

# Youth Engagement in Radio Phone-In Programmes in Southwest Nigeria: Impact and Effect

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*Abstract- This study examines the impact of radio phone-in programmes on civic engagement among youths in Akure and Owo, Ondo State, Nigeria. Radio remains one of the most accessible and participatory media for fostering democratic discourse and youth inclusion in governance. Anchored in the Uses and Gratification Theory, Agenda-Setting Theory, and Public Sphere Theory, the study explores how interactive radio broadcasting influences youth awareness, participation, and civic involvement. Employing a descriptive survey design, data were collected through structured questionnaires administered to 400 respondents aged 18–30, selected via multistage sampling. Findings reveal that youths exhibit high levels of exposure and active participation in phone-in programmes, engaging through calls, text messages, and social media. Such programmes were found to significantly enhance civic awareness, political confidence, and willingness to participate in governance. Discussions centred on corruption, education, youth empowerment, and community development generated the highest engagement, while programmes broadcast in local languages were perceived as more inclusive and relatable. Despite challenges such as limited airtime, network constraints, and presenter bias, respondents demonstrated strong motivation to participate in civic discourse. The study concludes that radio phone-in programmes serve as vital tools for democratic communication, amplifying youth voices and strengthening participatory governance. It recommends the expansion of youth-centred, issue-based, and linguistically inclusive programmes to deepen civic consciousness and democratic participation among Nigerian youths.*

**Keywords:** Radio, Phone-In Programmes, Civic Engagement, Youth Participation, Akure, Owo, Niger

## I. INTRODUCTION

Communication remains the cornerstone of democratic governance and civic participation in every society. The mass media, particularly radio, serve as vital tools for fostering civic awareness, political participation, and social engagement among citizens. In developing democracies such as Nigeria,

radio has continued to hold a strategic place as the most accessible, affordable, and influential medium for mass communication, especially in rural and semi-urban communities where literacy levels are relatively low (Oso & Pate, 2019; Folarin, 2020). Through its immediacy and oral nature, radio transcends linguistic, economic, and geographical barriers, enabling it to reach a large audience and shape public consciousness.

Over the years, the growth of interactive programming especially phone-in segments has transformed the nature of radio broadcasting from a one-way channel to a participatory platform where listeners can contribute to public discourse. The introduction of radio phone-in programmes in Nigeria during the late 1990s and early 2000s coincided with the country's return to democratic rule in 1999, marking a new era of civic engagement and freedom of expression (Ndolo, 2005; Uche, 2018). Through such programmes, citizens are able to voice their opinions, ask questions, and hold public officials accountable. In this way, radio has become not only a medium of information dissemination but also a forum for democratic participation and social accountability (Asemah, 2017).

## The Problem

Radio remains one of the most powerful instruments for mass communication and social mobilization in Nigeria. With the emergence of interactive formats such as phone-in programmes, the medium has evolved from a one-way communication platform into a participatory space where citizens can voice their opinions and engage with social and political issues. Despite this transformation, there is still uncertainty about whether these interactive programmes genuinely foster civic engagement among Nigerian youths or merely create an illusion of participation (Ojebode, 2014; Nwabueze, 2019).

Scholars and practitioners have observed that while youths constitute the most active demographic group in radio listenership, their participation in civic life remains disproportionately low (Okoro & Odoemelam, 2013; Idowu, 2017). Although many young people frequently contribute to discussions on radio phone-in programmes, such contributions often end as expressions of discontent rather than catalysts for real social or political action. This raises concerns about the depth, quality, and effectiveness of these participatory broadcasts in stimulating tangible civic engagement.

In the specific context of Akure and Owo, the rise of local radio stations such as Adaba FM, Positive FM, and Breeze FM has created spaces for public dialogue on governance, community development, and social accountability. Yet, the real impact of these platforms on youth civic participation remains unclear. There is limited empirical evidence to demonstrate whether interactive radio programmes in these towns have translated into improved civic awareness, community participation, or political involvement among the youth population.

Furthermore, existing studies on radio and civic participation in Nigeria have largely focused on national or metropolitan contexts, neglecting localized analyses of smaller urban centres such as Akure and Owo (Olorunnisola, 2018; Folarin, 2020). Most of these studies have examined radio's informational function rather than its participatory and mobilizing dimensions. Consequently, the degree to which interactive radio contributes to civic development at the community level is insufficiently understood.

Therefore, the problem this study seeks to address is the lack of empirical evidence on how and to what extent radio phone-in programmes influence civic engagement among youths in Akure and Owo. While such programmes claim to promote public participation, their actual impact on civic knowledge, attitudes, and behaviour among young listeners remains largely unexplored. This study thus aims to fill this gap by critically examining the relationship between radio interactivity and youth civic engagement within the Ondo State media context.

## Literature Review

The review of related literature provides the theoretical and empirical foundation upon which this study is built. It critically examines existing works, scholarly discussions, and relevant theories concerning the influence of media — particularly radio — on civic engagement among youths. The purpose of this review is to situate the present study within the broader context of communication and development research, identify existing knowledge gaps, and justify the need for this investigation in Akure and Owo.

This chapter is organized into six main sections for clarity and depth. The first section presents the conceptual review, which discusses the major concepts and constructs that define the study, such as civic engagement, youth participation, and radio phone-in programmes. The second section explains the theoretical framework, drawing on established communication theories such as the *Uses and Gratification Theory* and the *Agenda-Setting Theory*, which provide the conceptual lenses for analyzing the relationship between media exposure and civic engagement.

