

EZZA NORTH RESIDENTS' PERCEPTION OF HEALTH INFORMATION PROGRAMMES IN UNITY FM, ABAKALIKI, EBONYI STATE

Prof. Cornelius Aghadiegwu Ukwueze

Department of Mass Communication,

Faculty of Social Sciences,

Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka,

Anambra State, Nigeria

Phone: +234(0)8063694405

Email: ca.ukwueze@unizik.edu.ng

And

Favour Chinonso Aleke

Department of Mass Communication,

Faculty of Social Sciences,

Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka,

Anambra State, Nigeria,

Phone: +234 (0)7032230076

Email: chukwunonsoalekefavour@gmail.com

Abstract

Dissemination of health information of radio station to rural dwellers helps them to be exposed to health issues and equally help them make informed decisions about their health. Unity FM Abakiliki has played enormous roles in educating the masses in Ebonyi State especially Ezza North Local Government Area residents through their health programmes. This study examined Ezza North Residents' perception of health information programmes of Unity FM,

Abakaliki, Ebonyi State. The Agenda-Setting theory was adopted for the study. A descriptive survey design was used with questionnaire as the instrument for data collection. The sample size 400 was determined using Taro Yamane Formula. Multi-stage sampling technique was adopted to ensure that different communities in Ezza North LGA were equitably and evenly accommodated. Findings of the study showed that Ezza North residents are aware of the Unity FM health programmes and the exposure helps them be involved and take cognizance of their health situations. Larger number of respondents accepted that they are aware and exposed to health-related programmes of the radio station. It was also discovered that a greater number of listeners in Ezza North LGA follow up the unity FM health information programmes and that these programmes help them to make informed decision on their health. The implication of the findings is that the audience has a good perception of the role of unity FM Abakaliki in dissemination of health information in Ezza North LGA. The study recommended among others that given the high level of awareness and exposure to Unity FM health information programmes, Ebonyi State Ministry of Health and media organizations should strengthen collaboration to use local radio as a core instrument for public health campaigns.

Keywords: Audience Perception, Health Information Programmes, Ezza North LGA, Unity FM Abakaliki Ebonyi State, Radio programmes

Introduction

According to Nwokocha (2019), radio has grass root appeal. Its messages can be translated into local languages and

dialects. More so, receiving information from radio is easy and also relatively cheap and affordable even in rural areas. The portability of radio sets and the fact that they can be powered by ordinary batteries brings to the fore, radio's added advantage over other mass media". Therefore, the role by the radio station in airing relevant, accurate, and timely health information to the rural populace helps individuals to be aware and exposed to different health knowledges, rural dwellers through the adequate health information dissemination through the radio station can tell from their body system symptoms that they are sick and can self-diagnose and carry out self-treatments and when to contact doctors or get to hospital for medical treatment.

Unity FM radio station Abakaliki is known for many health related programmes that range from different medical aspects but the most popular programme among them is the "You can Do It Your Self" (the teaching and training of first aid practices); these programmes contribute to the growing scholarship on individual health knowledge, promoting access to healthcare information to rural individuals who are significant role players in community development. In view of the above, this study intends to evaluate the perception of Ezza North residents' perception of health information programmes of Unity FM radio station Abakaliki and to recommend strategies to salvage the situation of "no access to health information" by community dwellers in some of the communities.

Radio, as a means of communication, emerged from the late 19th-century discoveries about electromagnetic waves and the development of wireless telegraphy. Evolution of the

radio as we know and accept today as form of information dissemination and entertainment such as music, news and entertainment program broadcasting took two decades (Schiffer, 2021). People called radio *wireless* in the first decade that followed its invention of the radio by Marconi in 1895. The first radio had the same technology as today; it used electromagnetic spectrum for transmitting audio signals to the receivers. Social driving forces determining the direction of the radio technology were not integrated, therefore, the technology had a different meaning. The radio industry was not institutionalized, governments did not have any regulations on the use of electromagnetic spectrum and investors were not aware of the profit that could be generated by producing radio receivers to use at homes (Bergman, 2020). For decades, radio has worked well to improve and promote human coexistence particularly in sharing useful information. Its effectiveness in programme and reports has helped listeners to improve and to adopt new approaches to doing things that affect their lives in different ways (Ojomo & Ogungbamigbe, 2021).

