

EVALUATION OF AUDIENCE PREFERENCE OF PROGRAMMES ON SELECTED RADIO STATIONS IN CALABAR METROPOLIS, NIGERIA

JAMES U. EFFIOM, Ph.D
UNIVERSITY OF CROSS RIVER STATE, CALABAR
jimiko503@gmail.com
08038568480

ABSTRACT

This study examined audience preference of programmes on selected radio stations in Calabar. That is, Cross River Broadcasting Corporation (CRBC), FAD FM and Correct FM. Guided by Uses and Gratifications Theory, and Social Identity Theory, the study adopted a mixed-method approach combining survey research and focus group discussions. Data gathered from a sample size of 250 respondents were analysed. Findings revealed that entertainment value, credibility of news, and interactive talk shows are primary determinants of audience preference. FAD FM was found to dominate youth engagement, CRBC maintained strong credibility in news and public affairs, while Correct FM appealed to listeners through community-centred and participatory programming. The study underscored the importance of audience research and responsive programming strategies for sustaining radio's cultural, social, informational, educational and entertainment relevance in Calabar.

Keywords: Programmes, Media Consumption, Audience Preference, CRBC FM, FAD FM, Correct FM.

INTRODUCTION

Radio is one of the most accessible and influential mass media platforms in sub-Saharan Africa and beyond, in spite of the rapid expansion of digital and online communication technologies. In Nigeria, radio continues to function as a primary source of information, education, and entertainment, particularly in areas with limited access to broadband internet and television services (Uche, 2021). Its affordability, immediacy, portability, and linguistic flexibility have entrenched radio as a vital medium for shaping public opinion, social interaction, and cultural identity. Scholars argue that radio's continued relevance especially in developing societies is linked to its ability to adapt content to local realities and audience expectations (McQuail, 2010; Dominick, 2011).

Audience preference studies are fundamental to effective media programming and policy formulation because they provide insights into what listeners value, when they listen, and why

they remain loyal to particular media outlets (Napoli, 2011). In contemporary urban centres such as Calabar, audience preferences are shaped by a complex interplay of socio-cultural background, age, education, lifestyle, and exposure to new media technologies (Okon & Udo, 2022). Younger audiences increasingly combine traditional radio listening with online streaming and social media engagement, thereby compelling radio broadcasters to rethink programme formats and content strategies (Chan-Olmsted, 2015).

Historically, radio broadcasting in Cross River State has played a crucial role in public education, political mobilisation, cultural preservation as well as entertainment and information spheres. The Cross River Broadcasting Corporation (CRBC), as a government-owned station, pioneered public service broadcasting in the state, emphasising news, public affairs, and developmental communication. The emergence of private stations such as FAD FM introduced entertainment-oriented programming, interactive talk shows, and personality-driven presentation styles that appeal particularly to younger audiences (Akpan & Eyo, 2022). Correct FM further diversified the radio landscape by focusing on community-centred programming and participatory discussions addressing local issues using both pidgin and standard English to retain audience attention. Despite these developments, there remains limited empirical research comparing audience preference across these stations in Calabar. This work therefore investigated the determinants of audience preference and the factors that sustain listener loyalty among the selected radio stations in the study area.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objective of this study was to examine audience preference for programmes on selected radio stations in Calabar. Specifically, the study intended to:

- I. Determine the factors influencing audience preference of programmes on CRBC, FAD FM and Correct FM.
- II. Ascertain the differences in audience perception of programming quality and relevance on CRBC, FAD FM and Correct FM.
- III. Assess the extent to which demographic and psychographic variables such as age, education and lifestyle influence programme preference and listening patterns.

EMPIRICAL REVIEW

Empirical research on audience preference for radio programmes consistently demonstrates that listeners' choices are shaped by content relevance, presentation style, credibility, interactivity, and audience characteristics. Few studies are examined below to give credence to this research work.

Eze (2019), examined audience preference for private radio stations in urban Nigeria, focusing on entertainment-driven programming and presenter appeal. The study found that music quality, presenter charisma, and interactive segments were key components of programme preference, particularly among younger listeners.

