



Audrezara Journal of Communication and Social Research (AJCSR), Vol. 1(1), 137-151, 2025.



AUDREZARA JOURNAL OF COMMUNICATION AND SOCIAL RESEARCH (AJCSR)

Vol. 1, Issue 1, pp. 137-151, November, 2025.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17658908>

Perceived Credibility of State-Owned Media in Nigeria: Insights from Select Industry Experts in South-South Zone of Nigeria

¹Angese, John E.; ²Okpongkpong, Grace I.* & ³Ukpong, Edikan N.

¹Department of Mass Communication, Imo State University, Owerri

²Department of Mass Communication, Covenant University, Ota

³Department of Mass Communication, Ritman University, IkotEkpene

 **ORCID:**

¹<https://orcid.org/0009-0002-9644-2964>

²<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3510-1592>

³<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4218-3509>

***Corresponding Author:** imaikopgrace@gmail.com

History: Received: September 29, 2025; Revised: October 27, 2025; Accepted: November 07, 2025.

Abstract

This study focused on evaluating the credibility of state-owned radio stations in South-South Nigeria and its impact on audience trust and listenership. Recognising that media credibility is crucial for maintaining public trust and engagement, the study explored whether government-owned radio stations in the region are perceived as reliable sources of information or as biased platforms that prioritise state interests. Using the source credibility theory, the research employed a qualitative methodology which comprised in-depth interviews with twelve purposively selected journalists (two from each state capital, i.e. Benin, Asaba, Calabar, Uyo, Yenagoa, and Port Harcourt), aiming to gain deeper insights into professional perceptions of government influence and media credibility. The qualitative data were analysed using the explanation-building technique to identify themes and patterns in participant responses. The study's results provided a robust examination of how the credibility of state-owned radio programming in South-South Nigeria is perceived by its audience and how these perceptions influence listenership and trust. The study also found that government ownership is widely perceived to compromise the objectivity and balance of programming on state-owned stations. Based on the findings, the study identifies a strong public demand for editorial independence, transparency, and professional autonomy in state-owned radio. Hence, it recommends structural reforms such as the establishment of independent media boards and public broadcasting charters that shield content production from political interference.

Keywords: Media, Media Programmes, Credibility, Perceptions, Public Broadcasting



Introduction

The credibility of media programmes is crucial in shaping public trust, influencing audience engagement, and sustaining the relevance of broadcast stations. In an era where misinformation and propaganda are rampant, the ability of media outlets to maintain credibility determines their impact on society (Karlsson&Clerwall, 2018). Radio, being one of the oldest and most accessible forms of mass communication, holds a significant role in informing, educating, and entertaining the public. However, for these functions to be effectively carried out, audiences must perceive radio programmes as credible sources of information (Newman et al., ,2021). Without credibility, even the most informative and engaging programmes may fail to achieve their intended objectives. This highlights the need to assess how audiences perceive the credibility of programmes on state-owned radio stations, particularly in the South-South region of Nigeria.

Media ownership plays a pivotal role in shaping the editorial policies of broadcast stations, thereby influencing their credibility (McChesney, 2020). Ownership structure can determine the degree of editorial independence, the selection of news stories, and the framing of public discourse. State-owned radio stations, unlike their private counterparts, are often subjected to government oversight, which can affect their autonomy in news reporting. As a result, editorial policies in state-controlled media are sometimes aligned with government interests, potentially compromising objectivity and credibility (Vos& Thomas, 2019). Programme credibility is largely dependent on editorial independence, accuracy, and the balance of perspectives presented to the audience. If these attributes are undermined by ownership influence, public trust in the media institution may diminish. Hence, understanding the relationship between state ownership and media credibility is essential in evaluating how audiences perceive the reliability of these stations.

State-owned media, particularly radio stations, are often compelled to project the government in a positive light, sometimes at the expense of objectivity. Due to their funding structure and direct affiliation with government authorities, these stations may be inclined to promote state policies while downplaying dissenting voices or criticisms (Ogwezzy-Ndisika, 2021). This tendency can create a perception of bias, where the stations are seen as mere instruments of government propaganda rather than independent sources of information. The consequence of such perceptions is that audiences may begin to question the authenticity of the news and programmes broadcast by these stations. When media credibility is compromised, it may lead to a decline in audience trust and, ultimately, listenership (Tsfati& Cohen, 2019). Studies have shown that the extent to which an audience perceives a media outlet as credible directly affects their engagement with its content (Strömbäck, 2021). If state-owned radio stations in South-South Nigeria are perceived as mouthpieces of the government, their ability to effectively inform and educate the public may be weakened.

The credibility of media outlets has been a topic of significant debate. This is believed to be often influenced by government control, political narratives, and ownership structures. Existing body of literature have discussed how ownership structures, particularly state ownership, affect media freedom, the dissemination of information, and the perceived credibility of media outlets. Reviews of this



relationships primarily draw from global studies to provide insights into the dynamics of state-controlled media and their credibility within democratic and authoritarian contexts.