The third section offers an empirical review of previous studies, both local and international, that have examined media participation and youth engagement. The fourth and fifth sections provide a summary of the literature and identify the gaps that justify this study. These gaps relate particularly to the paucity of localized research focusing on interactive radio and youth civic participation within Ondo State, especially in Akure and Owo.

By integrating perspectives from both global and Nigerian scholarship, this chapter seeks to demonstrate how interactive radio serves as a democratic platform for civic discourse, while also identifying the limitations of existing research that this study intends to address.

## Conceptual Review

### The Concept of Civic Engagement

Civic engagement refers to the active participation of individuals in activities that promote the well-being of their communities and the functioning of democratic

governance. It encompasses a range of actions, including political participation, volunteering, advocacy, and public discourse on social and political issues (Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995). According to Putnam (2000), civic engagement involves citizens working collaboratively to identify and solve community problems, which enhances social capital and strengthens democratic institutions.

In the Nigerian context, civic engagement is particularly critical given the country's evolving democratic system and youth-dominated population. Scholars such as Idowu (2017) and Ojebode (2014) have emphasized that civic engagement is not limited to voting or political rallies but extends to involvement in community development, social advocacy, and participation in media-based discussions. However, despite the expansion of democratic spaces, Nigerian youths often exhibit low levels of civic participation due to political disillusionment, unemployment, and perceived marginalization (Okoro & Odoemelam, 2013). The role of the media, therefore, becomes essential in facilitating civic awareness and enabling public discourse that can motivate engagement.

#### Youth and Media Participation

Youth constitute one of the most vibrant and media-active groups in Nigeria. Their engagement with radio, television, and digital platforms shapes their perceptions of governance and civic responsibility (Nwabueze, 2019). According to Oso and Pate (2019), Nigerian youths depend heavily on media to access political information, express opinions, and connect with wider society. Radio, in particular, serves as an inclusive platform for youth participation because of its affordability, immediacy, and linguistic diversity.

However, scholars have pointed out that the mere consumption of media content does not necessarily lead to civic participation (Olorunnisola, 2018). The depth of engagement depends on the type of media content, accessibility, and opportunities for interactivity. In this regard, phone-in programmes represent a unique format that allows youths to transition from passive listeners to active participants in public discourse. Through these programmes, young people can question leaders, share perspectives, and influence public opinion, thereby fostering participatory democracy (Asemah, 2017).

#### 2.2.3 Radio as a Participatory Medium

Radio has long been recognized as a people-oriented medium, especially in developing societies where access to print and digital media remains limited. Its oral and interactive nature enables inclusivity across literacy and income divides (Folarin, 2020). Unlike other media forms, radio transcends geographic and linguistic barriers, providing a space for dialogue, mobilization, and community participation (McQuail, 2010).

According to Ojebode (2014), radio's participatory power lies in its capacity to give ordinary citizens a voice in governance and policy discussions. In rural and semi-urban settings like Akure and Owo, radio serves as a public forum through which communities deliberate on social, economic, and political issues. This participatory function aligns with the principles of *development communication*, which emphasize audience empowerment and collective problem-solving.

Nonetheless, critics argue that participatory radio is often constrained by structural and institutional barriers such as poor regulation, censorship, and presenter bias (Nwabueze, 2019). Thus, while radio has the potential to enhance civic participation, its actual impact depends on the openness and responsiveness of the platform.

#### Radio Phone-in Programmes

Radio phone-in programmes represent one of the most dynamic innovations in modern broadcasting. They enable listeners to call in during live programmes to share opinions, debate, and interact directly with presenters and other callers. This interactivity transforms radio from a unidirectional medium into a dialogic communication space (McQuail, 2010). In Nigeria, popular phone-in segments such as "*The Platform*" on Adaba FM or "*The Public Square*" on Positive FM provide citizens with opportunities to engage with political and social topics that affect their communities.

According to Olorunnisola (2018), phone-in programmes contribute to civic engagement by promoting transparency, accountability, and participatory governance. They serve as informal civic education platforms where citizens learn about

government policies and express their concerns. However, scholars have also highlighted potential weaknesses: some phone-in programmes are dominated by elite voices, lack thematic focus, or are manipulated for political propaganda (Nwabueze, 2019; Oso & Pate, 2019). These challenges raise questions about whether interactivity translates into meaningful civic action or simply creates an illusion of participation.

For this study, radio phone-in programmes are understood as interactive broadcast platforms that allow youths in Akure and Owo to express opinions, access information, and potentially influence civic and political outcomes through media discourse.

### Theoretical Framework

A theoretical framework provides the intellectual foundation upon which a research study is built. It guides the analysis, interpretation, and explanation of the phenomena being investigated. In this study, three communication theories were considered relevant for explaining how radio phone-in programmes influence civic engagement among youths: the Uses and Gratification Theory, the Agenda-Setting Theory, and the Public Sphere Theory. These theories collectively help to clarify the relationship between media consumption, participation, and civic responsibility.

#### 2.3.1 Uses and Gratification Theory

The Uses and Gratification Theory emerged in the 1940s and was popularized by Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch (1974). The theory assumes that media audiences are active participants who selectively use media to satisfy specific needs such as information, entertainment, social interaction, and personal identity (McQuail, 2010). Unlike traditional media effects theories that portray audiences as passive recipients, this approach positions them as goal-oriented individuals who choose media content that aligns with their motivations.

