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Broadcast Media and Secessionist Communication: Audience Exposure, Perception and Attitudinal Effects of Radio Biafra in Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examined the influence of Radio Biafra broadcasts on audience exposure, perception, and attitudinal disposition toward secessionist communication among residents of Awka metropolis, Anambra State, Nigeria. The research was anchored on Agenda-Setting Theory and Uses and Gratifications Theory, which provided a framework for understanding how broadcast media shape issue salience and how audiences actively select media to satisfy socio-political needs. A descriptive survey design was adopted, and data were collected from 450 respondents selected through stratified random sampling from Awka South and Awka North Local Government Areas. A structured questionnaire based on a four-point Likert scale was used for data collection, and the instrument demonstrated high reliability with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.81. Descriptive statistics were used to analyse the data. Findings revealed a high level of exposure to Radio Biafra broadcasts, with most respondents having access to radio sets and regularly listening to the station. The results also showed that the broadcasts significantly influenced audience perception about marginalisation, self-determination, and the agitation for Biafra restoration. However, despite the strong persuasive influence of the messages, respondents largely rejected violent means of achieving self-rule. The study concluded that Radio Biafra functions as a powerful alternative communication platform that shapes public opinion at the cognitive and attitudinal levels, but its influence on actual behavior remains limited among residents of Awka metropolis.

Keywords: Radio Biafra Broadcast Media; Audience Perception; Secessionist Communication, Political Mobilisation



Introduction

The role of broadcast media in shaping political consciousness, public opinion, and collective action has remained a central concern in communication scholarship. Radio continues to serve as a powerful medium for mobilisation, persuasion, and ideological dissemination, especially in societies experiencing political tension or identity-based agitation. Scholars have long argued that broadcast media possess the capacity to frame issues, influence perception, and shape attitudes toward political movements through repeated exposure to persuasive messages (Khoirunnisa et al., 2024; Aondover et al., 2023). In contexts where political dissatisfaction exists, alternative or non-state media platforms often become channels through which groups express grievances and mobilise support.

In Nigeria, the resurgence of separatist agitations in the South-East region has renewed scholarly interest in the relationship between media communication and political mobilization. One of the most prominent communication tools associated with the agitation for the restoration of Biafra is Radio Biafra, a broadcast platform linked to the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB). Studies have shown that the station functions as a counter-hegemonic medium, providing narratives that challenge official state discourse while fostering group identity and political consciousness among listeners (Nzeaka, 2025). Through regular broadcasts, commentaries, and ideological messages, the station attempts to construct a shared perception of marginalization, injustice, and the need for self-determination among its audience.

Historically, separatist movements have relied on communication channels to sustain support and coordinate collective action. Media messages can reinforce existing beliefs, create new interpretations of political reality, and influence the emotional attachment of audiences to a cause. Research on political communication indicates that repeated exposure to persuasive media content may significantly affect attitudes, voting behaviour, and public trust in government institutions (Aondover et al., 2023; Fagbemigun & Akase, 2024). In the South-East of Nigeria, the activities of IPOB and related movements have been closely linked with media messaging that emphasizes perceived marginalization of the Igbo ethnic group within the Nigerian federation, a narrative that has contributed to renewed agitation for self-rule (Mezie-Okoye, 2025).

Radio Biafra represents a form of alternative broadcasting that operates outside the conventional structure of licensed national media. Such forms of broadcasting are often described as dissident or guerrilla media because they provide space for voices that feel excluded from mainstream political communication. Research has shown that pirate or underground radio stations can serve as tools for civic engagement and political participation, particularly during periods of socio-political conflict (Nzeaka, 2025). However, the influence of such broadcasts is not uniform, as audience interpretation of media messages depends on factors such as exposure level, personal beliefs, social environment, and perceived credibility of the source.

Despite the increasing attention given to separatist communication in Nigeria, there is still limited empirical research focusing on how audiences in specific urban centres perceive and respond to Radio Biafra messages. Awka, the capital of Anambra State, represents an important setting for such investigation because of its political relevance, high literacy level, and exposure to diverse media channels. Understanding how residents of Awka are exposed to Radio Biafra, how they interpret its messages, and whether such exposure influences their attitudes toward agitation for self-rule is essential for explaining the broader relationship between broadcast media and political behaviour in the region.