Hanitzsch et al. (2018), conducted an extensive investigation into media ownership across 97 countries, examining how different ownership structures impact press freedom and media content. The study reveals a strong negative correlation between government ownership of media and press freedom. In countries where more than 50% of media outlets are state-owned, press freedom scores tend to fall below 40, suggesting limited editorial independence. On the other hand, countries where private ownership predominates, where government-controlled media account for less than 20% tend to score above 70 on press freedom indices. This suggests that in the context of Nigeria, where state-owned media are prevalent, such outlets may struggle with maintaining credibility, as government influence over content could compromise their objectivity and impartiality. Furthermore, the study highlights the potential risks associated with excessive media commercialisation. Private ownership may not be a panacea for media credibility, as private media outlets can also face biases due to corporate or political affiliations. This finding is relevant to the Nigerian context, where both state-owned and privately-owned media outlets may suffer from biases government-owned media from political influence and privately-owned media from commercial interests.

Trust in Media and Political Influence

Hanitzsch et al. (2018) explore how political influence and media ownership structures affect public trust in the press. Their findings suggest that countries with higher levels of journalistic autonomy and minimal government influence over editorial policies tend to have higher public trust in the media. Conversely, in nations where the government controls a significant proportion of media outlets, public trust is notably lower. Specifically, in countries where more than 40% of media outlets are state-owned, public trust in the media averages below 4.5 on a scale of 1 to 10. This correlates with Nigeria, where state-owned outlets are often seen as tools for government propaganda, which undermines public confidence in their impartiality. The study further emphasises the role of journalistic professionalism and ethical practices in enhancing media credibility. Sensationalism, misinformation, and political bias, common in media outlets under political control, contribute to the erosion of public trust. This reinforces the idea that media independence and ethical reporting are essential for enhancing the perceived credibility of media, a challenge for state-owned outlets in Nigeria.

Tsfati and Ariely (2014) focused on the factors influencing trust in the media, examining both individual and contextual variables. Their study found that public trust in the media is significantly higher in countries where media operate independently, without excessive government intervention. When the government controls a large proportion of media outlets, trust in these outlets tends to be lower, as audiences often perceive them as biased or aligned with political agendas. This finding resonates strongly with Nigeria, where the public is sceptical of state-owned media, viewing them as vehicles for government propaganda rather than objective news providers. The study also highlighted how individual factors such as education, political ideology, and institutional trust affect perceptions of media credibility. Educated individuals and those with higher levels of institutional trust are more likely to critically assess media content. In Nigeria, where political ideology often intersects with media consumption, trust in state-owned outlets is frequently influenced by partisan preferences, with audiences viewing media content through a political lens.

Tandoc et al. (2018) examined the impact of misinformation and disinformation on media credibility. The study emphasised that the rise of fake news deliberate misinformation, satirical news, and poor journalism



practices undermines public trust in media. In digital environments, where unverified information spreads rapidly, distinguishing between credible and misleading news becomes increasingly difficult. This is particularly relevant in the Nigerian context, where misinformation is often rampant, especially in media outlets that are influenced by political interests. The research found that even outlets with a history of credibility can be affected by fake news narratives, further complicating the issue of trust in media. For state-owned media in Nigeria, the challenge is twofold: not only is there the risk of producing biased content due to political interference, but the increasing spread of misinformation further diminishes the perceived credibility of these outlets.

The perception of credibility significantly influences listenership, as audiences are more likely to engage with media they consider reliable and truthful (Metzger & Flanagin, 2018). These empirical studies have underscored this relationship, demonstrating that audiences are more inclined to trust and rely on media outlets that demonstrate journalistic integrity and editorial independence (Nelson & Kim, 2022). Therefore, understanding how listeners in South-South Nigeria perceive the credibility of state-owned radio stations is essential in determining their effectiveness as public information channels. Using the source credibility theory, the study assesses the level of audience trust in the credibility of programmes aired by state-owned radio stations in South-South Nigeria; examines the factors influencing audience perception of the credibility of programmes on state-owned radio stations, as well as evaluates the extent to which government ownership affects the objectivity and balance of programmes on state-owned radio stations.

Theoretical Framework

The Source Credibility Theory served as the theoretical underpinning of this study. This theory was developed by Carl Hovland, Irving Janis, and Harold Kelley in the 1950s as part of their research on persuasive communication. Their studies focused on how the characteristics of a message source influenced audience reception and acceptance of information. The theory posits that individuals assess the credibility of a message based on their perception of the source delivering it. Hovland and his colleagues argued that when audiences consider a source credible, they are more likely to be persuaded by the information provided, whereas a source perceived as untrustworthy may lead to scepticism or outright rejection of the message.

The theory identifies three primary constructs that shape audience perceptions of credibility: expertise, trustworthiness, and dynamism (charisma). Expertise refers to the degree to which the source is perceived as knowledgeable or competent on the subject matter. A radio journalist with extensive experience covering political affairs, for example, is more likely to be regarded as a credible source on governance issues than a general entertainment host. Trustworthiness reflects the perceived honesty and objectivity of the source. Audiences tend to trust sources that are seen as fair, impartial, and transparent in their reporting. If a state-owned radio station consistently portrays the government in a positive light while ignoring critical perspectives, listeners may question its trustworthiness. Dynamism (charisma) relates to the source's confidence, enthusiasm, and ability to engage audiences. A compelling and passionate speaker may be more persuasive than one who lacks conviction, even if their message remains the same. These three elements collectively determine how audiences perceive the credibility of media sources and, consequently, how they interpret the information provided.