Since the inception of radio, there has been extensive research on the significance of radio stations in facilitating collaboration between voluntary community sectors, civil society, agencies, NGOs, and citizens to advance specific community development goals such research include the work of Ayobolu (2024) effectiveness of radio health advocacy programme in rural communities; Chukwu and Ikeme (2023) evaluated audience perception of broadcast media coverage of the effect of the Covid-19 pandemic on women in rural communities in Edo State, Olaoye and Onyenankaya (2023) examined effectiveness of Mdantsane FM community radio in health information promotion among

residents of Eastern Cape Province; and Utalor (2019) reviewed influence of broadcast media messages on awareness, perception and attitude of maternal health among reproductive women in Ilorin. It's widely acknowledged that these stations often fulfill their audience's needs by delivering a diverse range of content not available on larger commercial radio stations. This study examined Ezza North residents' perception of health information programmes of Unity FM radio station, Abakaliki.

A key focus of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is the promotion and protection of every individual's right to achieve the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, as reflected in Goal 3: Good Health and Well-Being, which seeks to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages (United Nations, 2015). The individual play essential and dynamic roles in the rural economies, being actively involved in health activities mainly. The health of these individuals is critical. However, in comparison with their urban counterparts, the health status of the rural individuals is poor; they are seldom educated and are more likely to suffer from lack of access to proper healthcare information. One major explanation of this observation is information poverty; rural individuals lack adequate access to healthcare information sources and literacy to meet their health information needs (Nwagu & Ajama, 2021).

Rural individuals can access diverse media choices but they are heavily fragmented. Audience habits, preferences and patterns affect media behaviour. Consequently the study focused on analyzing the audience perception of the role of Unity FM radio as a powerful source of information in the

rural area in dissemination of health information. (Tucker, 2019) and in creating awareness, providing information and education, improving skills and political and economic development or empowerment of individuals (Venu Arora, 2015).

A study on rural radio broadcasting in Nigeria found that rural radio “serves as a source of cultural, political, health and other educational and enlightenment programmes for the masses, leading them towards self-actualization and national development. Radio is so powerful that it brings political, economic and social news to any community or group of communities faster than other medium (Asemah, Anum, & Edegoh, 2013). Many studies have proved that radio station is an instrument of power in changing the lives of individuals (Nirmala, 2015). Yet, majority of the rural women face significant challenges in having access to excellent quality and timely health care information that enables them to access needed services and support (Pullen Fiantdt, & Walker, 2021; Schofield, Bloch, Herrman, Murphy, Nankervis, & Singh, 2020). In the current design of the basis and rationale of programming at the Unity FM radio station, there is a gap in determining how messages should be packaged to be commensurate with the rural individual stages of behaviour change as well as the intended behaviour change that the programmes wish to bring out. The result of these is that the rationale of programming does not encourage the rural dwellers to go for services and create awareness about their health issues.

Unity FM is one among many other radio stations in Ebony State, it is located at the Broadcasting House, Amike-Aba (Amaike-Aba), Abakaliki, Ebonyi State. The radio frequency

is 101.5 FM, It is listed under stations of the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN). It is owned by Arc. Sir Edward Nkwegu, and the radio station has a very wide audience reach that cut across three states; Abia, Enugu and Cross River State (mainly Ogoja). Unity FM Abakaliki has several health-related programmes, including “The Health Station” which covers topics like the power of prevention through antioxidants, children living with cancer, healthy breakfast option, and intermittent fasting. Unity FM also broadcasts the “TalkHealth9jaRadio show”, which discusses the Nigerian health system and health information management. Additionally, Unity FM has a mental health program that addresses issues like depression, loneliness, self-help, and recovery, supporting families and careers (Ekuma, 2024). The health station programme is aired on every Wednesday from 7:30am to 8:30am, TalkHealth9jaRadio show airs on Fridays from 12pm – 1pm, while Health Matters talk show airs every Thursday from 6:30pm - 8pm. These shows often give room for audience contributions by opening a hotline for audience to call and give their contribution on the matter of discourse. The health programmes broadcasted in Unity FM has a wide coverage, the frequency covers Ebonyi State and other communities of the neighboring states. The residents of Ebonyi State by extension Ezza North clearly listens and participate in the programmes.