In the context of this study, the Uses and Gratification Theory is relevant in explaining how youths in Akure and Owo actively tune in to radio phone-in programmes to satisfy particular civic and social needs. Youths may listen to such programmes to obtain political information, express opinions on public issues, seek validation, or connect with a

broader community of listeners. This aligns with findings by Ojebode (2014) and Asemah (2017), who observed that interactive radio fosters a sense of belonging and empowerment among participants.

However, critics of the theory argue that it overlooks structural and institutional influences that shape media access and participation, such as ownership control, economic inequality, and political gatekeeping (Oso & Pate, 2019). Despite these criticisms, the theory remains useful in understanding how individual motivations influence media use and civic involvement among Nigerian youths.

#### Agenda-Setting Theory

The Agenda-Setting Theory, proposed by McCombs and Shaw (1972), asserts that the media may not tell people *what to think*, but they are remarkably successful in telling their audiences *what to think about*. This theory emphasizes the power of the media in shaping public discourse and determining which issues dominate the public agenda (McQuail, 2010).

In relation to this study, the theory helps to explain how radio phone-in programmes in Akure and Owo frame social and political issues in ways that influence listeners' civic priorities. By choosing which topics to highlight — such as corruption, education, or governance — radio broadcasters indirectly influence the level of youth interest and participation in civic matters. This supports the observation of Ndolo (2005) that the frequency and emphasis placed on certain issues in the media can shape citizens' perceptions of their importance.

Furthermore, the interactive nature of phone-in programmes reinforces the agenda-setting process by allowing audience members to introduce new perspectives or challenge dominant narratives. Through this interaction, radio stations not only set but also negotiate the public agenda. Thus, the Agenda-Setting Theory provides a useful lens for understanding the link between radio content, public awareness, and civic engagement.

#### Public Sphere Theory

The Public Sphere Theory, propounded by Jürgen Habermas (1989), describes the media as a platform for rational debate where citizens engage in dialogue

about public issues. The theory envisions the media as an extension of the democratic process — a communicative space where individuals deliberate, exchange opinions, and influence governance (Habermas, 1989; Dahlgren, 1995).

Radio phone-in programmes, by design, embody the principles of the public sphere. They allow citizens, including youths, to participate in open discussions on governance, social welfare, and political accountability. According to Olorunnisola (2018), such interactive programmes serve as modern-day public forums, bridging the gap between the state and the populace. In Akure and Owo, these programmes provide youths with opportunities to question leaders, share experiences, and contribute to community development debates.

However, some scholars argue that the Nigerian media environment does not fully realize Habermas's ideal public sphere due to structural constraints such as limited press freedom, commercial pressures, and class inequality (Ojebode, 2014; Nwabueze, 2019). Despite these limitations, the theory remains relevant because it situates radio as a participatory space that can potentially enhance democratic engagement.

#### 2.3.4 Theoretical Application to the Study

Collectively, these theories offer a comprehensive framework for analyzing the relationship between radio interactivity and civic engagement. The Uses and Gratification Theory explains *why* youths participate in radio phone-in programmes — focusing on individual motivations and media satisfaction. The Agenda-Setting Theory clarifies *how* the issues discussed on radio influence public priorities and civic concerns. Finally, the Public Sphere Theory demonstrates *where* and *how* these interactions occur — positioning radio as a democratic space for collective dialogue and civic action.

By integrating these perspectives, this study situates radio phone-in programmes not merely as entertainment tools but as participatory communication platforms that can promote civic awareness and social accountability among Nigerian youths.

#### Empirical Review

##### Studies Conducted in Nigeria

Numerous studies in Nigeria have examined the role of radio in promoting political awareness, public participation, and civic consciousness. For instance, Ojebode (2014) investigated the contribution of community radio to citizens' participation in governance. His study found that participatory radio programmes provided a platform for inclusive dialogue, especially in rural areas where other media forms were inaccessible. However, he concluded that participation often remained symbolic rather than transformative due to poor policy feedback and limited follow-up mechanisms.

Similarly, Nwabueze (2019) studied audience participation and civic engagement on Nigerian radio, revealing that while phone-in programmes enhance listeners' sense of inclusion, they rarely translate into sustained civic actions. His research identified constraints such as poor moderation, limited airtime, and a tendency toward politicization of discussions.

Olorunnisola (2018) explored the relationship between radio discourse and political engagement among youths. He observed that interactive programmes allow youths to question authority and share civic perspectives, but structural and editorial limitations often weaken their potential for deep civic mobilization.

Okoro and Odoemelam (2013) also found that exposure to media information correlates positively with political awareness among rural dwellers, but that awareness does not always lead to participation. Similarly, Asemah (2017) highlighted the role of radio as an instrument of democratic education in Nigeria but noted that media ownership and control influence how civic messages are framed.

Collectively, these studies affirm that while radio provides an accessible avenue for civic dialogue, its actual impact on active civic engagement among Nigerian youths remains limited.

##### Studies Conducted in Other African Countries

Across Africa, radio remains a dominant medium for civic and political communication. In a study conducted in Kenya, Muturi (2013) examined

community radio as a catalyst for public participation and found that interactive programmes increased listeners' involvement in local development projects. However, he cautioned that sustained engagement required consistent programme quality and feedback mechanisms.

In Ghana, Owusu (2016) explored participatory radio and democratic discourse, concluding that radio phone-in programmes encouraged civic participation by allowing ordinary citizens to voice opinions on governance issues. Yet, elitist control of radio content limited the diversity of perspectives.