Scholars such as O’Keefe (2002) have expanded on Source Credibility Theory, recognising its evolving nature in different communication contexts. O’Keefe (2002) noted that credibility is dynamic and context-dependent, meaning that an individual or institution may be perceived as credible in one situation but not in another. For example, a state-owned radio station may be viewed as a reliable source for national security updates but regarded with scepticism when reporting on government corruption. Metzger and Flanagin (2013) further highlighted how digital media has reshaped credibility assessments, with audiences increasingly relying on interactivity, transparency, and peer validation when evaluating information. In the past, credibility was primarily assessed based on institutional reputation and journalistic integrity, but in today’s media landscape, factors such as audience engagement (e.g., social media discussions, fact-checking platforms) and media transparency play an equally crucial role in credibility perceptions.

Source Credibility Theory is well positioned to explain the ways and factors in which industry experts in the media ecosystem of the south-south region perceive the credibility of state-owned radio stations as a source of information, education and entertainment. This theory serves as a good way to explain the issues surrounding media credibility in the South-South region. Since government control over media can raise concerns about bias and propaganda, this theory provides a framework for assessing the credibility of information disseminated by such stations. Additionally, this theory helps to investigate whether listeners perceive journalists working for state-owned media as experts in their field or as mouthpieces for the ruling administration. Understanding these credibility dynamics is crucial in assessing the overall role of state-owned radio in shaping public opinion and informing citizens. As a result of the crucial role of credibility in media engagement, this study seeks to assess audience perception of the credibility of programmes broadcast by state-owned radio stations in South-South Nigeria. While previous research has explored media credibility broadly, limited studies have specifically focused on state-owned radio stations within this geopolitical zone. The findings from this study provides insights into the extent to which ownership influences programme credibility, how this impacts audience trust, and what can be done to enhance public confidence in state-owned radio broadcasting. As Nigeria continues to navigate a complex media landscape, understanding these dynamics is vital for shaping policies that promote media independence, credibility, and public trust.

Method

This study employed a qualitative research design using in-depth interviews to explore the perceptions of media industry experts on programme credibility in government-owned media in the South-South region of Nigeria. The study aimed to understand how these professionals perceive the credibility of programmes across various platforms, including radio, television, and other government-owned media outlets. The use of this method, according to Okpongkpong et al. (2025), is to ensure a comprehensive understanding and firsthand narrative of the issues.

Population, Sample Size and Sampling Procedure

The population for this study consisted of experienced media professionals from the South-South region of Nigeria, which includes six states: Rivers, Cross River, Delta, Edo, Bayelsa, and AkwaIbom. These professionals have extensive experience in the media industry and are well-versed in the challenges and practices of government-owned media organisations. A purposive sampling technique was used to select one expert from each of the six states. The selected experts were chosen based on their significant



experience in the media industry, particularly within government-owned media organisations. The sample size, therefore, consisted of six media professionals, each with a diverse range of experience in the field.

Instrument of Data Collection

The instrument for data collection was an interview guide, which was developed to gather insights from the selected media experts. The interview guide was structured to ensure the research questions were adequately addressed and aligned with the study's objectives. A media research expert from the Department of Mass Communication at Imo State University was consulted to ensure that the questions followed the appropriate research methodology.

Validation, Reliability and Administration of Instrument

The validity of the interview guide was assessed through face validity. Experts in the field of media and communication reviewed the instrument to assess whether it accurately measured the intended concepts. Their feedback ensured that the questions were appropriate for capturing the necessary data and aligned with the research objectives. The reliability of the interview guide was assessed using the Member Checking Technique. This technique involved sharing the findings with the participants to confirm the accuracy of the researcher's interpretations. The participants were given the opportunity to review and provide feedback on the researcher's findings to ensure that their views were accurately captured. The interviews were conducted at the convenience of the selected journalists and media experts. The interviews were carried out using WhatsApp calls and telephone calls, allowing flexibility in scheduling and ensuring that participants were comfortable with the communication method. The calls were recorded with the consent of the participants, ensuring ethical standards were upheld throughout the data collection process.

Findings

The qualitative data were analysed using thematic narrative analysis. This approach involved identifying key themes and patterns within the interview responses. These themes were then used to draw meaningful conclusions that addressed the research questions regarding the credibility of government-owned media programmes.