Ezza North Local Government Area is one of the thirteen local government areas in Ebonyi state. It is predominantly an area for the Ezza people, who are known for their rich culture and agrarian economy. It comprises eleven (11) communities: Amuda/Amawula, Ekka, Inyere, Umuoghara, Nkomoro, Ogboji, Okposi Umuoghara, Omege

Umuezeokoha, Oriuzor, Oshiegbe Umuezeokoha, and Umuezeoka. The predominant health challenge among the people of Ezza North is lymphatic filariasis elephantiasis, hydrocele, dermatitis and periodic fever, these health challenges can be attributed poor personal hygiene emanating from the consumption of bad water and food. The prevention and methods of curing the above health challenge are among the various health programmes broadcasted by Unity and that makes Ezza North Local Government an ideal area of the study.

Statement of the Problem

Excellent quality healthcare information can successfully substitute for consultation with health professionals, thereby enhancing individuals' sense of autonomy and potentially having positive fiscal benefits. However, this is not the case in most rural areas in Africa (Sanogo, Fantaye, & Yaya, 2019). According to a study by Johnson and Birk (2019), some of the traditional information sources available to the rural women are local drug hawkers, friends and family, drug sellers, traditional healers, oracle homes, faith healers and chemist. Although traditional sources play a significant role in healthcare delivery across rural African settings, the unstandardized nature of their medical knowledge, coupled with uncertainties regarding their understanding of human anatomy and disease, often renders these sources unreliable for providing adequate healthcare information. In Nigeria, radio has been identified as a powerful source of information especially among the vulnerable poor. Despite the significant role radio plays in information dissemination, many rural residents still lack access to adequate healthcare information necessary to meet their needs. In Ezza North Local Government Area, which serves as the focus of this study,

limited access to reliable health information may contribute to rising cases of maternal mortality. Consequently, it becomes imperative to critically examine the rationale and foundation of radio programmes broadcast by Unity FM, Abakaliki, and to assess how their content empowers rural dwellers in Ezza North to make informed health decisions and access essential healthcare services.

Objectives of the Study

The general objective of this study was to evaluate Ezza North residents' perception of health information programmes of Unity FM Abakaliki, Ebonyi State. However, the specific objectives were:

1. To determine the extent of awareness and exposure of residents of Ezza-North L.G.A to Unity FM health programmes.
2. To ascertain the extent to which Unity FM health information programme has helped residents in Ezza-North to make more informed decisions about their health.
3. To assess the perception of Ezza North L.G.A residents on Unity FM health information programmes.

Research Questions

The study was based on three main research questions which include:

1. To what extent are residents of Ezza-North L.G.A aware of and exposed to Unity FM radio station's health programmes?

2. To what extent has Unity FM health information programme helped residents of Ezza North L.G.A to make informed decisions about their health?
3. What are the perception of Ezza North L.G.A residents on Unity FM health information programmes?

Empirical Reviews: Some notable empirical studies related to this studies are reviewed briefly below.

Nweke, Chukwu and Okoli (2025) conducted a study on influence of audience perception of the NPHCDA'S radio campaigns on cervical cancer (HPV) vaccine intake. Cervical cancer ranks as the second most frequent cancer among women in Nigeria and the second most frequent cancer among women between 15 and 44 years of age. To curb the disease, the Federal Government embarked on radio HPV vaccination campaigns through the National Primary Health Care Development Agency (NPHCDA). The paper, therefore, sought to find out Awka South female residents' level of awareness of the campaigns, their perception of the campaigns, the extent their perception of the campaigns determine their decision to take the HPV vaccine and the extent they have taken the vaccine. To achieve these objectives, the researcher adopted the descriptive survey design and determined the sample size of this study (384) using Meyer's (1973) sample size determination formula. The samples were selected using the multi-stage sampling procedure. To collect data, the researcher used a close-ended and pre-tested questionnaire and used frequency tables and simple percentages to analyze the data. From this study, the researcher found, among others, that Awka South female residents are highly aware of the campaigns. Based on the findings, it was recommended, among others, that the Federal

Government should continue the radio campaigns until massive HPV vaccine intake is achieved in Nigeria.

