

**INFLUENCE OF PROGRAMMING
STRATEGIES ON AUDIENCE
PREFERENCE OF RADIO STATIONS
IN AKWA IBOM STATE**

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ABSTRACT

The influence of programming strategies on audience preferences for radio stations in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria is examined through evaluating how content design, scheduling, presentation style, and cultural relevance shape audience engagement and station loyalty. Using Taro Yamane's sampling formula, the study sampled 400 respondents from a population of 7,200,000 using a multistage sampling approach. Data were collected through structured questionnaire and semi-structured interview guides. The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) and Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) are particularly relevant, thus serving as useful framework. Findings revealed that Comfort FM emerged as the most preferred radio station. The dominant factor influencing preference was the type of programmes aired, underscoring the significance of tailored content in driving loyalty. Programming strategies across the stations were audience-centred, schedule-optimised, content-balanced, and culturally responsive. Programming strategies are not only central to content appeal but foundational to the sustainability and impact of radio broadcasting in Akwa Ibom State. Stations benchmark successful models like Comfort FM through comparative audience studies, maintain consistent quality content throughout the day, and invest in culturally resonant and feedback-responsive programming. This research contributes to the growing scholarship on audience behaviour and programme effectiveness within Nigeria's dynamic broadcast landscape.

Keywords: Programming Strategy, Audience Preference, Radio Stations, Programme/Programming, Broadcast Audience

Introduction

The media landscape in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, has experienced significant transformation with the rapid proliferation of radio broadcast stations. Early stations such as AKBC 90.5 FM, Atlantic FM (104.5), and Planet FM (101.1) laid the foundation for broadcasting in the state, but in recent years several additional stations have emerged, including Redemption FM (101.5), Passion FM (94.5), Inspiration FM (105.9), Comfort FM (95.1), Premium FM (88.7), XL FM (106.9), Memories FM (96.5), MIXX FM (88.9), Tang Sio FM (102.7), UNIUYO FM (100.7), Heritage FM (104.9), and Gospel Revolution FM (107.5). This expansion reflects the dynamic evolution of broadcasting in the state and has been largely driven by advancements in broadcasting technology and the increasing demand for localised content that reflects the cultural identity of the people of Akwa Ibom State (Akpan, 2023). As a result, audiences now have access to a wider range of programmes and broadcasting choices, creating new opportunities and challenges for radio stations seeking to attract and retain listeners.

Despite the growing number of stations, the competitive nature of the broadcasting industry means that radio stations must continuously work to maintain their relevance and listener engagement. With

multiple options available to audiences, stations are compelled to develop unique identities through distinctive programming styles, branding strategies, and innovative content delivery. The competition for listenership requires broadcasters to invest in high-quality programming and develop strategies that differentiate them from competitors (Bassey, 2022). In such an environment, stations that fail to distinguish themselves risk losing their audiences to other broadcasters that offer more appealing or relevant content. Consequently, station managers must pay close attention to audience demographics and preferences in order to tailor their programming in ways that resonate with listeners and sustain audience engagement (Ekanem, 2023).

The rise in the number of radio stations has intensified competition for audience attention in Akwa Ibom State. In this context, programming strategies have become an essential tool for attracting and maintaining listeners. Broadcasting organisations must carefully design programmes that reflect their brand identity while simultaneously meeting the diverse needs of their audience. Furthermore, technological advancements have increased listener flexibility, as radio content can now be accessed through mobile devices, online platforms, and streaming services. This accessibility encourages listeners to switch

between stations frequently, making it even more important for broadcasters to produce engaging and distinctive content capable of sustaining listener interest.