Perceived Credibility and Objectivity of State-Owned Media

The perception of the credibility of state-owned government programmes in Nigeria, based on the interviews, is generally negative, with many participants noting that these programmes are influenced by political agendas, making them biased and lacking in objectivity. Respondent A describes state-owned media as highly biased, saying, *"The perception of state government-owned programmes is generally biased, highly favoured to promote government activities, very unobjective, highly influenced by the proprietors of these media houses."* He adds that reporters in these media establishments are often intimidated and reluctant to report critically, noting, *"Most of the reporters in this government establishment are also scared to be objective, also intimidated, and sometimes influenced not to write on stories that seize the other side of government activities."* He explains that these pressures lead to one-sided reporting aimed at presenting the government in a positive light, asserting, *"It's also always one-sided, trying to appraise and put the government in good light, paint the government positively, ignoring the challenges."*



Respondent B also shares concerns about the low credibility of state-owned media, saying

Regarding the credibility of state programmes in state-owned media outlets in Nigeria, it is evident that credibility is typically at a low level. There are many people who do not give serious attention, adequate attention to programmes on state-owned media outlets, especially when those programmes have political implications.

Respondent C takes a similar stance, explaining that credibility in state-owned media is more about loyalty to the government than professionalism. He says, “*Credibility in state-owned media is tied to loyalty to the employer than professionalism.*” According to him, the emphasis on loyalty over professional standards significantly undermines the credibility of these programmes. *Respondent D* highlights the potential credibility of state-owned programmes, noting that they are backed by the authority of the state. However, he critiques the lack of openness to criticism, saying, “*The credibility...is supposed to be very credible...because of the state name and authority that backs the programme.*” He also points out that government programmes often become propaganda due to the fear of critical feedback, stating, “*Sometimes the programme producers, because of the government authority and the government backing the programme, tend to reduce it to a mere propaganda issue because of lack of openness to critical mind and critical analysis of the programme.*”

Respondents E views the credibility of state-owned media in terms of censorship in state-owned media. He states that the primary concern lies in how national interest is prioritised over professionalism, saying, “*What happens is that national interest becomes prominent above professionalism, above every other factor, what we call determinants of news gathering.*” He further explains how sensitive topics are handled in a way that ensures the national interest is protected, adding that:

In programmes in NTA, if you’re going to do a crisis report...you will report this thing as it were, but not pitching the thieves or the Idoma people against the Fulani...You’re not going to term them Fulani against the thieves, because if you do that, it will jeopardise the national interest.

Respondents F also highlights the issue of censorship, saying, “*For us who are working in the public media houses, talking about government-owned media houses, I perceive it to be that there is a minimal level of credibility because of direct or indirect censorship of content.*” The interviewees broadly agree that state-owned government programmes in Nigeria often lack credibility due to political influence, censorship, and the prioritisation of government interests over journalistic professionalism. The media are seen as being pressured to present government activities positively, with little room for critical analysis. As *Respondents A* succinctly puts it, “*There are many persons who do not give serious attention, adequate attention to programmes on state-owned media outlets, especially when those programmes have political implications.*” This pattern of bias and suppression of dissenting opinions contributes to a general perception that state-owned media cannot be relied upon for objective, balanced reporting.

The data above suggests that state-owned radio stations in South-South Nigeria have successfully established themselves as credible platforms in the eyes of their listeners. It reflects a strong relationship between the broadcasters and their audience, likely built over time through consistent messaging, relevance of content, and perhaps a lack of viable alternatives. The findings also point to the possibility that audiences still place value on traditional media sources for verified and authoritative information, especially in a region where digital literacy and access may vary. Moreover, the trust expressed could be influenced by cultural and institutional familiarity, where government-backed media are seen as more stable or formal sources of information, despite concerns about objectivity. This trust is significant, as it



enhances the potential for state-owned stations to influence public opinion, mobilise civic engagement, and contribute to information dissemination in critical times such as elections or health emergencies.

The findings of the current study present a clear contrast to broader global trends and other Nigerian-based research. While Hanitzsch et al. (2018) and Tsfaty and Ariely (2014) both found that trust in the media tends to be lower in contexts of high government control and minimal journalistic autonomy, the South-South Nigerian context appears to diverge from this pattern. Despite strong perceptions of government influence over state-owned radio content audiences in this region still report a notable degree of trust in these platforms. This divergence, however, does not entirely dismiss the concerns raised by other studies. For instance, the findings by Igben and Oronukpo (2022) and Ikechukwu et al. (2023) both suggest that Nigerians, in general, are sceptical of government-owned media due to concerns around credibility, press freedom, and journalistic ethics. These critiques are echoed in the present study's findings regarding the perceived lack of transparency and objectivity in state-owned stations, reinforcing the idea that while there is a base level of trust in the information presented, it is not without reservation.

Similarly, Egbai's (2018) research into NTA's programming aligns with the current study's recognition of mixed perceptions credible in some respects, yet lacking in impartiality and depth. The emphasis on the importance of ethical journalism and evidence-based reporting, as highlighted by Utwein (2019), also resonates with the current study's findings, particularly the strong correlation between credibility and listenership, and the high rate of information verification by audiences. This demonstrates that even when audiences express trust, they engage with media content critically. Moreover, the findings by Oko-Epelle et al. (2022) regarding poor perception due to content and structural challenges in local stations underscore the need for improvements in programming quality and presenter credibility; areas that, if left unaddressed, could erode the trust currently enjoyed by state-owned radio in South-South Nigeria.