Ezeah and Ozioko (2024) examined the influence of community radio in disseminating health information and promoting behavioural change in some selected rural areas in Enugu State. This study was carried out to investigate the influence of community radio (Solid 100.9 FM Enugu and Dream 92.5 FM, Enugu) as a vital communication channel for disseminating health information and promoting behavioural change in some selected rural areas in Enugu State. Residents of 5 selected communities in Enugu State constitute the population of the study. A mixed method of research design was used. The agenda-setting was used as its theoretical framework, and it explores how the community radio's emphasis on certain health issues shapes the public's agenda. The study found an increase in health knowledge among community radio listeners in the selected rural areas compared to non-listeners, particularly regarding health topics such as maternal health, malaria prevention, and drug abuse. The study recommends that community radio stations should prioritise community involvement in all stages of program development, from needs assessment and content creation to program evaluation. This will ensure that programs are relevant, culturally appropriate, and address the specific health needs of the underserved communities.

Eke and Alade (2024) conducted a study on Audience Perception of Radio Health Messages on Hypertension among Residents of Osun state, Nigeria. This paper examined audience perception of radio health messages on hypertension among residents of Osun State, Nigeria using Health Focus on Fresh FM 104.9, Osogbo as case. Adopting

framing theory and the elaboration likelihood model, the study surveyed four hundred and twenty-two (422) residents through multi-staged sampling technique using a structured questionnaire. Data gathered were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics and hypothesis tested at a 0.05 level of significance. Findings revealed that Health Focus radio programme did not significantly influence practice tips on hypertension prevention among Osun State residents ($R^2=0.255$, $B=0.262$, $t=11.380$, $p<0.05$) as audience awareness and listening habits to the radio programme were found to be low. The study concluded that the audience listened to Health Focus radio programme at a rather low level and that participants did not practice hypertension prevention tips highlighted. It was therefore recommended that producers of Health Focus radio programme should adopt more proactive measures to improve the awareness of the programme and that public health workers in the state should find and adopt measures to ensure that residents practice hypertension and other diseases prevention tips.

Oparaugo, Nwankpa, and Ohaja (2024) studied the influence of broadcast media messages on the knowledge, attitude and practice of maternal and child health among reproductive-age women in South-East Nigeria. The study investigated the influence of the broadcast media on the knowledge, attitude and practice of safe maternal and child health among reproductive-age women in South-East Nigeria. Out of the five states in the South-East region of Nigeria, three states were selected and 385 women of reproductive age were sampled using the multi-stage sampling technique. It was found that reproductive-age women in the South-East relied mostly on television and the radio as primary sources of information on maternal and child health; however, they

believed that television was more effective than the radio at spreading these messages. Also, maternal and child health messages were rarely promoted by other radio and television programs apart from talk shows and health programs. It was concluded that proper usage of maternal and child healthcare services could be improved by frequently promoting broadcast media messages through other programs such as news, drama and documentary. It was recommended that helplines/call lines should be properly advertised and made available to women to call in and speak to professional doctors concerning any issues they might have during or after pregnancy.

Ayobolu (2024) conducted a study on effectiveness of radio health advocacy program in rural communities: A Case of Agidigbo FM's "Ilera Wa" in Onidundu Area, Akinyele, Oyo State, Nigeria. This study examined how radio helps in health advocacy in rural communities. A popular health programme, "Ilera Wa" on Agidigbo FM, a private radio station located in Ibadan, Oyo state, Nigeria, was adopted as the case study. The research is anchored on the Diffusion of Innovation and Development Theories, while the Focus Group Discussion (FGD), a subset of the qualitative method, was utilized in gathering data from twenty randomly selected respondents. The data for this research were gathered through the analysis of the audio and tape recordings, notes and participant observation derived from answers provided in the interview guide for the discussion. Findings reveal that the respondents were ardent listeners of the programme as it serves as a "broadcast hospital" for them by addressing their various health needs while also teaching and encouraging healthy behavioral lifestyle. The study recommends more of this kind

of broadcast initiative globally, especially in rural communities.

