

RADIO BROADCAST ENGAGEMENT AND PUBLIC RESPONSE TO EMERGENCY RULE: ANALYSING THE PROTEST DISCOURSE IN RIVERS STATE, NIGERIA

¹Ire, Ebele Stella (PhD) and ²Eke, Chigozi (PhD)

Email: ebere.ire@uniport.edu.ng / chigozi_eke@uniport.edu.ng

¹Department of Broadcasting, University of Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria

²Department of Linguistics and Communication Studies, University of Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15295355>

Abstract: This study was an examination of radio broadcast engagement and public response to emergency rule: analysing the protest discourse in Rivers State, Nigeria. Uses and gratifications and framing theories were anchored in this study. This study adopted a qualitative research method utilizing face-to-face interviews. The target population comprised residents of Port Harcourt, Obio/Akpor and Oyigbo Local Government Areas, three urban centres notably affected by protest activities during the emergency rule estimated at a combined population of approximately 3.1 million people according to the National Population Commission (NPC, 2006, projected to 2023). A purposive sample size of 30 participants was selected, including radio listeners, civil society members, youth leaders, and political commentators who were active consumers of radio content and were knowledgeable about the political climate. The purposive sampling technique was employed to ensure that participants with rich, relevant insights were selected based on their exposure to radio broadcasts and their involvement in or observation of protest-related events. Data was collected through semi-structured, in-depth, face-to-face interviews. Thematic analysis was used to interpret the data, identifying recurring patterns, dominant narratives, and underlying sentiments related to radio engagement and protest discourse. The study found that radio broadcasts significantly sensitized the public during the emergency rule in Rivers State by simplifying complex government pronouncements, offering timely and accessible updates, and incorporating diverse expert voices that clarified the implications of the political situation, thereby empowering citizens with knowledge of their rights and fostering a sense of calm and resilience. The study concluded that radio broadcasts sensitized the public during the emergency rule is that radio plays an essential role in crisis communication by providing the public with timely, accessible, and reliable information, helping to mitigate uncertainty and empower citizens with knowledge during periods of political instability. The study recommended that radio stations should be used more strategically for crisis communication to ensure the public receives accurate and timely information during political instability.

Keywords: Radio Broadcast, Engagement and Public Response, Emergency Rule, Protest Discourse, Rivers State

Introduction

In times of political upheaval, communication channels, particularly radio, play a pivotal role in shaping public discourse and influencing civic behaviour. In Rivers State, the federal government's declaration of an emergency rule sparked an influx of media coverage and diverse public reactions. Radio, long considered the most accessible medium in Nigeria, has become instrumental in voicing citizens' responses to unfolding governance challenges (Ojebuyi & Salawu, 2020). It not only serves as a source of information but also as a space for political participation, particularly during periods of crisis. Radio broadcast engagement encompasses the dynamic interaction between radio stations, presenters, and audiences. Since the imposition of the emergency rule in Rivers State, this engagement has heightened, with a proliferation of talk shows, interviews, news commentaries, and audience call-ins that offer real-time reactions and criticisms (Oso, 2012). This interactivity transforms radio from a monologic medium into a dialogic platform, providing room for contestation, mobilization, and resistance against state narratives.

The emergency rule has brought severe implications ranging from suspension of constitutional rights to increased military presence that have altered the social and political landscape of Rivers State (Olutokun & Ajayi, 2017). While official narratives present the rule as necessary for peace and order, many residents perceive it as a suppression of democratic freedom. Radio has thus served as the frontline for airing these contrasting views, revealing the tensions between authority and grassroots resistance. Public response, in this context, has not been limited to passive listening but active engagement with the messages transmitted. Citizens in Rivers State have used radio platforms to challenge government actions, voice economic grievances, and call for community solidarity (Uche & Ngwu, 2021). This indicates a shift from traditional top-down information flow to bottom-up resistance, amplified by the immediacy and accessibility of the radio medium.

Protest discourse described as communicative acts that express opposition or demand change has found fertile ground on radio platforms. Local stations have become arenas where grievances are voiced, dissent is legitimized, and civic consciousness is heightened (Idowu, 2016). From anonymous call-ins to opinion segments by local influencers, these discourses contribute to a wider resistance culture that challenges authoritarian tendencies under the emergency rule. The nature of content aired its tone, framing and thematic focus significantly influences public mood. Some radio presenters, adopting an assertive tone, question government motives, while others call for calm or reconciliation. These differences reflect broader editorial choices that either empower public dissent or seek to stabilize public opinion (Edeani, 2019). In Rivers State, the framing of the emergency rule in broadcast narratives has had a profound effect on how the public interprets and responds to the crisis.

Public engagement with radio during this emergency period also reveals generational differences. Young people, in particular, have emerged as dominant voices on air, using radio to express dissatisfaction with the socio-political order. Their vocal involvement signifies a generational awakening, and their use of radio as a protest tool underscores the medium's evolving political relevance (Adeyanju & Okorie, 2020). These youth-

driven narratives often reflect broader frustrations over unemployment, exclusion, and state repression. The role of radio presenters cannot be underestimated. As gatekeepers, their presentation style, selection of guests, and modulation of discussions shape the tone of public discourse. In Rivers State, some have risen as public opinion leaders whose framing of issues deeply affects audience perceptions (Orji, 2018). Their influence extends beyond entertainment, into the realm of political mediation and community guidance, particularly during the uncertainty of emergency governance.