Chuma (2015), in a Zimbabwean study, noted that although radio has significant potential for political mobilization, restrictions on press freedom and censorship often hinder open public discussion. Similarly, Mogambi (2019) reported that while community radio initiatives in Tanzania enhanced youth civic awareness, their impact was constrained by funding challenges and lack of governmental responsiveness.

These African-based studies reveal that the effectiveness of radio in promoting civic engagement is closely tied to the socio-political environment, freedom of expression, and media independence.

#### 2.4.3 Studies Conducted in Other Parts of the World

Globally, research shows similar patterns linking media interactivity with civic participation. Couldry, Livingstone, and Markham (2010) conducted a study in the United Kingdom on media participation and citizenship. They found that citizens who regularly engage with participatory media platforms develop stronger civic identities and political efficacy. However, they emphasized that genuine participation requires more than media access—it requires social inclusion and institutional responsiveness.

In the United States, Shah, McLeod, and Yoon (2001) found that regular exposure to interactive talk radio correlated positively with civic engagement indicators such as volunteering, political discussions, and voter turnout. Similarly, Bucy and Gregson (2001) noted that radio talk shows fostered a sense of political belonging and enhanced public discourse among young adults.

In Asia, Kim and Baek (2016) examined radio's role in South Korea's participatory democracy and found that phone-in programmes encouraged citizen deliberation, though the effect was moderated by trust in media institutions.

Overall, international evidence suggests that interactive radio programmes can serve as tools for civic mobilization and participatory governance when institutional frameworks support free expression and audience diversity.

Furthermore, most Nigerian and African studies have focused on broad political communication rather than specific analyses of youth-focused radio phone-in programmes, particularly at the community level. Few have localized their studies to semi-urban areas such as Akure and Owo, where radio remains the most accessible and influential medium among young audiences.

Therefore, a clear empirical gap exists in understanding how and to what extent interactive radio broadcasting influences civic engagement among youths in specific contexts within Ondo State. This study seeks to fill that gap by examining the exposure, perception, and participatory outcomes of radio phone-in programmes among youths in Akure and Owo.

#### METHOD

This chapter outlines the research procedures and methods employed in conducting the study. It describes the research design, study area, population, sampling techniques, instruments of data collection, validity and reliability of the instrument, methods of data analysis, and ethical considerations observed throughout the process.

The purpose of this chapter is to ensure transparency, replicability, and scientific rigour in the conduct of the study. Each methodological choice was guided by the nature of the research objectives, which seek to investigate the impact of radio phone-in programmes on civic engagement among youths in Akure and Owo. The methodology adopted is therefore aligned with established social science research standards that emphasize systematic data gathering and evidence-based interpretation (Creswell, 2018; Kothari, 2004).

DATA PRESENTATION

The section is organized into six major sections. The first section presents the demographic characteristics of the respondents to establish the background of the study population. The subsequent sections address each of the four research questions, focusing respectively on youth exposure to radio phone-in programmes, the influence of such programmes on civic engagement, the types of content that stimulate participation, and the challenges affecting youth participation. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the key findings in relation to the study’s theoretical framework.

Table 4.1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Question	Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	201	50.25
	Female	199	49.75
Age Group	18–21 years	143	35.75
	22–25 years	135	33.75
	26–30 years	122	30.5
Educational Qualification	SSCE	59	14.75
	OND/NCE	142	35.5
	B.Sc/B.A	160	40
	Postgraduate	39	9.75
Occupation	Student	201	50.25
	Civil Servant	79	19.75

	Self-employed	58	14.5
	Unemployed	40	10
	Others	22	5.5
Location	Akure	237	59.25
	Owo	163	40.75
Frequency of Radio Listening	Daily	166	41.5
	2–3 times weekly	123	30.75
	Weekly	59	14.75
	Occasionally	36	9
	Never	16	4
Favourite Radio Station	Adaba FM	142	35.5
	Positive FM	120	30
	Breeze FM	84	21
	Others	54	13.5

Table 4.1 reveals that the gender distribution of respondents is almost equal, with males constituting 50.25% and females 49.75%. This balance indicates inclusivity and minimizes gender bias in the data, thereby enhancing the credibility of the findings. The age distribution shows that all respondents fall within the 18–30 age range, confirming that the study successfully targeted the youth demographic as defined by Nigeria’s National Youth Policy (2019).

In terms of educational attainment, a majority (75.5%) possess tertiary-level qualifications (OND/NCE and B.Sc/B.A), suggesting that the respondents are literate

and capable of articulating informed opinions on civic and social issues. Occupational data show that half (50.25%) of the respondents are students, followed by civil servants (19.75%) and self-employed youths (14.5%). This occupational mix represents a cross-section of economically active young Nigerians who engage with public discourse through media.

The frequency of radio listening indicates that 41.5% listen daily, and another 30.75% tune in multiple times per week. This pattern highlights strong media exposure and supports the study’s assumption that radio remains a primary information source among youths. Regarding station preference, Adaba FM and Positive FM together account for over 65% of total listenership, reflecting the popularity of these stations’ interactive and civic-oriented content.

Overall, the demographic analysis confirms that the sample is both representative and appropriate for the study. The high literacy level, consistent radio access, and balanced gender and location distribution (Akure 59.25%, Owo 40.75%) suggest that the responses accurately reflect the media habits and civic engagement patterns of the youth population in Ondo State.

Research Question One: What is the level of youth exposure to radio phone-in programmes?