Comparatively, While Eze's study provides insight into entertainment preferences at a national urban level, it does not offer a comparative analysis between public, private, and community-oriented stations within a single media market. The present study extends this work by comparing, CRBC, FAD FM and Correct FM within Calabar, thereby capturing how ownership structure and institutional orientation shape audience preference for these radio stations.

This study consequently fills the gap by providing a station-specific and locality-based comparison, revealing how entertainment competes with credibility and community relevance in shaping audience preference.

Akpan and Eyo (2022), investigated urban youth listenership patterns in Southern Nigeria and found that private radio stations attracted younger audiences due to informal presentation styles and participatory formats such as music, sports and other amusements for the young minds. Although the study highlights youth preference patterns, it focuses narrowly on youth audiences and private stations. The present study broadens the scope by incorporating diverse age groups and comparing youth-oriented preferences with those of older and more educated listeners across different station types. Interesting, this study fills the gap by integrating demographic and psychographic variables to explain why different audience segments prefer different stations within the same geographic space.

Uche (2021) on his part, examined radio relevance and audience dynamics in Nigeria's digital era, finding that radio remains relevant due to credibility, accessibility, and cultural proximity, despite competition from digital media. Uche's study adopted a broad national perspective and does not examine audience preference at the station or programme level. The

current research operationalises these dynamics by analysing how credibility and interactivity influence preference among specific radio stations in Calabar.

This study therefore fills the gap by translating macro-level observations into micro-level audience preference patterns, thereby offering actionable insights for station programming and audience appreciation and patronage.

Onyebuchi et al (2015), investigated radio listenership habits among undergraduate students. The study indicated that some of the students listened to the radio for any programme, but majority of them only prefer news programmes to any other programme aired on any radio station. Although the study indicated programme preference, but it is within a group of students who may be within a certain age bracket or limit. Also, these students do not have any choiced radio station. But the current study go beyond programme preference to selecting certain radio stations for their choiced kind of programme(2), and also with a more diverse age limit

THEORETICAL REVIEW

This work is hinged on Uses and Gratification Theory and Social Identity Theory. These theories provide insights for understanding why audiences in Calabar prefer particular radio programmes and stations. They (theories) help explain audience preference as an active, selective, and socially meaningful process shaped by needs, values, desires and outcomes.

Uses and Gratifications Theory

The uses and gratifications theory is a mass communication theory that tries to understand why people actively seek to go after certain forms of media to get specific needs. The theory was Introduced in early 1970s by Elihu Katz and his two colleagues, Jay Blumler and Michael Gurevitch, who view mass media consumers as active audience who actively seek out specific media and content to achieve certain results on gratifications that satisfy their personal needs and desires (Katz et al., 1974).

The theory talks about the reciprocal gesture between the media and its consumers, stating that the media are useful to the society as well as the society is also useful to the media, hence, the name, uses and gratifications theory (Asemah, Nwamnguo & Nkwam-Uwaoma, 2017). Roy (2009), noted that the theory acknowledges individual use and choice and that different people can use the same medium or media for different purposes. This according to Edim and Effiom (2018), explains why media audiences get their satisfaction from the media that meet their needs and aspirations.

In applying the theory to this study, Uses and Gratifications Theory explains why audiences in Calabar exhibit different listening preferences across CRBC, FAD FM and Correct FM. Listeners who prioritise credible information and civic education are more inclined towards CRBC's news and public affairs programmes. Conversely, younger audiences who seek entertainment, relaxation, and social connection gravitate towards music-driven and personality-based programmes on FAD FM (Akpan & Eyo, 2022). Correct FM satisfies social integration and community participation needs through interactive phone-in programmes and discussions on local issues especially with the application of both pidgin and standard English for the understanding of all segments of the society. When media programmes constantly meet the user gratification needs, satisfaction increases, making way for continuous and long-term exposure to that particular station(s) (Napoli, 2011; Effiom, 2021). Therefore, uses and gratifications theory makes an individual to understand the reason(s) behind programme preference among the consumers of radio stations in Calabar.