Ekuma (2024) assessed the use of radio in the fight against cholera outbreaks in Ebonyi State, Nigeria. This study focused on 'Use of Radio in the Fight Against Incessant Cholera Outbreaks in Ebonyi State'. Cholera as we all know had from time to time besieged Ebonyi State leading to the death of hundreds and thousands affected and infected. The dreaded illness has continued to increase in our society despite all efforts to put a stop to it, hence this study which looked at what radio with its enormous power can do to put a stop to the disease. The research work adopted two theoretical frameworks in carrying out the research. The theories are Social Responsibility and Agenda Setting Theories. In the research methodology, survey research method was used in data gathering. In the survey, three local government areas of Ebonyi State were randomly selected from the three senatorial zones of Ebonyi State namely: Ezza North, Ohaozara and Ohaukwu. For easy understanding, tables were used in the data presentation of the study. According to the findings of the research work, radio plays a significant role in shaping the health life pattern of its audience in general but the health policy makers do not liaise with radio health programmers during disease outbreak like cholera. Therefore, this study recommends that they should be synergy between radio health programmers and health policy makers, if the battle against cholera outbreaks in Ebonyi state must be won.

Onwe, Obin, Ibiam, Okereke, Okwubunka, Uche and Ezeani-Iheukwumere (2024) examined the exposure to health programmes on Salt FM radio and knowledge of Vesico

Vaginal Fistula risk-factors among women in Abakaliki Metropolis of Ebonyi State, Nigeria. This study investigated how exposure to Salt FM radio messages influence the awareness of VVF risk-factors among women in Abakaliki metropolis of Ebonyi Stat, Nigeria. The study adopted qualitative research design, using in-depth interview to elicit responses from participants. Purposive sampling technique was adopted. Focus was on women residing in the Abakaliki metropolis who have been exposed to Salt FM Radio campaigns on VVF. Results: Majority of the respondents reported regular exposure to Salt FM's programme, citing it as a reliable source of health information. Women who listened to the programmes frequently (weekly or more) were more likely to be aware of VVF and its associated risk-factors. The study concluded that there was significant relationship between exposure to Salt FM health programmes and knowledge of VVF risk-factors among women in Abakaliki metropolis of Ebonyi state. The study can inform policy development and implementation strategies aimed at improving maternal healthcare services and reducing the burden of VVF in Ebonyi State and similar settings. Policymakers can use the evidence generated to advocate for the integration of radio campaigns into existing maternal health programmes and allocate resources for sustained health communication efforts. The study recommends more audience participation in the programmes through interactive features like live calls, SMS platforms, and community forums.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the Agenda Setting Theory. Agenda-setting theory was propounded by [Maxwell McCombs](#) and [Donald Lewis Shaw](#) 1968. Agenda-setting

theory suggests that the [communications media](#), through their ability to identify and publicize issues, play a pivotal role in shaping the problems that attract attention from [governments](#) and [international organizations](#), and direct [public opinion](#) towards specific issues. The theory suggests that the media can shape public opinion by determining what issues are given the most attention, and has been widely studied and applied to various forms of media. The way news stories and topics that impact public opinion are presented is influenced by the media. It is predicated on the idea that most individuals only have access to one source of information on most issues: the news media. Since they establish the agenda, they may affect how important some things are seen to be. The agenda-setting by media is driven by the [media's bias](#) on things such as politics, economy and culture, etc. Audiences consider an issue to be more significant the more [media attention](#) it receives (issue saliency). For instance, even if readers don't have strong feelings about immigration, they will believe that it is a pressing problem at the time if there is consistent journalistic coverage of it over the period of a few months.

The theory has two core assumptions; the first is that it is the media that controls the reality. The media does not report the reality but instead filters and shapes it. The second assumption is quite akin to the description or definition of agenda-setting theory which states that it is the media that gives importance or saliency to its topics as the more likely the media focuses on certain issues, the more likely the public perceive such issue as important and therefore demands action.

Three models describe the agenda-setting process:

1. "Awareness model"
2. "Priorities model"
3. "Salience model"

The research on the audience perception of the role of Unity FM radio station in dissemination of health information using agenda-setting compares the salience of issues in news content with the public perceptions of the most important issue. Then it analyses the extent of influence by guidance of the media. There are three models proposed by Max McCombs: the "*awareness model*", the "*priorities model*" and the "*salience model*". Most investigations are centered on these three models.

Awareness model

The awareness model proposes that an issue is on an individual's agenda because they have seen it in the media. If the media does not report on an issue or topic, then it will most likely not be thought about by an individual. For example, if the media reports on Topic X, an individual is more likely to be aware of Topic X over Topic Y.