This study therefore examines the extent of audience exposure to Radio Biafra messages, the perception of listener toward the content of the broadcasts, and the attitudinal effects of such exposure among residents of Awka metropolis. By focusing on exposure, perception, and attitude formation, the study contributes to existing literature on political communication, alternative media, and separatist movements



in Nigeria, while also providing empirical evidence on the influence of broadcast media in conflict-related communication contexts.

The purpose of this study is to examine the role of Radio Biafra broadcasts in shaping audience exposure, perception, and attitudinal disposition toward secessionist communication among residents of Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria. The study specifically sought to determine the level of exposure of the audience to Radio Biafra messages, assess their perception of the broadcast content, and evaluate the extent to which such messages influence public opinion and attitude toward self-rule agitation. To this end, three research questions guided this study:

1. What is the frequency of exposure of Awka residents to Radio Biafra messages?
2. Does exposure to Radio Biafra messages influence audience perception about self-agitation and self-rule struggle of IPOB?
3. What is the effectiveness of Radio Biafra messages on Awka audience?

Theoretical framework

This study is anchored on an integrated framework of Agenda-Setting Theory and Uses and Gratifications Theory, which together provides a comprehensive lens for understanding the effects of Radio Biafra broadcasts on audience exposure, perception, and attitudes in Awka, Anambra State. Agenda-Setting Theory, first articulated by McCombs and Shaw (1972), posits that the media play a critical role in shaping public perception by emphasizing certain issues, thereby determining what the audience considers important. In the context of this study, Radio Biafra's broadcasts, which highlight issues such as marginalization, self-rule, and secessionist aspirations, serve as agenda-setting mechanisms that influence the salience of these issues among the Awka audience. The repeated exposure of listeners to these thematic broadcasts can significantly shape their awareness, prioritization, and interpretation of political and socio-cultural concerns related to the Biafra movement (McCombs & Shaw, 2022; Tandoc & Maitra, 2020).

Complementing the agenda-setting perspective, the Uses and Gratifications Theory (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974) explains the active role of audiences in selecting media content to fulfill personal, social, or informational needs. This framework is particularly relevant for understanding why residents of Awka choose to engage with Radio Biafra despite the availability of alternative media platforms. Listeners may be motivated by the desire for socio-political information, cultural affirmation, or reinforcement of ideological beliefs, which in turn influences their attentiveness and interpretation of broadcast content. The theory also helps to explain differential exposure, as audience members selectively engage with messages that resonate with their existing perceptions and expectations (Katz et al., 2021).

The integration of these two theoretical perspectives provides a robust framework for analyzing the three key dimensions of this study. Firstly, audience exposure is examined through the lens of uses and gratifications, identifying the motivations that drive regular, occasional, or rare engagement with Radio Biafra broadcasts. Secondly, perception is explored through agenda-setting, revealing how repeated thematic emphasis shapes audience understanding of self-rule, secession, and marginalisation in southeastern Nigeria. Finally, attitudinal effects, including shifts in political orientation, awareness, and participation in socio-political discourse, are understood as the combined outcome of media-driven issue salience and the audience's purposive engagement with content. Prior research indicates that such integrated theoretical approaches are particularly effective in contexts where media serve both informational and mobilization functions in politically sensitive environments (Oso & Agbaje, 2019).

By applying this combined theoretical lens, this study situates Radio Biafra's influence within both media-centric and audience-centric perspectives, offering a nuanced understanding of how broadcast media shape awareness, perception, and attitudinal outcomes among residents of Awka, Anambra State. It



provides a framework for interpreting the results presented in the tables, linking frequency of exposure, attentiveness, and perception to potential behavioral or attitudinal changes within the audience, in line with the study's objectives and research questions

Method

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive survey research design to investigate the audience exposure, perception, and attitudinal effects of Radio Biafra on residents of Awka metropolis, Anambra State, Nigeria. The survey design was deemed appropriate as it allows for the systematic collection of data from a defined population to describe characteristics, attitudes, and behaviors of the target audience regarding secessionist communication (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Kumar, 2021).