Social Identity Theory

The social Identity theory, which was developed by Tajfel and Turner in (1986), provided a sociological lens for understanding media preference. The theory posited that individuals derive part of their self-concept from their membership in social groups such as age cohorts, ethnic communities, professions, and religious groups. Media platforms often serve as symbolic spaces where these identities are expressed, affirmed, and negotiated.

Radio stations in Calabar function not merely as channels of communication but as cultural institutions that reflect and reproduce social identities. Programmes that incorporate local languages, indigenous music, religious values, and community concerns resonate strongly with listeners who identify with those social groups (Boateng & Anokwa, 2020). Correct FM's emphasis on community dialogue and moral discourse appeals to listeners who value communal identity and cultural continuity. CRBC reinforces civic and state identity through its public service orientation, news and information while FAD FM affirms generational identity among youths through modern branding and popular culture, entertainment and the like. Social Identity Theory is particularly relevant to this study as it, focuses on demographic and psychographic, variables. Age, education, and lifestyle are not merely background characteristics; they are markers of identity that influence media choice. Radio programmes that affirm listeners' identities are more likely to be trusted,

preferred, and defended, even in a highly competitive media environment (Chan-Olmsted, 2015). Hence, the relevance of the theory to this research work.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive survey design, with the support of qualitative insights, to provide a comprehensive understanding of audience preference for radio programmes in Calabar. This design was appropriate because it enabled the systematic collection of data from a sizeable audience population while capturing listeners' attitudes, motivations, and subjective experiences.

The population of Calabar Metropolis which is the study area comprised of 741,455 out of which a sample size of 250 was purposively selected for this research. The choice of purposive sampling approach was adopted because the work required respondents with direct listening experiences of radio programmes. This approach ensured that only regular listeners capable of providing informed views on programme preferences were selected in order to enhance the relevance and validity of the data.

Data were collected primarily through a structured questionnaire designed to capture respondents' demographic characteristics, listening habits, programme preferences, and perceptions of programme quality. The instrument contained both closed-ended and open-ended items, allowing for quantitative measurement of preferences and qualitative expression of views on programme content, presentation style, credibility, and interactivity (MoQuail, 2010). In addition to the questionnaire, two Focused Group Discussions (FGDs) comprising of 10 listeners and 7 presenters provided contextual insights that enriched the interpretation of the results.

To ensure instrument validity, the questionnaire was subjected to expert review by specialists in mass communication and media studies, whose feedback informed revisions that improved clarity and alignment with the study objectives. Reliability testing using Cronbach's Alpha produced a coefficient indicating strong internal consistency, confirming the suitability of the instrument for measuring audience preference and related variables (Baran, 2010, Dominick, 2011; Baran, 2010).

Data collection was carried out through the distribution of copies of the Questionnaire which were administered directly to respondents with the assistance of trained research assistants who provided clarification where necessary. Also, data analysis was conducted descriptively and

interpretatively, with findings presented in statistical tabulation. Responses were analysed to identify dominant patterns of programme preference across the three radio stations as indicated in table 2 and 3 of the study.

Data Presentation and Analysis

A total of two hundred and fifty (250) copies of questionnaire were distributed to respondents in the study area and two hundred and forty-five (245) copies were retrieved. Simple percentage distribution was used to analyse the data. For the Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), 10 respondents (listeners) and 7 presenters, were treated to engaging discussions on the subject under investigation.

Table 1: Social Characteristics of Respondents

Age	Frequency	Percentage
18-25	32	13.0
26-32	29	12.0
33-40	30	12.2
41-47	29	15.5
48-55	54	22.0
56 and above	62	25.3
Education		
FSLC	31	12.6
SSCE	38	15.5
ND/HND	49	20.0
B.Sc	60	24.4
M.Sc and above	67	27.3

Source: Author’s Field Work, 2026

Data on social characteristics showed that respondents between the ages of 56 and above representing 25.3 percent occupy the highest number. Also, respondents with Master’s degree and above are the majority, that is, 67 representing 27.3 percent.