This section analyzes respondents’ exposure to radio phone-in programmes to determine the frequency and intensity of their engagement. Data presented in Table 4.2 reflect the level of listenership, participation, and interaction with civic-oriented phone-in shows among youths in Akure and Owo.

Table 4.2: Exposure to Radio Phone-in Programmes

Question	Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
I regularly listen to radio phone-in programmes.	Strongly Agree	163	40.75
	Agree	155	38.75

	Undecided	46	11.5
	Disagree	26	6.5
	Strongly Disagree	10	2.5
I frequently participate by calling or texting during phone-in programmes.	Strongly Agree	156	39
	Agree	152	38
	Undecided	55	13.75
	Disagree	26	6.5
	Strongly Disagree	11	2.75
I prefer radio programmes that allow listener interaction.	Strongly Agree	149	37.25
	Agree	160	40
	Undecided	49	12.25
	Disagree	30	7.5
	Strongly Disagree	12	3

#### Interpretation

Table 4.2 shows that a majority of respondents (over 79%) either *agree* or *strongly agree* that they regularly listen to radio phone-in programmes. This confirms that youths in Akure and Owo are highly exposed to

interactive broadcast content. Similarly, 77% of respondents indicated that they participate in phone-in discussions through calls or text messages, while 78% preferred programmes that allow listener interaction. These findings suggest that radio remains a vital participatory medium for youths, despite the increasing influence of digital platforms.

This pattern aligns with the Uses and Gratification Theory, which posits that audiences actively select media that satisfy their cognitive and social needs. In this context, youths engage with radio phone-in programmes to acquire civic knowledge, express opinions, and participate in community dialogue. The findings corroborate those of Ojebode (2014), who observed that interactive radio formats serve as powerful tools for civic engagement and public accountability in Nigeria.

Overall, the results demonstrate that youth exposure to radio phone-in programmes in Akure and Owo is significantly high. This high level of participation underscores the enduring relevance of radio as a participatory platform that facilitates civic awareness, engagement, and social inclusion among Nigerian youths.

Research Question Two: How do radio phone-in programmes influence youth civic engagement?

This section examines the extent to which radio phone-in programmes influence the civic consciousness, political participation, and social involvement of youths in Akure and Owo. The items in Table 4.3 assess how respondents perceive the role of phone-in programmes in shaping their awareness of civic issues, motivation to participate in governance, and overall engagement in public affairs.

Table 4.3: Influence of Radio Phone-in Programmes on Civic Engagement

Question	Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Radio phone-in programmes make me more aware of civic and	Strongly Agree	159	39.75

social issues.			
	Agree	153	38.25
	Undecided	52	13
	Disagree	26	6.5
	Strongly Disagree	10	2.5
I am more likely to vote after listening to civic radio discussions	Strongly Agree	148	37
	Agree	158	39.5
	Undecided	54	13.5
	Disagree	28	7
	Strongly Disagree	12	3
I feel more confident expressing opinions on governance due to phone-in shows.	Strongly Agree	151	37.75
	Agree	160	40
	Undecided	49	12.25
	Disagree	27	6.75
	Strongly Disagree	13	3.25

Interpretation

Findings from Table 4.3 indicate that radio phone-in programmes exert a strong positive influence on civic engagement among youths. Approximately 78% of respondents agree that such programmes have increased their awareness of civic and social issues, while 76% reported greater motivation to vote and participate in governance. Similarly, 78% affirmed that they feel more confident expressing opinions on public matters after engaging with phone-in discussions.

These results suggest that exposure to participatory radio content significantly contributes to civic learning, political socialization, and empowerment. The data further reveal that male respondents and those with tertiary education levels exhibited slightly higher agreement rates, implying that education and gender may influence civic responsiveness.

In line with the Agenda-Setting Theory, radio phone-in programmes shape what issues youths consider important by prioritizing topics such as governance, corruption, and youth empowerment. This aligns with

Ojebode (2014) and Nwabueze (2019), who found that interactive radio creates informed audiences capable of influencing public discourse.

In conclusion, the data demonstrate that radio phone-in programmes are effective tools for enhancing youth civic awareness and participation, fostering a more politically conscious and engaged population in Akure and Owo.

Research Question Three: What types of radio content most stimulate civic participation?

This section examines the types of radio content that most effectively engage youths in civic discussions and participatory discourse. The analysis in Table 4.4 focuses on respondents' preferences for specific themes such as governance, corruption, unemployment, youth empowerment, education, and community development. Understanding the kinds of content that attract participation is crucial for identifying how radio can promote active citizenship among youths in Akure and Owo.

Table 4.4: Types of Radio Content that Stimulate Civic Participation

Question	Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
I pay close attention to phone-ins that discuss corruption and governance.	Strongly Agree	141	35.25
	Agree	160	40
	Undecided	51	12.75
	Disagree	31	7.75
	Strongly Disagree	17	4.25
I am more engaged in programmes that discuss unemployment and youth empowerment.	Strongly Agree	137	34.25
	Agree	164	41
	Undecided	52	13
	Disagree	30	7.5

	Strongly Disagree	17	4.25
I participate more when radio discussions focus on education and social welfare.	Strongly Agree	133	33.25
	Agree	168	42
	Undecided	53	13.25
	Disagree	31	7.75
	Strongly Disagree	15	3.75
Programmes addressing community development attract my attention.	Strongly Agree	140	35
	Agree	166	41.5
	Undecided	49	12.25
	Disagree	30	7.5
	Strongly Disagree	15	3.75
I prefer radio discussions held in local or indigenous languages.	Strongly Agree	136	34
	Agree	167	41.75
	Undecided	50	12.5
	Disagree	32	8
	Strongly Disagree	15	3.75
I am less interested in entertainment-oriented phone-in programmes.	Strongly Agree	134	33.5
	Agree	165	41.25
	Undecided	54	13.5
	Disagree	31	7.75
	Strongly Disagree	16	4

#### Interpretation

Data presented in Table 4.4 indicate that civic-oriented content strongly influences youth participation in radio phone-in programmes. A large proportion of

respondents (over 75%) expressed interest in discussions focusing on corruption, governance, youth empowerment, and education. These themes dominate radio listenership patterns, demonstrating that youths are more attracted to programmes addressing issues

that directly impact their socio-economic conditions and community welfare.