Population of the Study

The target population for this study comprised adult residents of Awka metropolis, which encompasses both Awka South and Awka North Local Government Areas. According to the National Population Commission of Nigeria (2006), Awka South had a population of approximately 301,657, while Awka North had 129,991. Using a projected annual growth rate of 3.2%, the estimated population of Awka metropolis in 2023 is approximately 486,000 residents. The population includes men and women across diverse socio-economic backgrounds, all of whom have potential exposure to broadcast media, particularly Radio Biafra.

Sample Size and Sampling Technique

A sample size of 450 respondents was drawn from the target population using stratified random sampling to ensure representation across gender, age groups, educational levels, and occupation. The stratification was guided by official demographic estimates and local enumeration patterns. This approach ensures that the selected sample adequately reflects the diversity of Awka metropolis and enhances the generalisability of the findings (Israel, 2022).

Instrumentation

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire designed to address the study objectives. The questionnaire comprised closed-ended items, predominantly formatted on a four-point Likert scale (1 = Rarely, 2 = Occasionally, 3 = Sometimes, 4 = Regularly), to measure respondents' exposure, attentiveness, and perceptions of Radio Biafra messages. Additional sections captured socio-demographic information, access to radio sets, and evaluative opinions on the influence of Radio Biafra on secessionist attitudes.

Validity and Reliability of the Instrument

To ensure content validity, the questionnaire was reviewed by three experts in communication studies and adjusted based on their recommendations. Reliability was established through a pilot study involving 30 respondents in a neighboring town with similar socio-demographic characteristics. Using Cronbach's alpha, the instrument achieved a reliability coefficient of 0.81, indicating a high level of internal consistency (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011).

Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected through face-to-face administration of questionnaires by trained research assistants over a four-week period in March 2023. Respondents were informed about the study objectives and



provided consent before participation. Every effort was made to ensure ethical standards, including confidentiality, voluntary participation, and the right to withdraw at any time.

Method of Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics such as frequency distribution, percentages, and cross-tabulation to summarise the demographic characteristics of the respondents and their responses to the research questions. A four-point Likert scale was employed to measure the level of exposure to Radio Biafra messages as well as the degree of attentiveness of the audience to the broadcasts. The analysed data were presented in tables to ensure clarity, facilitate comparison, and enhance ease of interpretation.

As the study involved human participants, ethical considerations were strictly observed throughout the research process. The respondents were adequately informed about the purpose of the study, and their participation was entirely voluntary. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before the administration of the questionnaire, and they were assured of anonymity and confidentiality of the information provided. The respondents were also informed that the data collected would be used strictly for academic purposes, and no participant was required to disclose personal identifying information. These measures ensured that the study conformed to acceptable ethical standards for research involving human subjects.

Findings

Research Questions Analysis (4-Point Likert Scale)

Likert Scale Used: 1 = Never / No, 2 = Sometimes, 3 = Occasionally, 4 = Regularly / Yes

Research Question 1: *What is the frequency of exposure of Awka residents to Radio Biafra messages?*

Table 1

Item	1 (Never /No)	2 (Sometimes)	3 (Occasionally)	4 (Regularly /Yes)	Mean	SD
Do you have a radio set?	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	450 (100%)	4.00	0.00
Do you have access to Radio Biafra?	0 (0%)	71 (16%)	0 (0%)	379 (84%)	3.84	0.37
How often do you listen to Radio Biafra?	0 (0%)	62 (14%)	101 (22%)	287 (64%)	3.50	0.73
Do you pay attention to Radio Biafra messages?	0 (0%)	98 (22%)	0 (0%)	352 (78%)	3.56	0.60

The analysis in Table 1 shows that Awka residents have a high level of exposure to Radio Biafra messages. All the respondents indicated ownership of a radio set (100%, Mean = 4.00, SD = 0.00), suggesting that radio remains a widely available medium in the study area. A large majority respondents (84%, Mean = 3.84, SD = 0.37) reported that they have access to Radio Biafra, while listening frequency was also high, with 64% indicating that they listen regularly (Mean = 3.50, SD = 0.73). Similarly, 78% of the respondents stated that they pay regular attention to the station's messages (Mean = 3.56, SD = 0.60), showing that exposure is not only frequent but also accompanied by attentiveness. The mean scores for all the items are above the criterion mean of 2.50, indicating that exposure to Radio Biafra among residents



of Awka is generally high, thereby suggesting that the station has a strong reach and the capacity to influence its audience.