Studies suggest that audience members tend to prefer radio stations whose programmes reflect their interests, values, and cultural orientations (Ekanem, 2023; Oko, 2023). Therefore, a critical task for radio broadcasters is not only to attract listeners but also to understand the types of programmes and presentation styles that encourage sustained engagement. This involves identifying audience expectations, analysing listening patterns, and designing programmes that establish a sense of connection and loyalty among listeners. In an increasingly crowded broadcasting market, the ability to retain audience attention over time has become a major challenge for radio stations in Akwa Ibom State. To remain competitive, broadcasters must develop programming strategies that are distinctive while maintaining the quality and relevance of their content.

Another important factor influencing radio programming is the evolving nature of audience preferences. Listener interests are not static; rather, they change over time due to social trends, technological developments, and shifts in lifestyle and cultural exposure. As audiences interact with a wider range of media platforms, including digital and streaming services,

their expectations regarding broadcast content continue to increase (Oko, 2023). This dynamic environment requires radio stations to continually adapt their programming approaches by incorporating audience feedback, analysing consumption patterns, and responding to emerging trends. Failure to keep pace with these changing preferences may lead to declining listenership and threaten the sustainability of broadcasting organisations.

To remain relevant, radio stations often employ a variety of programming strategies. These include audience-centred approaches that involve understanding listener demographics and psychographics, as well as scheduling techniques such as dayparting, block programming, stripping, and strategic lead-ins to maintain audience flow. Other strategies include counter-programming, tentpole programming, and demographic targeting, all of which aim to maximise audience engagement and advertising opportunities. Additionally, modern broadcasting increasingly integrates digital technologies, including cross-platform promotion and data analytics, to refine programming decisions and extend audience reach.

In the Nigerian broadcasting context, radio stations also utilise culturally responsive programming strategies. These include the use of vernacular languages and code-mixing to reach diverse audiences,

interactive programmes such as phone-in discussions, and a strong focus on locally produced content that reflects community interests. Stations also employ strategic scheduling for peak listening periods, invest in high-quality production standards, and use social media platforms to interact with listeners and expand their audience base. Such strategies not only strengthen audience engagement but also position radio as an important tool for public education, cultural expression, and community development.

Given these developments, this study seeks to examine how radio stations in Akwa Ibom State design and implement programming strategies that align with audience preferences. It also investigates the role of programme presentation styles in shaping listener engagement and satisfaction. By analysing the relationship between programming strategies and audience preferences, the study aims to provide insights that can help radio stations enhance their competitiveness while effectively meeting the evolving expectations of their audience.

2.0 Methods

2.1 Research Design

The research design chosen for this study was survey and it involves collecting information, opinions, perceptions, attitudes, and preferences of individuals in

a specific area to draw inferences or conclusions regarding the subject matter. This approach was deemed suitable for the study as it focused on gathering data about the programming strategies and audience preferences of private and public radio stations in Akwa Ibom State.

2.2 Population of the Study

The population comprised residents of Akwa Ibom State who listen to both public and private radio stations in the state. However, since statistics for Radio Listenership were not readily available, the researcher was constrained to adopt the 2024 projected population of Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria, as given by the Nigerian Population Commission, which stands at 7,200,000 with annual estimated growth rate projected at 3.4%.(akwaibomstate.gov.ng)

2.3 Sample Size and Sampling Procedure

Accordingly, the sample size of this study was determined using Taro Yamane (1967) method of calculating sample size with the formula which is expressed as follows:

$$n = N / (1 + N (e)^2)$$

From the calculation (please refer to appendix III), the sample size n will be approximately 400 respondents. Thus, using Taro Yamane's formula, the sample size for this study was determined to be approximately 400 individuals.

To ensure broad representation of the sample, a multi-stage sampling procedure was adopted. This process was organised into distinct stages, with specific sampling techniques employed at each stage.

Stage 1: Cluster Sampling

Each Senatorial District in Akwa Ibom State was treated as a cluster of interconnected units. The three senatorial districts included in the study are:

Akwa Ibom North- East

Akwa Ibom South

Akwa Ibom North –West

Stage 2: Purposive Sampling Technique

In the second stage, a purposive sampling technique was employed to select specific Local Government Areas (LGAs) as sub-populations. The following LGAs were chosen based on their significance as the political capital of the respective senatorial districts.