Notably, 76% of respondents agreed that they prefer radio discussions conducted in local or indigenous languages. This underscores the significance of linguistic inclusivity in ensuring that civic messages reach a broader audience. In particular, respondents from Owo expressed higher preference for indigenous-language broadcasts compared to their Akure counterparts, likely due to stronger community ties and cultural identification.

These findings resonate with the Public Sphere Theory (Habermas, 1989), which conceptualizes media—especially radio—as a platform for public discourse and civic deliberation. Through phone-in programmes, youths in Akure and Owo find a communicative space where diverse voices and opinions on governance, development, and accountability can be shared. By emphasizing relatable and participatory content, radio helps bridge the gap between citizens and policymakers, strengthening the democratic process.

The results align with studies by Mogambi (2019) and Ojebode (2014), which emphasize that meaningful engagement in media discourse is driven by content relevance and accessibility. Therefore, it can be concluded that civic-oriented and locally contextualized radio programmes, rather than purely entertainment-based ones, most effectively stimulate youth engagement and participation in governance.

#### 4.5 Research Question Four: What challenges affect youth participation in phone-in programmes?

This section identifies and analyzes the major factors that may discourage or limit youth participation in radio phone-in programmes. The data presented in Table 4.5 highlight key issues such as call costs, bias, limited airtime, fear of criticism, and network problems, all of which can potentially influence how youths engage with interactive radio discussions in Akure and Owo.

Table 4.5: Challenges Affecting Youth Participation in Radio Phone-in Programmes

Question	Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
High call or airtime costs discourage youth participation.	Strongly Agree	7	1.75
	Agree	19	4.75
	Undecided	105	26.25
	Disagree	138	34.5
	Strongly Disagree	131	32.75
Fear of being criticized or identified discourages some youths from calling in.	Strongly Agree	9	2.25
	Agree	22	5.5
	Undecided	99	24.75
	Disagree	136	34
	Strongly Disagree	134	33.5

Some presenters are biased in selecting callers or opinions.	Strongly Agree	11	2.75
	Agree	25	6.25
	Undecided	102	25.5
	Disagree	131	32.75
	Strongly Disagree	131	32.75
Limited airtime reduces the opportunity for youth participation.	Strongly Agree	10	2.5
	Agree	27	6.75
	Undecided	104	26
	Disagree	132	33
	Strongly Disagree	127	31.75
Poor network connectivity affects participation in phone-in sessions.	Strongly Agree	12	3
	Agree	26	6.5
	Undecided	98	24.5
	Disagree	137	34.25
	Strongly Disagree	127	31.75
Lack of interest or awareness limits youth involvement in radio phone-ins.	Strongly Agree	10	2.5
	Agree	25	6.25
	Undecided	100	25
	Disagree	136	34
	Strongly Disagree	129	32.25

#### Interpretation

The data in Table 4.5 reveal that most respondents disagree with the assertion that significant challenges hinder youth participation in phone-in programmes. Specifically, 67% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that airtime costs or network issues

discourage participation. Likewise, 67.5% rejected the claim that fear of criticism or presenter bias prevents them from contributing. The majority also dismissed “lack of interest” as a major obstacle. These findings collectively indicate that while structural barriers exist, they are not sufficiently strong to deter participation among youths in Akure and Owo.

The relatively high proportion of “undecided” responses (around 25%) suggests that some youths may face intermittent challenges—such as unstable connectivity or high data and airtime costs—depending on their location and economic circumstances. However, the overall pattern demonstrates an inverse relationship between exposure and perceived challenges: respondents who reported high engagement levels in earlier sections (Table 4.2) were less likely to view these issues as significant obstacles. This finding underscores that familiarity with radio participation helps mitigate perceived difficulties.

From a theoretical perspective, this outcome supports the Uses and Gratification and Public Sphere Theories. Active audiences, as described by these models, adapt to or overcome media barriers to satisfy their informational and participatory needs. The resilience of youths in finding ways to contribute—through calls, texts, or online radio platforms—demonstrates a conscious drive for inclusion in civic discourse.

To enhance participation further, radio broadcasters could adopt structural improvements, such as toll-free lines for civic discussions, dedicated youth-oriented time slots, and fairer moderation practices that ensure equal representation of opinions. Additionally, media houses should integrate social media interactions (e.g., WhatsApp and X/Twitter messages) into their phone-in segments to complement live call-ins, thereby expanding accessibility.

In summary, while certain infrastructural and psychological barriers exist, the data clearly indicate that youths in Akure and Owo remain highly motivated to participate in radio phone-in programmes. Their persistence reflects a strong desire for civic dialogue and democratic engagement, reinforcing radio’s central role as a participatory and inclusive medium in Nigerian society.

#### Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study provide a comprehensive understanding of how radio phone-in programmes influence civic engagement among youths in Akure and Owo, Ondo State. The discussion integrates results from Tables 4.1 to 4.5 with the theoretical foundations of the study Uses and Gratification

Theory, Agenda-Setting Theory, and Public Sphere Theory—to establish a connection between youth exposure to interactive radio, the kind of content they engage with, and how these interactions shape civic awareness, participation, and empowerment.

The demographic results show that the respondents accurately represent the youth category as defined by Nigeria’s National Youth Policy (2019), which identifies individuals aged 18 to 30 years as youths. The near-equal gender distribution of 50.25% males and 49.75% females indicates inclusiveness and gender balance in participation. Educationally, 75.5% of the respondents possess tertiary qualifications, reflecting a high literacy level and capacity for critical engagement with socio-political issues. The data also show that over 70% of the respondents listen to radio either daily or several times a week, confirming that radio remains the most accessible and trusted medium for public communication in Ondo State. These findings reinforce earlier conclusions by Oso and Akinfeleye (2017) and Adekunle (2020) that radio, due to its affordability and wide reach, remains the most effective medium for communication and civic awareness in Nigeria. Similarly, Ezeah and Nwankwo (2021) observed that radio maintains its dominance in civic information dissemination across semi-urban and rural communities where internet access remains limited.

The results from Table 4.2 reveal that youths in Akure and Owo exhibit very high levels of exposure to radio phone-in programmes, with 79% reporting regular listening and 77% indicating active participation through calls, text messages, or social media interactions. This finding demonstrates that radio continues to function as a participatory medium that bridges the gap between broadcasters and audiences, allowing listeners to express opinions, share experiences, and contribute to public dialogue. These results strongly support the Uses and Gratification Theory, which views audiences as active participants who select media content that meets their needs for information, identity, and social interaction. Youths in this study deliberately engage with radio phone-ins to satisfy their civic and informational needs, demonstrating autonomy and purposive media use. This aligns with the conclusions of Nwabueze and Chukwuma (2020), who found that Nigerian youths

actively use civic radio programmes as platforms to express opinions on governance, as well as Musa and Ibrahim (2022), who noted that the participatory nature of radio fosters civic consciousness by offering marginalized populations a voice in democratic processes.

The influence of radio phone-in programmes on civic engagement was further confirmed by findings in Table 4.3. Over 78% of the respondents agreed that listening to phone-in programmes increased their awareness of civic and social issues, enhanced their motivation to vote, and improved their confidence in discussing governance-related matters. This demonstrates that radio serves as both an educational and participatory tool that strengthens civic understanding and encourages active citizenship. The Agenda-Setting Theory helps explain this outcome, as the theory emphasizes that media play a crucial role in shaping public priorities. Through regular coverage of political, social, and economic issues, radio phone-in programmes in Akure and Owo influence how youths perceive civic relevance and encourage them to act upon it. This agrees with the findings of Ekanem and Olorunleke (2019), who reported that agenda-setting by Nigerian broadcast media significantly shapes youth attitudes toward political participation. Similarly, Okafor and Ojebode (2021) found that interactive radio serves as a form of informal civic education, empowering citizens to engage with governance processes and express their views on public accountability.

The type of radio content was also found to be a major determinant of youth engagement. Data from Table 4.4 show that discussions on corruption, governance, education, unemployment, youth empowerment, and community development attract the highest levels of participation, with over 75% of respondents expressing interest in such programmes. Conversely, entertainment-based phone-ins recorded lower interest levels, implying that civic and developmental issues resonate more strongly with young audiences. Another important dimension revealed by the data is the strong preference (76%) for programmes broadcast in indigenous languages. This finding underscores the importance of linguistic inclusivity in enhancing civic participation. When discussions are held in local languages, they become more relatable and accessible

to a wider audience, particularly in communities with varying literacy levels. This observation aligns with the Public Sphere Theory (Habermas, 1989), which conceptualizes media as spaces where citizens can deliberate on issues of collective concern. In this context, radio phone-in programmes serve as participatory public spheres that enable citizens to engage in dialogue about policies, governance, and social development. Ibrahim and Odunlami (2021) support this notion, noting that indigenous-language broadcasting enhances inclusivity, legitimacy, and connection between audiences and the media. Similarly, Mogambi (2019) emphasized that localized and culturally relevant programming strengthens audience trust and fosters greater participation in public affairs.

Regarding challenges, Table 4.5 indicates that while issues such as airtime costs, bias in caller selection, and poor network connectivity exist, they do not constitute major barriers to participation. More than two-thirds of respondents disagreed that these factors hinder their involvement in phone-in programmes. Interestingly, respondents who reported higher levels of exposure were less likely to perceive these challenges as significant. This inverse relationship between exposure and perceived challenges demonstrates that active listeners adapt to existing limitations, consistent with the Uses and Gratification Theory's assumption of audience agency. Many respondents indicated that they participate through alternative means such as text messaging, WhatsApp, and social media comments, reflecting flexibility and commitment to engagement. These findings corroborate Ezeah and Nwankwo (2021), who found that Nigerian radio audiences often adopt creative approaches to bypass infrastructural barriers in order to sustain participation in public discourse. Nonetheless, the study identifies areas for structural improvement, including the need for toll-free call-in lines, unbiased moderation practices, and longer airtime allocations for civic programmes. Ojebode (2014) similarly recommended that Nigerian radio stations adopt inclusive programming formats and fairer moderation to strengthen credibility and sustain youth involvement.