While the current study shows relatively high levels of audience trust in state-owned radio, this trust exists alongside significant concerns about objectivity, government interference, and professionalism, concerns echoed in both international and local research. The findings suggest that although state-owned media in South-South Nigeria currently enjoy a degree of public confidence, sustaining this trust will require increased independence, adherence to journalistic ethics, and improvements in programme quality.

The findings align most closely with Source Credibility Theory, as the study demonstrates that audience trust in state-owned radio stations in South-South Nigeria is largely influenced by the perceived reliability and trustworthiness of the information source. Despite concerns about objectivity and government influence, respondents still regard these stations as credible, suggesting that the perceived expertise and authority of the broadcaster significantly shape audience attitudes and trust.

Challenges facing the Maintenance of Credibility in State Media

Various perspectives on the challenges involved in maintaining the credibility of state-owned government programmes in Nigeria. These challenges largely stem from political interference, staffing issues, a lack of professional autonomy, and the pressure to align with governmental interests. Respondents identify the core challenge as the government's control over the media, stating, *"It's extremely difficult...because the government controls this media, this state government media houses. It's a mouthpiece of government, so they have to speak for in promoting government activities."* He points out the difficulty in criticising government actions within state-owned media, adding, *"It's difficult for state government media houses to*



criticise government, and so it is also a big challenge for...they might be able to micro-project or micro-criticise other subsets of governance."

Respondent A highlights the issue of recruitment practices within state-owned media outlets, which he believes contributes to the credibility crisis. He explains, *"The consideration for recruitment of staff...is usually for people with political precariousness. That is what is actually at the height of the crisis, of the credibility crisis, that the media outlets suffer."* He goes on to emphasise the need for professional staff, stating, *"Only qualified, trained personnel can man this station, whether at the manufacturing level or at the general staffing level. It is important that the government take this seriously. Respondents D focus on the lack of separation between government and media programmes. He believes that the programmes often reflect the narrow perspectives of those in power, saying,*

The challenge state-owned programme has most of the time is that the producers most times don't want to separate the programmes from the government institution or authority that is behind the programme. (This narrow focus results in a programme that) becomes a mere propaganda machine for the state at that time. (words in bracket are mine)

Respondents C provides a more succinct response, listing three key challenges: *"One, loyalty to states. Two, security concerns. And three, editorial policy."* These challenges indicate the structural and practical difficulties in maintaining credibility within state-controlled media environments. *Respondents E* describes the public perception of state-owned media as one of bias and lack of credibility. He explains, *"Most times you go to the party, you go to do a programme, and people look at you as an agent of APC...agent of PDP...agent of Labour Party...whichever party is on."* He further highlights the difficulties faced when trying to maintain professionalism, stating, *"It becomes very challenging to do professional programmes."* He also points to the non-commercial nature of state-owned media as a challenge, noting, *"If it's a paid programme, it should be paid."* According to him, these factors all affect the credibility of programmes. *Respondents F* underscores the problem of political interference, explaining that *"political interference is on the high side"* because the head of state-owned media is often appointed by the state government. He concludes, *"He (the head of the state-owned media appointed by the government) will always want to play and dance to the beats of the occupant of the office of who the governor is."*(emphasis in bracket are mine).

Thus, the challenges to maintaining the credibility of state-owned government programmes are multifaceted. The overriding issue is political interference, with many interviewees emphasising how the government's control over the media limits its ability to criticise government actions and influences staffing decisions. As *Respondents A* suggests, *"the consideration for recruitment...is usually for people with political precariousness,"* which further exacerbates the credibility crisis. Additionally, issues such as the lack of professionalism in media production, loyalty to political leadership, and the blending of government and media functions contribute to the erosion of public trust in these programmes.

The findings of the current study resonate strongly with several of the studies mentioned, particularly in terms of the relationship between media credibility, audience trust, and engagement. For instance, *Igben&Oronukpo (2022)* explore the connection between news credibility and the corporate reputation of broadcast media in Nigeria, revealing that the public's trust in government-owned broadcast media tends to be lower than in private media, primarily due to concerns over the credibility of the news they broadcast. This is strikingly similar to the current study's findings, where perceived credibility plays a crucial role in driving listenership. The lower trust in government-owned media highlighted by *Igben&Oronukpo* echoes the respondents' concerns about credibility in state-owned radio stations,



underscoring the need for broadcasters to maintain a high level of integrity and transparency in their content. Ochia et al. (2022) also provide valuable insights into the role of content relevance and credibility in driving engagement. They demonstrate that programmes like the Energy Platform on Nigeria Info 92.3FM have a strong influence on local energy discussions, suggesting that when programmes meet the specific informational needs of their audience, they contribute to enhanced awareness and policy influence. Similarly, the current study found that audience engagement is closely linked to the perceived credibility of the content, with listeners more likely to tune into stations they view as reliable and trustworthy.