Uyo (Akwa Ibom North- East)

Eket (Akwa Ibom South)

Ikot Ekpene (Akwa Ibom North –West)

Stage 3: Probability Proportionate to Size (PPS) Sampling

Equal representation among the sub-populations was achieved at the final stage using the Probability Proportionate to Size (PPS) sampling method. Systematic

Calculations were conducted to determine the distribution of respondents for each senatorial district, resulting in the following allocation:

Uyo (Akwa Ibom North- East): 196 respondents (representing 49%)

Eket (Akwa Ibom South): 114 respondents (representing 28%)

Ikot Ekpene (Akwa Ibom North –West): 92 respondents (representing 22%)

This structured approach ensured a comprehensive and representative sample of the audience for the radio stations in Akwa Ibom State.

2.4 Description of Research Instruments

The primary instrument for data collection in this study was a structured questionnaire, designed with fifteen (15) items tailored to address the research questions. Each item focused on different aspects of programming strategies and audience preferences, including audience engagement, content variety, scheduling, and perceived quality of programming. Some of the questionnaire items utilised 5-point Likert scale to gauge respondents' opinions and preferences effectively. The interview guide was adopted to conduct interviews with station managers to elicit their opinions about their programme strategies.

2.5 Data Collection

Trained research assistants facilitated the administration of the questionnaire to ensure a smooth and efficient process. The data collection period spanned four weeks, allowing adequate time to reach all selected participants.

2.6 Data Analysis

The data obtained were systematically organised and analysed using quantitative methods. Descriptive statistics, including weighted mean analysis and frequencies, were utilised to summarise the data. Additionally, inferential statistics, such as the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient statistical method (commonly

denoted as r), was employed to explore relationships between programming strategies and audience preferences, drawing on established theories and previous research findings.

3.0 Results

3.1 Data Presentation

From the 400 administered copies of the questionnaire, 379 were retrieved and used in the analysis. This represents a 94% return rate, an acceptable range for an empirical study. The presentation was completed in relevant tables, and analysis was done using the weighted mean.

Table 4.1: Frequency of Audience Engagement with Radio Stations' Programmes

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Daily	299	79
A few times weekly	38	10
Weekly	19	5
Rarely	23	6
Never	-	-
Total	379	100

Table 4.1 shows that the highest number of respondents, 299 (79%), listen to radio programmes daily, which gives them a higher degree of exposure to radio content.

Table 4.2: Time of the Day respondents Listen to Radio Stations Most

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Morning (6 am to 12 pm)	171	45
Afternoon (12 pm to 6 pm)	76	20
Evening (6 pm to 12 am)	114	30

Late Night (12 am to 6 am)	18	5
Total	379	100

Table 4.2 shows that most of the respondents (45%) listen to the radio stations mostly in the morning hours, while the least is late night (5%).

Table 4.3: Radio Stations Respondents Prefer Most

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Comfort FM	90	24
Passion FM	80	21
AKBC	60	16
Planet FM	50	13
Atlantic FM	30	8
Inspiration FM	20	5
Heritage FM	15	4
Redemption FM	12	3
Excel FM	10	3
Uniuvo FM	7	2
Mix FM	5	1
Total	379	100

Table 4.3 shows that Comfort FM and Passion FM are the most preferred radio stations, together accounting for 45% of respondents' choices, indicating their strong popularity among listeners.

Table 4.4: Audience Perception of Radio Stations' Programming Strategies

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Very relevant	150	40
Somewhat relevant	130	34
Somewhat Irrelevant	50	13
Very Irrelevant	30	8
Not sure	19	5
Total	379	100

Table 4.4 reveals that the majority of respondents (74%) perceive radio stations' programming strategies as relevant, indicating overall positive audience approval.