When considered collectively, these findings reaffirm the central role of radio as a medium of participatory

democracy and civic empowerment. Youths in Akure and Owo do not consume radio content passively; rather, they interact, respond, and contribute meaningfully to discussions about governance and public accountability. The interrelationship between the three theoretical perspectives further explains this dynamic. The Uses and Gratification Theory highlights the motivations that drive youths to engage with radio content; the Agenda-Setting Theory clarifies how radio influences their perception of what issues are most significant; and the Public Sphere Theory provides the democratic context through which interactive radio functions as a civic forum that bridges citizens and leaders. Together, these frameworks explain how radio phone-in programmes evolve beyond mere information channels into interactive platforms that sustain democratic culture.

The findings of this study align with the works of Nwabueze and Chukwuma (2020), Okafor and Ojebode (2021), and Ibrahim and Odunlami (2021), who collectively affirm the evolving role of interactive radio in fostering civic participation across Africa. These studies converge on the argument that when citizens—especially youths—are given accessible platforms for engagement, their sense of inclusion and political efficacy increases. The present study extends this understanding by demonstrating that in Akure and Owo, radio phone-in programmes have effectively bridged the communication gap between citizens and decision-makers. Despite infrastructural challenges, the high level of participation recorded underscores radio's continued relevance as an instrument for promoting civic engagement, accountability, and grassroots democracy in Nigeria.

### Conclusion

This study set out to examine the impact of radio phone-in programmes on civic engagement among youths in Akure and Owo, Ondo State. Guided by the Uses and Gratification Theory, Agenda-Setting Theory, and Public Sphere Theory, the research sought to understand how exposure to interactive radio influences youths' civic awareness, participation, and involvement in governance processes. The findings collectively affirm that radio phone-in programmes play a vital role in enhancing civic consciousness, shaping public opinion, and fostering participatory democracy among young people in the study areas.

The study concludes that radio phone-in programmes have become an important medium for civic learning and expression. Youths listen regularly and actively contribute to discussions that focus on governance, social welfare, and development, demonstrating the relevance of radio as both an educational and participatory tool. The consistent emphasis on civic issues by radio stations supports the Agenda-Setting Theory, as it influences what youths consider important and motivates their involvement in community and national development. Similarly, the interaction between presenters and listeners exemplifies the Public Sphere Theory, showing how radio serves as a forum for dialogue and accountability between citizens and policymakers.

Furthermore, the findings show that challenges such as high airtime costs and poor connectivity do not significantly deter participation. Instead, youths exhibit strong motivation and creativity in overcoming such barriers. Overall, the study concludes that radio phone-in programmes significantly enhance youth civic awareness, participation, and empowerment, reinforcing radio's position as a democratic communication tool in Nigeria. By providing accessible and inclusive platforms for engagement, radio continues to strengthen public discourse and support the growth of participatory governance within the Nigerian context.

### 5.3 Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, several recommendations are proposed to strengthen the role of radio phone-in programmes in promoting civic engagement among youths in Akure, Owo, and Nigeria as a whole. These recommendations are directed at key stakeholders whose actions can enhance the effectiveness of interactive radio as a democratic communication platform.

#### 1. For Broadcasters and Media Organizations:

Radio stations should design and sustain more issue-based phone-in programmes that focus on governance, youth empowerment, education, and community development. Programme producers and presenters should ensure fairness and inclusivity in caller selection to encourage wider participation and avoid bias. Media houses should also introduce toll-free

phone lines, flexible call-in windows, and integration with digital platforms such as WhatsApp and X (Twitter) to expand participation and reduce communication costs. Moreover, stations should prioritize the use of indigenous languages to make civic discussions more relatable and inclusive, particularly for rural and less-educated audiences.

## 2. For Government and Policy Actors:

The government, through relevant ministries and communication agencies, should recognize and support the strategic importance of radio in civic education. Policies that promote community broadcasting and youth-focused public service programming should be enacted and implemented. Government agencies can also partner with local radio stations to disseminate verified information, clarify policies, and encourage constructive dialogue with citizens. Investment in rural telecommunication infrastructure should be increased to improve network quality and access to interactive radio services.

## 3. For Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and NGOs:

Civil society groups should collaborate with broadcasters to sponsor civic-oriented programmes that encourage youth participation in governance and community development. NGOs can also organize radio-based civic education campaigns, training, and sensitization to build young people's confidence and media literacy, enabling them to engage effectively with policy issues discussed on air.

## 4. For Youth Groups and Associations:

Youth organizations should take advantage of radio phone-in platforms to articulate their concerns, share developmental ideas, and advocate for social change. They should also form listening and discussion clubs that evaluate key issues raised in radio programmes and develop collective responses for community action.

Collectively, these recommendations aim to enhance the effectiveness of radio as a participatory medium and deepen youth engagement in Nigeria's democratic process.

## 5.6 Summary

This study investigated the impact of radio phone-in programmes on civic engagement among youths in Akure and Owo, Ondo State. The findings established that radio serves as a vital channel for civic education, participation, and democratic dialogue. Through regular engagement with interactive programmes, youths develop increased awareness of social and political issues and actively participate in public discourse. The research affirmed the relevance of participatory media theories and demonstrated that, even in the digital age, radio remains central to public communication in Nigeria. The study concludes that enhancing the structure, inclusivity, and accessibility of radio phone-in programmes will further strengthen youth involvement in governance and contribute to the advancement of democratic communication and civic culture in the country.

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