Table 2: Factors Influence Audience Preference of Programme

Factor	CRBC(%)	FAD DM(%)	Correct FM (%)
Entertainment value	34(13.8%)	148(60%)	63(26.0%)
Credibility of Information	152(62.0%)	53(22%)	50(20.4%)
Cultural Relevance	84(34.2%)	80(33%)	81(33%)
Interactivity	70(29%)	46(19%)	129(53%)

Source: Author’s Field Work, 2026

Data on table 2 indicated that entertainment value took the center stage in FAD FM with 60%. Credibility of news/information had it on CRBC with 62%, interactivity, that is participation of audience was swallowed by correct FM with 53% while cultural relevance cut across the 3 radio stations being studied.

Table 3: Listeners’ Perception of Programmes Quality and Relevance

Perception	CRBC	FAD FM	Correct FM
Authoritative and reliability	152(62%)	31(13%)	60(24.4%)
Dynamism and Modern	31(13%)	153(62.4%)	61(25%)
Relevance and trustworthiness	51(21%)	46(19%)	148(60%)

Source: Author’s Field Work, 2026

According to data on table 3, listeners perception of CRBC is that it is authoritative and reliable in terms of programme quality and relevance. This is shown in the figure 152(62%). This means that its programmes are perceived on being of quality and relevance to the listeners. For FAD FM, listeners perception of the programme quality and relevance is on its dynamism and modern. This is shown on the figure 153(62.4%). According to them, the station is entertainment oriented, especially in terms of its presentation in style in contemporary music selection. Listeners scored Correct FM for its programme quality and relevance in terms of relevant and trustworthy programmes. This is as indicated in the figure 148(60%), with moral discourse, community dialogue, Pidgin English segments and cultural continuity.

Table 4: Effect of Demographic and Psychographic factors on Preferred Programmes of Audiences

Age	18-25	26-32	33-40	41-47	48-55	56 & above
Programme						
News/Current Affairs	24(10%)	24(10%)	28(11.4%)	30(12.2%)	44(18%)	95(39%)
Music/Entertainment	84(34%)	58(24%)	30(12%)	28(11%)	25(10%)	20(8%)
Talk/Call-in	68(28%)	62(25.3%)	50(20.4%)	20(8.1%)	20(8.1)	16(7%)
Drama/Story telling	62(25.3%)	44(18%)	34(14%)	42(17.1%)	38(16)	25(10.2%)
Education						
Programme	FSLC	SSCE	ND/HND	B.Sc	M.Sc & above	
News/Current Affairs	25(10.2%)	27(11%)	39(16%)	56(23%)	98(40%)	
Music/Entertainment	82(33%)	56(23%)	41(17%)	35(14%)	31(13%)	
Talk/Call-in	71(29%)	66(26%)	53(22%)	32(13%)	23(9.3%)	
Drama/Story telling	72(29%)	64(26%)	56(23%)	28(11%)	25(10%)	

Source: Author's Field Work, 2026

Analysis on table 4 indicated that older and more educated listeners showed greater interest to news and current affairs programmes associated with CRBC. The table showed that 95 respondents representing 39% within the age bracket of 56 and above as well as 98 respondents, representing 40% have the highest education, that is masters degree and above. This group of audiences are more matured. The younger respondents showed stronger preference to entertainment-based and music oriented programmes associated with FAD FM.

According to Table 2, responses from the questionnaire were examined to identify dominant trends in programme preference across the three selected radio stations FAD FM, Cross River Broadcasting Corporation (CRBC) and Correct FM. Audience preference was analysed in relation to key variables identified in the literature, including entertainment value, credibility of

information, language use, cultural relevance, sustainability and interactivity, which have been widely recognised as critical determinants of radio listenership (Eze, 2019; Uche, 2021).

Also, findings from table 2 revealed that entertainment-oriented programmes attracted a significant proportion of listeners, particularly among younger respondents. Music-based programmes, humorous Fad presentation styles, and personality-driven shows were identified as major attractions on FAD FM. Respondents described these programmes as engaging, relaxing, and reflective of contemporary youth culture. This pattern indicated that entertainment gratification plays a central role in shaping programme preference among younger audiences, consistent with the assumptions of Uses and Gratification Theory (Katz et al., 1974).