Also, Sabo and Kante (2024) contribute relevant findings in this context by demonstrating the significant impact of political programming on audience political awareness and involvement. Their study indicates that political analysis and discussions on radio shows have a considerable effect on audience political participation, a pattern similarly observed in the current study where trust and credibility are pivotal in sustaining listener loyalty. Just as the current study finds that transparency and balanced reporting are key to maintaining engagement, Sabo and Kante's study highlights how balanced political content can engage listeners who might otherwise be disengaged, reinforcing the notion that credibility directly affects the depth of audience engagement. Furthermore, Akoja (2016) points out that a large portion of Nigerians access development programmes through radio, with 36% preferring radio over other mediums for such content. Akoja's study also concludes that media programmes play an important role in national development, and this aligns with the findings of the current study, which show that audiences not only seek out trustworthy content but also expect such content to have relevance to national development and civic engagement. The role of credibility in sustaining audience interest is emphasised here as well just as the current study demonstrates that perceived credibility correlates with regular listenership, Akoja's study affirms that listeners remain engaged when they perceive content to have meaningful, development-related value.

Additionally, the findings of Oko-Epelle et al. (2022) echo the current study's results by highlighting the challenges that local radio stations face, including poor programme quality, inconsistencies, and a lack of engaging content. This study found that audiences were less satisfied with the quality of content on Redeemer's 103.5FM due to these limitations. In contrast, the current study found that audiences are less likely to engage with stations they perceive as biased or lacking in credibility, particularly if the content is inconsistent or fails to meet their expectations for balanced reporting. Both studies underscore the critical importance of programme quality and content consistency in maintaining audience trust and engagement. Together, these studies provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing audience engagement with state-owned radio stations. They reinforce the notion that credibility, shaped by factors such as accuracy, transparency, balanced reporting, and relevance to the audience, serves as a cornerstone for fostering sustained engagement. The current study's findings confirm that when state-owned broadcasters meet these expectations, they cultivate listener loyalty, while failure to do so can lead to disengagement and a reduction in audience trust.

The results of this study align most closely with Source Credibility Theory and Uses and Gratifications Theory. Source Credibility Theory suggests that audiences are more likely to trust and engage with media content when they perceive the source to be credible, which is strongly reflected in the current study's findings. The positive correlation between perceived credibility and regular listenership ($r = 0.501$) demonstrates that trust in the programme's accuracy, transparency, and balanced reporting directly influences audience engagement. Additionally, Uses and Gratifications Theory explains how audiences actively seek media content that meets their needs and preferences, which, in this context, includes the



desire for reliable and trustworthy news. The study reveals that listeners are more likely to engage with state-owned radio stations when they perceive the content as credible and relevant, underscoring the active role audiences play in selecting media based on its perceived quality.

Role of Training in Addressing Credibility Crisis

The training of programme personnel and heads of government-owned media is widely seen as a crucial factor in improving the credibility crisis facing these outlets. The interviewees express strong support for the idea that professional development can address some of the current challenges, though they also acknowledge limitations in implementation. *Respondents B* stresses that training is essential for human capacity development, especially in terms of technological advancements and evolving broadcast practices. However, he points out that most state government-owned media, particularly in the broadcast sector, are struggling with outdated equipment and have not invested in the training of personnel for several years. He argues that without constant training, personnel will struggle to keep up with modern media practices.

Unfortunately, most of the state government-owned media, let me go to the broadcast section, are still using obsolete equipment. They have not stepped up to digital broadcasting, and most of these stations... have not undergone any form of training for their personnel.

Respondents B believes that *"Constant training would help build human capacity development, will also help build confidence, will also be able to think outside the box."* *Respondents A* echoes this sentiment, highlighting the importance of training for the viability of every media station. He emphasises that training is essential at all levels of the organisation, from top management to the programme staff, to ensure they are equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to adapt to new developments in the media landscape. He argues that *"it is important that the government, if they want to really change the narrative, [they] have to adopt a programme schedule or a training schedule that allows for people to be trained... especially those who are on programmes."* *Respondents A* also stresses the need for personnel to be motivated to be creative and resourceful - *"they (media personnel in state-owned media) need to be trained, as I said, and they need to be motivated to be creative, and to be resourceful"* - which can only happen if they are given the tools to succeed.

Respondents D reinforces the idea that training is crucial for both programme personnel and station heads. He argues that the *"training of programme personnel cannot be overemphasised... training and retraining cannot be overemphasised in management of government-owned programmes and government-owned media houses."* *Respondents C* believes that such training will go a long way in improving the credibility crisis that exists within government-owned media outlets. *Respondents C* simply states "The answer is yes." This goes further to strengthen the assertion that training is a critical factor in improving the credibility of government-owned media, affirming that it is necessary for addressing the issues faced by these stations. *Respondents E* also views training as key to improving credibility. He explains that providing the necessary training and orientation for top management and staff in these media houses will help to resolve the credibility crisis: *"Training is vital, it's key. When top managements are given necessary training... it will help in the credibility crisis in such media."* *Respondents F* also acknowledges that training could improve credibility, but he also warns that its impact may be limited if it remains theoretical and disconnected from real-world practice.