Table 4.5: Suitability of Radio Programmes' Schedule Among Respondents

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Very suitable	160	42
Somewhat suitable	140	37
Somewhat unsuitable	40	11
Very unsuitable	20	5
Not sure	19	5
Total	379	100

Table 4.5 shows that most respondents (79%) find the radio programme schedules suitable, which reflects a general satisfaction with the timing of broadcasts.

Table 4.6: Respondents' Rating of Presentation Style of Radio Stations

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Excellent	120	32
Good	140	37
Average	80	21
Poor	25	7
Very Poor	14	3
Total	379	100

Table 4.6 shows that the majority of respondents (37%) rate the presentation style of radio stations as good and 32% as excellent, indicating generally positive audience perceptions.

Table 4.7: Respondents' rating of Radio Stations programmes as Culturally Sensitive

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Very Sensitive	140	37
Somewhat Sensitive	130	34
Somewhat Insensitive	55	15
Very Insensitive	30	8
Not Sure	24	6
Total	379	100

Table 4.7 indicates that most respondents (71%) perceive radio station programmes as sensitive to cultural issues, reflecting positive cultural responsiveness.

Table 4.8: Respondents' Reasons for Radio stations' preferences

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Types of Dominant Programmes Aired	120	32
Content and Subject Matter	110	29
Scheduling of Programmes	75	20
Presentation Style of Hosts	50	13
Cultural Sensitivity in Programmes	24	6
Total	379	100

Table 4.8 shows that the leading reasons for radio station preference among respondents are the types of dominant programmes aired (32%) and the content and subject matter discussed (29%).

Table 4.9: Extent to which Types of Programmes Aired on Radio Stations Influence Audience

Response	Frequency	Percentage	Weight	FW
Very High Extent	80	21	5	400
High Extent	198	52	4	792
Low Extent	50	13	3	150
Very Low Extent	30	8	2	60
Not At All	21	6	1	21
Total	379	100		1,423
<i>Weighted Mean</i>			3.8	
<i>Average mean</i>			3.0	

Table 4.9 reveals that the weighted mean of 3.8 reflects a strong agreement among respondents that the type of programmes aired on radio stations greatly influences their listenership.

Table 4.10: Extent to which Content and subject matter raised in Radio Stations' programmes Influence Listenership

Response	Frequency	Percentage	Weight	FW
Very High Extent	85	22	5	425
High Extent	190	50	4	760
Low Extent	55	14	3	165
Very Low Extent	30	8	2	60
Not At All	19	5	1	19
Total	379	100		1,429
<i>Weighted Mean</i>			3.77	
<i>Average mean</i>			3.0	

Table 4.10 shows that the content and subject matter of radio programmes have a strong influence on listenership, as indicated by a weighted mean of 3.77.

Table 4.11: Extent to which programme Scheduling in Radio Stations influences Audience

Response	Frequency	Percentage	Weight	FW
Very High Extent	75	20	5	375
High Extent	195	51	4	780
Low Extent	60	16	3	180
Very Low Extent	30	8	2	60
Not At All	19	5	1	19
Total	379	100		1,414
<i>Weighted Mean</i>			3.73	
<i>Average mean</i>			3.0	

Table 4.11 indicates that radio programme scheduling has a considerable influence on listenership, with a weighted mean of 3.73 suggesting broad agreement among respondents.

Table 4.12: Extent to which the Presentation style of Hosts in Radio Stations influences listenership

Response	Frequency	Percentage	Weight	FW
Very High Extent	90	24	5	450
High Extent	185	49	4	740
Low Extent	55	15	3	165
Very Low Extent	30	8	2	60
Not At All	19	4	1	19
Total	379	100		1,434
<i>Weighted Mean</i>			3.78	
<i>Average mean</i>			3.0	

Table 4.12 reveals that the presentation style of radio hosts significantly influences listenership, as reflected by a weighted mean of 3.78.