Research Question 2: *Does exposure to Radio Biafra messages influence audience perception about self-agitation and self-rule struggle of IPOB?*

Item	1 (Never/No)	2 (Sometim es)	3 (Occasion ly)	4 (Regularly/ Yes)	Mean	SD
Key agenda propagated by Radio Biafra	30 (7%)	41 (9%)	48 (11%)	331 (73%)	3.55	0.84
Does the Nigerian government welcome the modus operandi of Radio Biafra?	414 (92%)	36 (8%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1.08	0.27
Have messages changed your perception of radio in self-rule agitation?	159 (35%)	0 (0%)	101 (22%)	190 (43%)	3.04	1.12

The findings indicate that respondents clearly perceive Radio Biafra as a strong agenda-setting platform, with 73% agreeing that it regularly propagates its key messages (Mean = 3.55, SD = 0.84). At the same time, there is an overwhelming consensus that the Nigerian government does not welcome its mode of operation, as shown by the very low mean score of 1.08 (SD = 0.27). More importantly, the messages appear to have influenced how listeners view radio as a tool for self-rule agitation, with a substantial proportion reporting changed perceptions (Mean = 3.04, SD = 1.12). Overall, this suggests that Radio Biafra's broadcasts are not only widely recognized for promoting separatist agendas but also significantly shape audience perceptions of radio's role in political mobilization.

Research Question 3: *What is the effectiveness of Radio Biafra messages on Awka audience?*

Item	1 (Never /No)	2 (Sometime s)	3 (Occasion ally)	4 (Regularly/ Yes)	Mean	SD
Has Radio Biafra impacted the struggle for self-rule?	32 (7%)	89 (20%)	0 (0%)	329 (73%)	3.53	0.83
Can Biafra's dream be actualized through violence?	354 (79%)	79 (17%)	0 (0%)	17 (4%)	1.29	0.66

Effectiveness is high (mean = 3.53), but respondents overwhelmingly reject violence as a means (mean = 1.29).

Discussion

Findings showed a very high level of exposure to radio generally and to Radio Biafra specifically. All respondents indicated that they owned a radio set (Mean = 4.00, SD = 0.00), confirming that radio remains widely accessible in Awka metropolis. Furthermore, 84% reported having access to Radio Biafra,



producing a high mean score (Mean = 3.84, SD = 0.37), indicating frequent availability of the broadcast among the audience.

Listenership frequency also recorded a high mean value (Mean = 3.50, SD = 0.73), showing that most respondents listen regularly or occasionally to Radio Biafra. Attentiveness to the messages also produced a high mean score (Mean = 3.56, SD = 0.60), suggesting that exposure is not passive but involves conscious attention to the content.

These findings support the assumptions of the Uses and Gratifications Theory, which states that audiences actively select media that satisfy their needs for information, identity, and social belonging (Katz et al., 1974). In conflict-related communication, individuals are more likely to seek media messages that reinforce ethnic identity and political beliefs (Severin & Tankard, 2019).

The result also agrees with the findings of Okoro and Nwafor (2021), who reported high listenership of politically oriented radio broadcasts in Southeast Nigeria due to perceived marginalization and distrust of mainstream media. Similarly, Asemah and Edegoh (2020) found that radio remains the most influential medium in rural and semi-urban communities because of affordability and accessibility.

The findings revealed that respondents strongly believed that Radio Biafra propagates ideological messages related to Biafra restoration, marginalization, and separatism, with a high mean score (Mean = 3.55, SD = 0.84). This suggests that the audience clearly understands the political agenda of the broadcast.

Respondents overwhelmingly disagreed that the Nigerian government welcomes the activities of Radio Biafra (Mean = 1.08, SD = 0.27), indicating strong awareness that the station operates in opposition to state authority. This reflects the perception of Radio Biafra as an alternative or resistance medium.