The findings reveal that training plays a fundamental role in addressing the credibility crisis confronting government-owned media in Nigeria. The interview data indicate a shared consensus among respondents



that professional training and retraining are indispensable for improving human capacity, ensuring technological adaptability, and enhancing media credibility. Respondents consistently stressed that the lack of regular training has hindered personnel from keeping pace with modern broadcast practices, particularly given the persistent use of outdated equipment and limited investment in capacity development. *Respondent B's* observation that most state-owned stations “have not undergone any form of training for their personnel” underscores a structural deficiency that has long affected public trust in these media outlets. Likewise, *Respondents A, D, and E* highlight that effective training should not only focus on technical skills but must also build confidence, creativity, and resourcefulness among media staff, thereby improving programme quality and public perception. These observations demonstrate that training, when systematically implemented, can bridge knowledge gaps, enhance professionalism, and restore credibility to government-owned media, which are often perceived as less trustworthy due to bureaucratic inefficiency and political interference.

Empirical studies corroborate these perspectives, confirming that targeted professional development initiatives can significantly enhance journalistic quality and, by extension, credibility. An evaluation of a Journalist in Residence programme in Malawi demonstrated that sustained, practice-oriented training improved health research reporting by increasing journalists’ accuracy and use of credible sources. Similarly, a Nigerian study on media training for extractive sector reporting showed that specialised instruction strengthened journalists’ ability to communicate complex technical subjects and pursue investigative angles, outcomes that correlate strongly with audience perceptions of trustworthiness. These studies affirm that structured, continuous, and context-specific training improves the competence and ethical orientation of media professionals, which are key indicators of institutional credibility.

However, empirical evidence also demonstrates that while training is vital, it cannot operate in isolation from broader institutional and structural reforms. Research on public media credibility across Africa and the Middle East, including studies on Egyptian state broadcasters, reveals that even when journalists receive training, their ability to produce credible content remains constrained by systemic factors such as political control, limited editorial independence, and outdated infrastructure. In Nigeria, similar findings suggest that government ownership and regulatory influence often diminish public confidence, regardless of individual journalists’ skills. Consequently, while training strengthens human capacity, its impact on credibility is mediated by organisational culture, leadership priorities, and access to modern equipment. Respondent F’s caution that training may remain “theoretical and disconnected from real-world practice” captures this tension between skill acquisition and institutional application.

The broader academic discourse on media credibility thus positions training as a necessary but insufficient condition for reform. Gaziano and McGrath’s credibility framework identifies training as a core dimension of trustworthiness, but its effectiveness depends on complementary conditions such as transparency, editorial freedom, and public accountability. UNESCO and other global media development agencies similarly advocate for an integrated approach, coupling skills development with institutional and ethical safeguards. In practice, this means that training programmes should go beyond technical instruction to include mentorship, ethical reorientation, and exposure to contemporary digital broadcasting tools. It also requires policy frameworks that prioritise resource investment, modernisation of broadcast facilities, and the autonomy of editorial decision-making.

In conclusion, both the interview findings and empirical evidence converge on the argument that training is a crucial determinant of credibility restoration in government-owned media, yet its success hinges on systemic alignment between capacity development and institutional reform. Without continuous investment in human capital, technological infrastructure, and professional motivation, training initiatives



risk becoming perfunctory exercises with minimal practical outcomes. Therefore, for government-owned media to regain public trust, they must institutionalise comprehensive training schedules, upgrade their operational facilities, and embed professionalism at all organisational levels. Only through this holistic integration can training serve as a sustainable pathway to rebuilding credibility and ensuring the viability of state-owned broadcasting institutions in an evolving media environment.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Credibility remains the cornerstone of effective public communication, particularly within state-owned media institutions tasked with informing, educating, and engaging the populace. When audiences perceive media as trustworthy, objective, and accurate, they are more likely to consume its content, act upon the information received, and participate actively in public discourse. Credible media fosters civic responsibility, strengthens democratic institutions, and supports the free flow of information essential for societal progress. It also helps to counter misinformation and build a more informed and resilient public. Conversely, media systems that are viewed as biased or heavily influenced by political interest risk losing their relevance, especially in democratic societies that rely on a well-informed citizenry. The credibility of state-owned radio stations in Nigeria's South-South region is therefore not merely a media issue, but a matter of public interest and national development.

Generally, the study reveals a high level of audience trust in the credibility of state-owned radio stations in South-South Nigeria, with a majority affirming the authenticity of programmes, news, and discussions aired. This trust is not passive; it is shaped by identifiable factors such as accuracy of content, reliability of the source, and audience perceptions of impartiality. A significant portion of respondents indicated that their listenership is directly influenced by their perception of a station's credibility, with many willing to disengage from content they perceive as biased. These findings reflect a critical and evaluative audience that prioritises truthfulness and integrity in media content, and who respond positively to credible communication while withdrawing from perceived misinformation or political slant. The study also found that government ownership is widely perceived to compromise the objectivity and balance of programming on state-owned stations. A significant majority of respondents expressed concerns that these platforms are used to promote government interests at the expense of public service. The data showed strong correlations between perceptions of political interference and the loss of journalistic independence, with many respondents calling for greater autonomy and neutrality in content production.