Priorities model

The priorities model is a way of looking at the process that explicitly describes where our priorities lie. The issues the media prioritizes will likely be prioritized by the individuals as well. For example, if the media reports on Topic X, an individual will care about Topic X and its updates (even if Topic Y is more pressing, it is not being reported on).

Saliency model

The saliency model lies somewhere in between the awareness model and the priorities model. In this model, individuals' agendas do not exactly reflect the media's agendas. However, some issues or topics that are consistently presented in the media will appear at the top of individuals' agendas. For example, if the media reports on Topic X, an individual will care about Topic X to a lesser extent than the media cares.

Most research on agenda-setting are based on the following:

1. the press and the media do not reflect reality; they filter and shape it;
2. media concentration on a few issues and subjects leads the public to perceive those issues as more important than other issues.

Figure 2.1: Agenda Setting Theories and relevance to this study.



Source: <https://www.geeksforgeeks.org/social-science/agenda-setting-theory-overview-and-features/>

Therefore, Unity FM radio station communication channels are pivotal in the diffusion of Social Responsibility and Agenda Setting Theories. Unity FM radio stations act as a potent communication channel, reaching a wide audience and disseminating healthcare information effectively. The two-step flow of communication, where opinion leaders within the community are influenced by the radio content and, in turn, influence others, propels the diffusion process.

Furthermore, the time factor plays a crucial role. Over time, as the community members continually engage with the radio content, more individuals become aware of the healthcare information, leading to a critical mass of adopters. The diffusion process shifts from early adopters to the early majority and, eventually, to the late majority and laggards.

Methodology

The study used descriptive survey design. The area of study was Ezza North L.G.A, Ebonyi State. Ezza North is one of the thirteen L.G.As in Ebonyi State in Southeastern Nigeria. It is geographically located in the Southern part of Ebonyi state. Its Headquarters is at Ebaji. The local government comprises several communities. They include: Amuda, Amawula, Umuezeoka, Oshegbe, Umuezeokoha, Inyere, Nkomoro, Ekka, Oriuzor, Ogboji, Uggaru, Okoaru, Ektete Uwe and Ndiapuogbunyagu. According to the National Population Census and Official Website of Nigeria Local Government System 2024 publication using the population projection, the population of Ezza North Local Government

is 276,836. So, two hundred and seventy six thousand, eight hundred and thirty six (276,836) is the total population of the study. A sample size of 400 respondents was drawn using the Taro Yamane formula. The researchers adopted multi-stage sampling technique in the selection of respondents for administration of instruments while Structured Questionnaire was the instrument for data collection.

Data Presentation and Analysis

In this section, data were presented and analyzed the data collected with tables of frequencies and percentages. 322 out of the 400 copies of questionnaire distributed were returned and used for the analysis. The data from the three research questions were presented and analysed hereunder.

► Research Question one: Awareness and Exposure of Individual in Ezza-Northh towards Unity FM Radio Station Health Programmes

Question: Are you aware of Unity FM radio station in dissemination of health information programmes

Table 4.2: Distribution of Response on Awareness and exposure of Unity FM Radio Station dissemination of health information programmes

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	270	83.9
No	52	16.1
Total	322	100

Source: Survey, 2025

Table 4.2 above showed that 270 respondents representing 83.9% of the respondents confirmed that they are aware and also exposed to Unity FM radio station in dissemination of health information programmes while 52 respondents representing 16.1% confirmed that they are not.

► **Research Question two: To what extent has Unity FM health information programme helped residents of Ezza North L.G.A to make informed decisions about their health?**

Table 4.3: Distribution of Response on the question

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
High	243	75.5
Low	79	24.5
Total	322	100

Source: Survey, 2025

The table above shows that out of the 322 respondents, 243 representing 75.5% accepted that the extent Unity FM health information helped residents of Ezza North L.G.A to make informed decisions about their health is high while 79 respondents representing 24.5% affirmed that it is low. The implication is that majority of the respondents believe that the station's health programmes have been very instructive in guiding them to make informed health decisions about themselves.