In contrast, credibility of news and informational content emerged as the dominant factor influencing preference for CRBC. Respondents associated the station with accuracy, professionalism, and public service responsibility. News and public affairs programmes on CRBC were perceived as reliable and authoritative, particularly among older and more educated listeners. This finding underscores the importance of institutional trust and credibility in audience evaluation of programme quality (Uche, 2021; Okon & Udo, 2022).

Correct FM's preference was largely shaped by its emphasis on community-centred discussions, religious programmes, and interactive talk shows. Listeners valued the station's focus on local issues, use of pidgin English, moral discourse, and opportunities for audience participation through phone-in segments. These programmes were perceived as inclusive and socially relevant, reinforcing listeners' sense of belonging and community identity. This supports earlier findings that participatory programming enhances audience loyalty and trust (Edim & Effiom, 2018; Boateng & Anokwa, 2020).

From table 1, demographic variables such as age and educational level were analysed alongside programme preference to determine their influence on listening behaviour. Younger respondents consistently demonstrated stronger preference for entertainment and interactive programmes, particularly on FAD FM, while older and more educated listeners showed greater attachment to news, cultural, and public affairs programmes associated with CRBC (Akpan & Eyo, 2022; Okon & Udo, 2022). Correct FM attracted listeners whose lifestyles and social orientations emphasised communal values and moral engagement.

Psychographic variables, including lifestyle and social identity, further explained observed listening patterns. Listeners tended to prefer programmes that aligned with their values, beliefs,

likes, and everyday experiences. Programmes perceived as inconsistent with these orientations were audience. Preference evaluated as less relevant, regardless of technical quality. This selective pattern of programme indicated audience preferences to programmes that meet their tastes, desires, motivations and the like content that reinforces existing attitudes and orientations (Katz et al., 1974; Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

Qualitative responses from open-ended questionnaire items and informal group discussions revealed that programme quality was commonly evaluated based on presenter competence, clarity of communication, opportunity for audience participation, sustainability and perceived sincerity and Sustainability credibility of content. Presenters who demonstrated professionalism, empathy, and effective audience engagement were frequently mentioned as influencing continued listenership and fellowship. These qualitative insights supported the quantitative trends and provided better explanation for observed audience preferences.

Discussion of Findings

This section discussed the findings of the study with regards to the research questions and the theoretical framework guiding the research. The discussion demonstrated how audience preference for radio programmes in Calabar is shaped by programme characteristics and audience attributes, and how each research question has been empirically addressed.

Research Question One

What are the major factors influencing audience preference for programmes on CRBC, FAD FM and Correct FM in Calabar?

Findings from the study showed that entertainment value, credibility of information, cultural relevance, and interactivity are the major factors influencing audience preference across the three selected radio stations. These factors, however, operate differently depending on station orientation and target audience.

Entertainment emerged as the major factor influencing preference for FAD FM, particularly among younger listeners. Music-based programmes, humour, and personality-driven presentation styles were consistently identified as engaging and relaxing. This demonstrates that audiences actively select programmes that provide emotional relief and companionship. thereby confirming the core assumptions of Uses and Gratifications Theory, which explains that audiences choose media content to satisfy specific psychological and social needs (Katz et al., 1974).

For CRBC, credibility of news and informational content was the most influential factor. Listeners associated the station with accuracy, professionalism, and public service responsibility, especially in relation to news and public affairs programmes. This finding highlights the continued importance of trust and institutional authority in audience preference, supporting earlier studies that emphasise credibility as a key determinant of radio listenership (Uche, 2021).

In the case of Correct FM, audience preference was largely influenced by community-centred programming and interactivity. Programmes that addressed local issues and allowed audience participation through phone-ins as well as the use of pidgin English were perceived as inclusive and socially relevant. This finding demonstrated that audiences value opportunities for participation and social connection, reinforcing the role of interactivity in shaping sustained listenership (Baran, 2010; Hasan, 2013).

In summary, the answer to this question identified that audience preference is determined by a combination of entertainment, credibility, cultural relevance, and interactivity, rather than a single factor, and that each station's preference is tied to how well it satisfies these needs in line with the audience expectations or desires.

Research Question Two

How do listeners perceive the quality and relevance of programmes across the three radio stations?