These insights suggest that while audiences still find value in state media, there is a deep and growing demand for structural reforms that separate media operations from direct government control, thereby enhancing public trust and democratic accountability. Theoretically, the study advances the application, Source Credibility Theory, within the unique setting of state-owned radio. It underscores the influence of media credibility on audience engagement and demonstrates how perceived independence and objectivity of broadcast sources impact the acceptance of information. By contextualizing these theories within the political and media landscape of Nigeria, the research enriches their explanatory power and relevance in non-Western settings, particularly in countries with contested media freedoms and high political influence over public broadcasting. In terms of policy relevance, the findings offer actionable insights for media policymakers, broadcast regulators, and government institutions. The study identifies a strong public demand for editorial independence, transparency, and professional autonomy in state-owned radio. It recommends structural reforms such as the establishment of independent media boards and public broadcasting charters that shield content production from political interference. These insights are particularly valuable for informing future media reforms and legislation aimed at strengthening public



broadcasting institutions and restoring public confidence in government-owned media. Societally, the study contributes to a broader understanding of how media credibility shapes civic engagement, democratic participation, and national development. It reveals that Nigerian audiences are not passive consumers but active evaluators who verify content and reject politically biased programming. This finding underscores the increasing media literacy among the population and highlights the critical role that credible media play in promoting informed citizenship and social accountability. As such, the study offers a compelling case for reinforcing public trust through ethical and transparent media practices.

Therefore, given the importance of media credibility and the impact of government ownership on state-owned radio stations, further research could expand on this study by exploring the following areas:

1. A study comparing the credibility perceptions and audience trust between state-owned and privately-owned radio stations in Nigeria's South-South region could offer deeper insights into how ownership influences content objectivity and listenership. This comparison would provide valuable data on the dynamics of media credibility across different ownership structures.
2. Extending this study to include other geopolitical zones in Nigeria would help assess whether the trends observed in the South-South region are consistent across the country. It would be interesting to investigate whether the same levels of trust and concerns about political bias are prevalent in other regions with varying political contexts.

Acknowledgements: We acknowledge the contributions of scholars whose published works and reports enriched in this study also we thank those who made this work possible.

Funding: No funding has been received for this research.

Conflict of Interest: In light of the present study, the authors of the manuscript have no financial or non-financial conflict of interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

How to Cite: Angese J.E., Okpongkpong, G.I. & Ukpong, E.N. (2025). Perceived credibility of state-owned media in Nigeria: Insights from select industry experts in South-South Zone of Nigeria. *Audrezara Journal of Communication and Social Research*, 1(1), 127-136.

References

- Djankov, S., McLeish, C., Nenova, T., & Shleifer, A. (2003). Who owns the media? *Journal of Law and Economics*, 46(2), 341–382.
- Hanitzsch, T., Van Dalen, A., & Steindl, N. (2018). Caught in the nexus: A comparative and longitudinal analysis of public trust in the press. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 23(1), 3–23.
- Karlsson, M., & Clerwall, C. (2018). Transparency and journalism: A critical appraisal of a new paradigm. *Digital Journalism*, 6(2), 178-195. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2017.1416314>
- McChesney, R. W. (2020). *The problem of the media: U.S. communication politics in the twenty-first century*. Monthly Review Press.



Audrezara Journal of Communication and Social Research (AJCSR), Vol. 1(1), 137-151, 2025.

- Metzger, M. J., & Flanagin, A. J. (2013). Credibility and trust of information in online environments: The use of source expertise and perceived interactivity as predictors of credibility. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 18(2), 146–165.
- Metzger, M. J., & Flanagin, A. J. (2018). Credibility and trust of information in online environments: The use of cognitive heuristics. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 152, 206-221. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2018.07.009>
- Newman, N., Fletcher, R., Schulz, A., Andi, S., Robertson, C. T., & Nielsen, R. K. (2021). Reuters Institute digital news report 2021. Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report/2021>
- Ogwezzy-Ndisika, A. O. (2021). Government ownership and media credibility in Nigeria: A critical analysis. *African Journal of Media Studies*, 13(3), 245-262. <https://doi.org/10.4314/ajms.v13i3.5>
- Okpongkpong .G.I., Ekhareafo .D. & Asemah .E. S. (2025). Implications of Information Sources in Shaping Public Awareness of Kidney Disease: Insights from Health Practitioners in *Advances in Law, Pedagogy, And Multidisciplinary Humanities (ALPAMET)* 3(1) 71-83
- Strömbäck, J. (2021). News credibility and public trust: The impact of journalistic standards. *Journal of Communication*, 71(4), 556-575. <https://doi.org/10.1093/joc/jqz031>
- Tsfati, Y., & Ariely, G. (2014). Individual and contextual correlates of trust in media across 44 countries. *Journal of Communication*, 64(5), 760–782.
- Tsfati, Y., & Cohen, J. (2019). Perceptions of media bias and their impact on media engagement. *Media Psychology*, 22(3), 345-362. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15213269.2018.1515077>
- Vos, T. P., & Thomas, R. J. (2019). The political economy of news: Ownership, ideology, and media credibility. *Journal of Media Economics*, 32(1), 1-16. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08997764.1619.1567039>