Table 4.13: Extent to which the cultural sensitivity of Radio Stations' programmes influences Audience

Response	Frequency	Percentage	Weight	FW
Very High Extent	85	22	5	425
High Extent	175	46	4	700
Low Extent	65	17	3	195
Very Low Extent	30	8	2	60
Not At All	24	6	1	24
Total	379	100	15	1,404
<i>Weighted Mean</i>			3.7	
<i>Average mean</i>			3.0	

Table 4.13 shows that the cultural sensitivity of radio programmes plays a strong role in attracting listeners, as indicated by a weighted mean of 3.70.

Discussion

The discussion of findings in this study examines audience listening behaviour, station preference, determinants of

preference, programming strategies, audience perception of programmes, and the extent to which programming strategies influence audience choices in Akwa Ibom

State. Overall, the findings highlight the enduring relevance of radio as a major communication medium and demonstrate that programming strategies play a crucial role in shaping audience engagement and loyalty.

The frequency and timing of radio listenership is examined among audiences in Akwa Ibom State. The findings show a very high level of engagement with radio broadcasting. Specifically, 79% of respondents reported listening to radio daily, demonstrating that radio remains deeply integrated into the daily lives of many residents in the state. This high level of exposure indicates that radio still functions as an influential medium for the dissemination of information, cultural narratives, education, and entertainment. The relatively small proportion of respondents (21%) who reported listening weekly or less suggests that radio has not been significantly displaced by newer digital media. Instead, its continued relevance can be attributed to its affordability, accessibility, and portability, which allow audiences to access content even in environments where digital connectivity may be limited. These findings correspond with earlier research by Osazee-Odia and Ojobor (2017), who reported that over 75% of respondents engaged with radio daily due to the medium's accessibility and mobility. Similarly,

Chioma et al. (2015) observed that radio listenership is particularly strong during morning hours, especially among working-class audiences.

The study also investigated the preferred listening periods of audiences. The findings revealed that morning hours (6 a.m.–12 p.m.) represent the most popular listening time, with 45% of respondents identifying this period as their primary listening window. This trend reflects the role of radio as a companion medium during daily routines such as commuting, preparing for work, or engaging in household activities. Evening listening (6 p.m.–12 a.m.) emerged as the second most preferred period, accounting for 30% of respondents, while afternoon (20%) and late-night listening (5%) attracted comparatively lower engagement. These patterns highlight the importance of strategic scheduling, as broadcasting during peak listening hours maximises audience reach and message effectiveness. Consequently, radio stations can increase their influence by placing high-impact programmes within these time slots.

The study further examined audience preferences for specific radio stations operating in Akwa Ibom State. The results revealed a structured hierarchy in station preference, with Comfort FM emerging as the most preferred station with 24% of respondents, followed by Passion FM at

21%. Together, these stations account for nearly half of the listenership in the state. Their popularity appears to be linked to innovative programming strategies, interactive content formats, and strong engagement with youthful audiences. Other stations such as AKBC (16%), Planet FM (13%), and Atlantic FM (8%) constitute a second tier of preferred stations. The relatively lower preference levels for stations like Inspiration FM (5%), Heritage FM (4%), Redemption FM (3%), Excel FM (3%), Uniuyo FM (2%), and Mix FM (1%) may reflect factors such as limited coverage, specialised content, or weaker branding strategies. These findings align with studies by Bassey and Essien (2022) and Nkereuwem and Ekanem (2023), which highlighted that radio stations with strong audience engagement, musical diversity, and interactive programming tend to attract higher levels of listener loyalty.