► **Research Question three: Perception of Audience
towards Unity FM Radio Station Health Information
Aired and Disseminated**

**Question: How do you see or perceive Unity FM radio
station abakaliki in dissemination of health information**

Table 18: Distribution of Response on the question

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Good	94	24.5
Satisfactory	122	31.6
Beneficial	52	22.4
Bad	54	21.5
Total	322	100

Source: Survey, 2025

From the table above, the assessment of how the respondents see Unity FM radio station in dissemination of information shows that 122 respondents at 31.6% see it as satisfying. 94 representing 24.5% of the listeners agreed that the information dissemination programme is good. While 52 representing 22.4% of the listeners indicated that the programme is beneficial while 54 representing 21.5% affirmed that the programme is bad. The implication is that there is a positive perception of the residents on the station and the health information it disseminates.

Discussion of Findings

The first objective was to examine the extent of awareness and exposure of individuals in Ezza-North L.G.A to Unity FM radio station programmes. The findings shows that Ezza North residents are aware of the Unity FM health programmes and the exposure helps them be involved and take cognizance of their health situations, among others. Thus 270 respondents from Ezza North LGA with 83.9% accepted that they are aware and exposed to Unity FM radio station programmes. However, the 52 respondents with 16.1% of the respondents confirmed that they are not fully informed and they are not aware of health information broadcasts of Unity FM. This clearly shows that the radio stations have not fully explored the use of evidence-based and the context specific programming in the dissemination of health care information to residents in Ezza North LGA.

The findings of the study on Ezza North residents' awareness and exposure to Unity FM programmes align closely with the Agenda-Setting Theory propounded by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw (1972). The central assumption of this theory is that the mass media may not tell people what to think, but it tells them what to think about. Through repeated emphasis and consistent exposure, the media influence the salience of issues in the minds of audiences, thereby shaping public awareness and priorities.

The findings of this study reveal that a large proportion of residents in Ezza North LGA (83.9%) are aware of and exposed to Unity FM radio programmes, suggesting that the station plays a vital role in informing and educating the public on crucial issues such as health, agriculture, and

education. This aligns with the Agenda-Setting Theory developed by McCombs and Shaw (1972), which posits that the media do not tell people what to think, but rather what to think about. By prioritizing certain topics through its programming, Unity FM determines the relative importance of these issues in the public mind.

This finding is consistent with Okorie and Oyesomi (2014), who noted that radio stations in Nigeria significantly influence public awareness of social issues by giving consistent prominence to topics related to development, health, and education. Similarly, Owolabi and Oloyede (2017) observed that radio broadcasting serves as a critical agenda-setting platform that draws attention to community concerns and mobilizes collective understanding around them. In the same vein, Ndolo (2005) emphasized that radio plays a strong agenda-setting role in rural communication by shaping listeners' perceptions of what issues matter most within their socio-economic environment.

In theoretical context, the high level of awareness (83.9%) and exposure of respondents to Unity FM's programmes shows that the station effectively functions as an agenda setter within Ezza North LGA. By providing continuous information, education, and entertainment particularly on health, agriculture, and education Unity FM determines the issues that dominate public discussion and concern among residents. The findings indicate that through its programming, the radio station successfully draws public attention to social and developmental issues, such as health information, which are crucial for community well-being.

The second objective of the study was to examine the extent to which Unity FM health information programme has helped residents in Ezza-North to make more informed decisions about their health. The study found that greater number listeners follow up the Unity FM health information programme. Again, it was ascertained that Unity FM health information programme positively influence the health decisions of listeners in Ezza North LGA. Results equally showed that among other programmes aired by the radio station, health information programme is the most listened to by the Ezza North residents. It is further adduced that by educating the listeners on health care, the media is helping create positive change towards the community members accessing health care information and services.

The study sought to determine the extent to which Unity FM's "Health Matters" talk show has helped residents in Ezza North LGA make informed health decisions. The findings revealed that a significant number of residents regularly follow the programme, which has positively influenced their health-related attitudes and practices. This outcome aligns strongly with the Agenda-Setting Theory which provide explanations for how media content influences public understanding and behavior.

According to McCombs and Shaw (1972), the Agenda-Setting Theory posits that the media play a crucial role in determining the salience of issues by giving them consistent attention and framing. In the context of this study, Unity FM's "Health Matters" talk show sets the health agenda for residents by prioritizing health education topics and drawing sustained attention to them. This finding corroborates the work of Okorie and Oyesomi (2014), who observed that

radio health programmes in Nigeria significantly shape public discourse on health issues by focusing listeners' attention on preventive care, maternal health, and community well-being. Similarly, Ndolo (2005) noted that radio stations in rural areas often serve as agenda-setters in mobilizing awareness on public health concerns, thus influencing the cognitive priorities of their audiences.

