) indicated a low level of exposure. Also, 50.0% (n=10) of this category of respondents indicated a medium level of exposure to political content on UNIZIK 94.1 FM.

On the types of political programmes exposed to, 37.5% (n=12) indicated that they were mostly exposed to political talk shows, while 31.2% (n=10) said they were mostly exposed to news on politics. In addition, 18.7% (n=6) of the respondents indicated that they were mostly exposed to political discussion programmes, while 6.2% (n=2) were mostly exposed to interview programmes. These data imply that the respondents mostly preferred listening to political talk shows and news on UNIZIK 94.1 FM. This is consistent with findings from the study conducted by Onyebuchi, Umunna and Obayi (2019).

On the whole, findings showed that although majority of the undergraduate students could access radio using their mobile phones, only a few accessed political content on UNIZIK 94.1 FM. This result suggests that the students had other uses of radio. This resonates the finding by Badaru and Adu (2020) in South Africa showing that most of the participants did

not access political content via radio. The researchers, however, further found that the participants rather preferred using the internet for political information. Here, the Internet can be said to be more appealing to the students than radio. A similar study by Mogambi (2016) in Kenya showed that students were avid listeners to different types of content on radio including politics, a departure from the findings of the present study. Mogambi suggested that the programming pattern, timing of programmes, topics of discussion, the radio host and language of broadcast influence radio listening habits of university students

### **Gratifications on Political Content of UNIZIK 94.1 FM**

The respondents were asked to indicate as many gratifications as they got from exposure to political content of UNIZIK 94.1 FM. Their responses showed that 93.0% (n=30) of those exposed to political content on the radio station indicated that their political information needs were gratified. Also, 88.0% met their political education needs from the political content of the station, while 84.0% (n=27) noted that it helped them in their political research. Results further show that the political content of UNIZIK FM helped 66.0% (n=21) of the respondents in their political discussion, while it provided entertainment and served as a medium for political campaign for 38.0% (n=12) and 53.0% (n=17) respectively. In addition, 68.7% (n=22) indicated that the political content helped them meet their need for social relevance. This result indicates that most of the respondents met their political information needs with the political programmes on UNIZIK 94.1 FM.

Regarding the gratifications mostly obtained from political content of the station, results show that 31.2% (n=10) of those exposed to this content indicated that it mostly helped them meet their political information needs, while 12.5% (n=4) said their political education needs were mostly met. All this suggests that political content of UNIZIK FM empowered and enlightened the undergraduates in politics by keeping them informed and offering a platform for political discussion. These findings support and add to existing uses and gratifications literature which generally indicates, as Jackson and Lilleker (2007) put it, that audiences use the media to meet a range of personal goals.

### **Demographic Determinants of Use of Political Content of UNIZIK 94.1 FM**

Chi-square tests on the association between gender and exposure to political content of UNIZIK FM revealed that males were more exposed to this content than their female counterparts, a relationship found to be statistically significant at 0.000 level. Similarly, older undergraduates (21 – 25 years) experienced higher exposure than younger ones (16 – 20 years), and this was found to be statistically significant at 0.000 level. Also, data indicate that more male undergraduates had their needs met by the political programmes on UNIZIK FM than their female counterparts, and this was again statistically significant at 0.000 level.

These findings align with the Uses and Gratifications Theory, which emphasizes that media audiences are active participants who seek content that satisfy their individual needs. The significantly higher exposure of males and older undergraduates to political content on



UNIZIK FM suggests that these groups find such content more relevant or useful – possibly for information, social interaction, or personal identity. Furthermore, the fact that more males reported having their needs met by the political programmes reinforces the theory's claim that media use is purposeful, and goal driven. Gender and age thus appear to shape the motivations behind media consumption and the gratifications received.

## Conclusion

This study concludes that the undergraduate students of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka are active audience who have need-specific uses of the radio. First, this study found that the undergraduates who were exposed to political content on the campus radio had their political information needs gratified through news, political talk shows and discussion programmes. Second, the campus radio offered the students a platform to discuss current political issues. Third, the information from the political content on the radio gratified the undergraduate students' need for social relevance. The findings of this study which show that UNIZIK FM meets the political needs of the students in the areas of information, political discussion and social relevance substantiate the uses and gratifications theory which points to the need-specific uses of the media.

This study argues that the campus radio meets the needs of the undergraduate students who have a pre-existing interest in political issues but is less likely to do same regarding other segments of audience who prefer other types of radio content. However, there is a possibility that the programming pattern adopted by UNIZIK FM, timing of programmes, political topics of discussion and the expertise/popularity of the radio hosts of political programmes may have an interest on the undergraduate students' interest in political programmes.

## Recommendations

In view of the foregoing findings and conclusion, the following are recommended:

1. UNIZIK 94.1 FM should consider conducting research to gain more insights into the needs of the audience regarding political content with a view to possibly tailoring its programming to these needs.
2. The management of the station should publicize its political programmes to create more awareness about them in the light of the finding that majority of the respondents lacked this awareness.
3. Qualitative studies should be conducted to enable more in-depth assessment of gratifications sought by UNIZIK undergraduates from political content of their campus radio station.

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