Another important aspect of the discussion relates to the factors influencing audience preference for particular radio stations. The results indicate that the types of programmes aired constitute the most influential factor, accounting for 32% of respondents' preferences. This finding emphasises the importance of programme genres such as music, talk shows, sports, religious programmes, and entertainment in shaping audience loyalty. Content and subject matter were the second most

influential factor at 29%, demonstrating that audiences are increasingly attentive to the relevance and quality of discussions presented on radio. Scheduling of programmes accounted for 20% of audience preference, highlighting the importance of aligning broadcasts with listeners' daily routines. Presentation style of hosts contributed 13%, indicating that charismatic and engaging presenters can significantly enhance audience connection and retention. Cultural sensitivity, though the least cited factor at 6%, remains important in maintaining identity and resonance within local communities. These findings correspond with the studies of Eze and Onyema (2021) and Bassey and Edem (2023), which identified programme content and structure as major determinants of audience loyalty in Nigerian radio broadcasting.

The study also explored the programming strategies adopted by radio stations in the state. The findings indicate that audience-centred programming is a fundamental strategy used by broadcasters. Stations rely on community feedback, social trends, call-in programmes, and digital interaction to design content that reflects listeners' interests. Strategic scheduling during peak listening hours, particularly morning and evening drive times, is another key approach used to maximise audience reach and advertising potential. Additionally,

stations balance entertainment, news, and educational content to create hybrid programming formats that maintain audience interest while fulfilling public information needs. Feedback mechanisms such as WhatsApp interactions, live calls, and audience polls also allow stations to adapt programmes based on listener responses, thereby sustaining engagement. However, stations must also balance editorial integrity with commercial pressures from sponsors and advertisers.

Audience perception of radio programming was generally positive. Approximately 74% of respondents considered radio programmes relevant to their interests and social realities. Furthermore, 79% believed that programme schedules were suitable for their daily routines, while 69% rated the presentation style of radio hosts as either excellent or good. Similarly, 71% acknowledged that radio stations demonstrate cultural sensitivity in their programming through the use of indigenous languages, traditional music, and locally relevant themes. Despite these positive perceptions, a small proportion of respondents expressed dissatisfaction or uncertainty, suggesting that certain demographic groups may still be underserved by current programming strategies.

Finally, the study assessed the extent to which programming strategies influence

audience preferences. The results revealed strong relationships across all examined indicators. Approximately 73% of respondents indicated that programme types significantly influence their listenership, while 72% emphasised the importance of content and subject matter. Scheduling was also influential, with 71% acknowledging its impact on listening behaviour. Presentation style (73%) and cultural sensitivity (68%) were likewise found to affect audience preferences. These findings demonstrate that programming decisions—ranging from content design and scheduling to presentation and cultural alignment—are central determinants of radio listenership.

The findings of this study are consistent with previous research such as Ojebode and Adegbola (2022) and Abubakar and Mustapha (2021), which emphasised the significance of culturally relevant and strategically scheduled programming in maintaining audience engagement. The Uses and Gratifications Theory further explains these patterns by suggesting that audiences actively select media content that satisfies their informational, social, and entertainment needs. Similarly, the Theory of Planned Behaviour highlights how attitudes, social norms, and accessibility shape listening behaviour. Together, these theoretical perspectives confirm that audience preferences are shaped by

deliberate choices influenced by programming quality, relevance, and accessibility.

Conclusion

Programming strategies occupy a central place in modern broadcasting, serving as the critical link between content creators and the listening public. In an era defined by intense media competition and rapidly evolving audience preferences, the success or failure of a radio station is increasingly dependent on how well its programming aligns with the needs, lifestyles, and cultural expectations of its listeners. Programme type, scheduling, content relevance, and presentation style are no longer peripheral concerns—they have become core components of a station's brand identity and market relevance. This underscores the idea that audience engagement is not incidental but a direct outcome of deliberate programming choices.

Drawing from the study's findings, it is evident that various programming strategies strongly influence audience preferences for radio stations in Akwa Ibom State. The study therefore, concludes that programming strategies are not only vital but foundational to the sustainability and impact of radio broadcasting in Akwa Ibom State today.

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