Furthermore, Nwabueze (2014) emphasized that health communication through radio serves as both an agenda-setting and behavioral-change tool, as it informs, motivates, and reinforces community members' decisions about health practices. Similarly, Owolabi and Oloyede (2017) noted that when health programmes are consistently aired and relatable, they serve as learning environments where audiences observe, evaluate, and adopt recommended practices.

In essence, the findings demonstrate that Unity FM's Health Matters talk show plays a dual role: as an agenda setter, it brings health issues to public attention and sustains discourse on healthcare access; and as a social learning platform, it facilitates knowledge sharing and behavior modeling that lead to informed health decisions among residents of Ezza North LGA. This dual influence underscores the power of radio not just to inform, but to transform public understanding and action through both cognitive and social learning mechanisms.

The third objective focused on the perception of Ezza North L.G.A residents towards Unity FM health information aired and disseminated in Ebonyi State. Majority of the listeners confirmed that the health based radio programmes had influenced them to take some form of action regarding their

health or that of their family members. Out 322 respondents 24.5 % stated that Unity FM radio station in dissemination of information is good, while higher number of the respondents with 31.6% viewed it as satisfactory, 22.4% agreed that it is beneficial while 21.5% were those that viewed it as bad.

This outcome aligns with the Agenda-Setting Theory proposed by McCombs and Shaw (1972), which asserts that the media shape public awareness and perceptions by emphasizing certain issues and framing them as important. By consistently broadcasting health-related information, Unity FM has succeeded in prioritizing health topics within the consciousness of Ezza North residents, leading them to perceive health issues as salient and worthy of attention. This agrees with the position of Okorie and Oyesomi (2014), who found that media coverage and repetition of development-oriented programmes increase audience salience of those issues, thereby shaping their perceptions and attitudes. Similarly, Ndolo (2005) notes that through repetition and framing, radio serves as an effective agenda-setting tool for public health education in rural areas, influencing how communities evaluate and respond to health messages.

The findings of this study also align with prior research on the positive impact of radio exposure on health knowledge and behavior. For instance, a study by Bankole et al. (2007) in Burkina Faso and Uganda found that men exposed to radio were significantly more likely to possess knowledge of correct condom use. This suggests that radio, as a medium, can effectively disseminate health-related information, potentially leading to improved health practices among its listeners.

Summary

This study analyzed the audience perception of the role of Unity FM Abakaliki in the dissemination of health information in Ezza-North L.G.A of Ebonyi State. The findings show that individuals in Ezza-North L.G.A are aware and exposed to Unity FM radio station's programmes, again Unity FM Health Matters talk show helps residents of Ezza North L.G.A to make informed decisions about their health, and lastly, Ezza North L.G.A residents has good perception towards Unity FM health information aired and disseminated in Ebonyi State.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this work has shed light on the significant role of Unity FM radio station in the dissemination of healthcare information to residents in Ezza North LGA of Ebonyi state. The findings underscore the importance of these platforms in reaching and empowering community members with essential health knowledge. Unity FM radio station act as vital tools for bridging information gaps, promoting health literacy, and ultimately improving the well-being of rural dwellers.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and implications of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Given the high level of awareness and exposure to Unity FM programmes, it is recommended that Ebonyi State Ministry of Health and media organizations strengthen collaboration to use local radio as a core instrument for public health campaigns. Regular and well-structured health

programmes should be developed to educate rural populations on preventive health practices, maternal health, sanitation, and nutrition.

2. The finding that some residents are passive participants in Unity FM's programmes suggests a need for greater audience involvement. Programme producers should integrate feedback mechanisms, such as live call-in segments, community interviews, and social media engagement, to make programming more interactive and responsive. Incorporating community voices and local experiences will enhance credibility and ensure that health messages are contextually relevant and evidence-based.
3. Health agencies, NGOs, and hospitals should collaborate with Unity FM and other local stations to co-produce health programmes. Joint initiatives can ensure that health messages are not only scientifically accurate but also culturally sensitive. This partnership will help transform radio from a mere information channel into a strategic health promotion partner.

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