The findings revealed that listeners' perceptions of programme quality and relevance are subjective and value-driven, shaped by how well programme content aligns with their expectations, beliefs, and everyday experiences. Programme quality was not evaluated solely on technical excellence but on perceived relevance, presenter competence, and alignment with listener values.

Listeners perceived FAD FM as dynamic, modern, and entertaining, particularly appreciating its informal presentation style and contemporary music selection. For this audience segment, relevance was defined by lifestyle compatibility and cultural resonance with youth identity. Conversely, CRBC was perceived as authoritative and reliable, with programme quality measured by depth of discussion, accuracy, and professionalism. Correct FM was perceived as relevant and trustworthy among listeners who valued moral discourse, community dialogue, pidgin English and cultural continuity.

These variations in perception support Selective Exposure Theory, which suggests that audiences selectively engage with media content that reinforces their existing attitudes and orientations (Klapper, 1960). Programmes that aligned with listeners' beliefs were perceived as higher in quality and relevance, while those that conflicted with these orientations were often disregarded.

Hence, this research question was answered by demonstrating that programme quality and relevance are audience-dependent constructs, shaped by selective exposure and individual value systems rather than universal norms or beliefs.

Research Question Three

To what extent do demographic and psychographic factors determine the preferred programmes of Calabar audiences?

Findings from the study showed that demographic and psychographic variables significantly determined programme preference among radio audiences in the study area. Age and educational level emerged as particularly influential demographic factors, while lifestyle and social identity were key psychographic elements.

Younger respondents demonstrated strong preference for entertainment-oriented and interactive programmes, especially on FAD FM. Older and more educated listeners preferred news, public affairs, and culturally oriented programmes associated with CRBC. Correct FM attracted listeners whose lifestyles emphasised community engagement, religious values, and social cohesion.

These preferences confirm the relevance of Social Identity Theory, which posits that individuals prefer media content that affirms their group identity and social belonging (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Media choices, therefore, function as expressions of identity rather than mere consumption habits. The findings further indicated that demographic factors influence what programmes are preferred, while psychographic factors explain why such preferences persist. This demonstrates that programme preference is both structurally and psychologically determined.

Accordingly, this research question was answered by looking at the fact that demographic and psychographic variables inject a strong and necessary influence on programme preference, shaping listening behaviour across different stations being studied

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the study, it is concluded that audience preference for radio programmes in Calabar is an active, selective, and identity-driven process. Listeners consciously choose radio programmes that gratify their psychological, social, entertainment and informational needs, rather than engaging with content indiscriminately.

The work concluded that different radio stations sustain audience loyalty by satisfying distinct audience needs. FAD FM appeals largely through entertainment-oriented and youth-centred programming; CRBC maintains preference through credibility, professionalism, and public service broadcasting; while Correct FM attracts listeners through community-focused, interactive, and value-oriented content. These differences underscore the importance of differentiated programming strategies in a competitive media environment such as Calabar Metropolis.

Furthermore, the study indicated that demographic and psychographic factors significantly influence programme preference, with age and education shaping exposure patterns, and lifestyle and social identity explaining sustained listenership and followership. The alignment of these findings is a testament to the fact that audience preferences with established communication theories confirms the robustness of the study's theoretical framework and its relevance to contemporary media studies of radio programmes is necessitated by several factors as carefully highlighted in the study.

Recommendations

Arising from the objectives and findings of the study, the following recommendations are made thus:

- i. Radio stations should ensure that they design programmes that will meet the needs and desires of their audiences. That is, each station should be conscious of their audiences' needs while packaging and presenting their programmes.
- ii. Considering the relevance of credibility in audience preference, stations should package their programmes in line with their audience identity and social belonging.
- iii. Since both demographic and psychographic factors influence what programmes are preferred by the audience, stations' programmes should have the ability to adequately address these concerns.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

James U. Effiom is a Senior Lecturer with a Ph.D in Public Relations and Organisational Communications. He lectures in the Department of Mass Communication, Faculty of Communication and Media Studies, University of Cross River State, Nigeria. His research interest is in Public Relations, Organisational Communication and the New Media.