Furthermore, the mean score of 3.04 (SD = 1.12) for perception change indicates that many respondents admitted that exposure to the broadcast has influenced their views about the role of radio in agitation and self-rule struggle.

The findings are consistent with the study of Edegoh et al. (2020), who found that exposure to ethnic-based radio messages significantly shapes public perception about political marginalization in Southeast Nigeria. Similarly, Nwabueze (2017) reported that audiences exposed to ideological broadcasts tend to develop stronger opinions about self-determination movements.

The results showed that respondents generally believed that Radio Biafra has had significant impact on the struggle for self-rule (Mean = 3.53, SD = 0.83), indicating high perceived effectiveness of the broadcast messages. This suggests that the station has succeeded in influencing public awareness and discussion about Biafra agitation.

However, the mean score for actualizing Biafra through violence was very low (Mean = 1.29, SD = 0.66), showing that although respondents acknowledge the influence of the broadcast, they largely reject violent methods. This indicates that exposure does not necessarily translate into support for extreme action.

The finding is consistent with Baran and Davis (2021), who argue that media influence is often strongest at the level of perception rather than behavior. Similarly, Umechukwu (2019) found that political broadcasts in Nigeria can shape attitudes without necessarily leading to violent participation.

The result also agrees with Okoro (2022), who observed that listeners of ideological radio programs often show increased awareness of political issues but remain cautious about supporting radical actions.



Conclusion and Recommendations

This study examined audience exposure, perception, and attitudinal effects of Radio Biafra broadcasts among residents of Awka metropolis, Anambra State, Nigeria. The findings revealed that radio remains a highly accessible medium, with all respondents indicating ownership of radio sets and a large majority reporting regular access to Radio Biafra broadcasts. This confirms the continued relevance of broadcast media as a powerful channel for political and ideological communication in Nigeria, particularly in regions where radio remains the most affordable and widely used medium.

The study further showed that exposure to Radio Biafra messages significantly influences audience perception regarding issues of marginalization, self-determination, and agitation for Biafra restoration. Respondents demonstrated clear awareness of the ideological position of the station and generally perceived it as an alternative voice challenging the Nigerian state.

However, while the broadcast was perceived as effective in shaping opinions and raising awareness, the findings also indicated that most respondents did not support violent approaches to achieving self-rule. This suggests that although Radio Biafra has strong persuasive influence at the level of perception, its messages do not necessarily translate into support for extreme or violent actions. The result confirms the position of framing theory that media messages shape interpretation of issues but do not always determine behaviour.

Overall, the study concludes that Radio Biafra functions as a significant alternative communication platform that shapes public opinion in Awka metropolis, but the audience remains selective in accepting the messages, especially when such messages conflict with personal safety, social stability, or national unity. The influence of the broadcast is therefore strong at the cognitive and attitudinal levels but limited at the behavioural level.

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

1. Government and media regulators should strengthen strategic alternative broadcasting in the Southeast. Since the findings reveal a very high level of exposure and regular listenership to Radio Biafra, there is a need for credible public and community radio platforms to provide balanced, timely, and trusted information that addresses issues of marginalization, governance, and national integration. This will help reduce overdependence on ideologically driven broadcasts as the primary source of political information.
2. Communication stakeholders should develop media literacy and peace-oriented audience education programmes. Because respondents demonstrated conscious attentiveness and admitted that the messages influenced their perception, universities, civil society groups, and media practitioners should promote critical media literacy initiatives that help audiences evaluate political and ideological messages objectively. Such programmes should emphasize peaceful civic engagement and discourage the manipulation of ethnic identity narratives.
3. Policy makers should address the socio-political grievances that drive high listenership and message acceptance.

The high perception of Radio Biafra as a relevant voice on marginalization and self-rule suggests that audience exposure is tied to unresolved feelings of exclusion and distrust in mainstream systems. Therefore, government institutions should adopt inclusive communication policies, dialogue mechanisms, and visible developmental interventions in the Southeast to reduce the appeal and persuasive power of separatist broadcasts



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