A unique feature of radio is its real-time feedback mechanism, which has proven crucial in emergency situations. Listeners interact through live calls, text messages, and social media extensions, creating a hybrid communication system that captures immediate sentiments (Obono, 2016). This rapid exchange of information has helped in dispelling rumours, clarifying policy, and, at times, inciting resistance. The agility of radio makes it both a stabilizer and a disruptor. The inclusive nature of radio protest discourse is also notable. From religious leaders to market women, the platform has given voice to a broad spectrum of the population. These contributions enrich the discourse and allow for multifaceted views to be heard (Agba, 2020). However, the lack of editorial control in some instances can lead to the spread of inciting rhetoric, which poses challenges for national security and social cohesion.

High levels of audience participation, particularly, those that reflect discontent or solidarity signal the emotional and political temperature of the public. In Rivers State, numerous radio programs have recorded surges in listenership and audience contribution, particularly during peak periods of government crackdown or public demonstrations (Nwabueze, 2021). This reinforces the notion that radio functions as both a mobilization tool and a venting space for the masses. The intersection of radio broadcast engagement, public response, emergency governance, and protest discourse represents a complex communicative ecology. In this ecology, radio is not merely a passive conduit but an active arena of negotiation, resistance, and meaning-making. In understanding the protests and public sentiment in Rivers State under emergency rule, it becomes imperative to examine how radio shapes and reflects the people's political and social experiences.

The significance of this study lies in its potential to illuminate the critical role of radio broadcast engagement in shaping public responses and protest discourse during periods of political crisis, such as the emergency rule in Rivers State; by examining how radio serves as both a platform for civic expression and a catalyst for political mobilization, the study contributes valuable insights to the fields of media studies, political communication, and democratic governance, while also offering practical implications for media practitioners, policymakers, and civil society actors seeking to understand and harness the communicative power of radio in times of socio-political tension.

Statement of the Problem

The declaration of emergency rule in Rivers State has triggered widespread political tension, civil unrest and heightened public discourse, particularly through radio broadcasts, the most accessible and interactive medium for the majority of the population. Despite the centrality of radio in disseminating information and facilitating civic engagement, there remains a significant gap in understanding how such broadcasts influence public

perception, shape responses and contribute to protest narratives during political emergencies. While some radio programs serve as platforms for public enlightenment and constructive dialogue, others may inadvertently escalate tensions through biased reporting or inflammatory content. The complexity of these interactions raises critical concerns about the role of radio in either mitigating or exacerbating socio-political instability. Yet, empirical studies analysing the depth of radio engagement and its impact on protest discourse in the context of emergency governance in Rivers State are scarce. This study, therefore, seeks to address this gap by interrogating how radio broadcast engagement influences public response and fuels or moderates protest discourse during the emergency rule, with the aim of offering insights into the communicative dynamics of political crisis in Nigeria. This study aims, first, to examine the extent to which radio broadcast engagement influenced public awareness, sentiment, and participation during the emergency rule in Rivers State. Secondly, it seeks to analyse the nature and framing of protest discourse as expressed through radio platforms, with a focus on how radio programs, presenters, and audience interactions contributed to shaping public opinion and resistance narratives. Lastly, the study intends to explore the implications of these radio-mediated responses for democratic governance, civic engagement, and conflict management in politically tense environments.

Concept of Radio Broadcast Engagement

Radio broadcast engagement refers to the level of interaction, attention, and participation that audiences exhibit in response to radio content. In the Nigerian context, radio remains one of the most widely consumed media due to its affordability, accessibility, and ability to broadcast in indigenous languages (Ojebuyi & Salawu, 2020). Engagement can range from passive listening to active involvement through call-ins, social media feedback, or participation in on-air discussions. This interaction has been particularly vital during crises, where radio becomes a lifeline for real-time updates and civic dialogue. The interactive potential of radio becomes even more significant during emergency rule, where other forms of political expression may be curtailed. Audiences rely on radio not only to access news but also to voice concerns and mobilize responses (Uche & Ngwu, 2021). Stations that host talk shows and open forums encourage listeners to contribute opinions, thereby transforming radio from a mere information source into a participatory communication space. These forms of engagement are crucial for gauging public sentiment and measuring civic pulse during politically sensitive periods.

Moreover, the degree of radio engagement often depends on the trustworthiness of broadcasters and their perceived alignment with the people's realities. Listeners are more inclined to engage with stations they believe reflect their interests and community challenges (Obono, 2016). This explains why local radio stations with culturally resonant content tend to elicit more robust public participation. Engagement is not merely a media phenomenon but a political act, particularly in times of crisis where voicing an opinion can equate to resisting authority. Additionally, engagement is shaped by content quality, message framing, and the station's ability to foster inclusive dialogue. Research suggests that programs with balanced moderation and diverse guest representation enjoy higher levels of audience trust and interaction (Idowu, 2016). Thus, radio broadcast engagement is a multidimensional concept that involves emotional investment, political expression, and media credibility, all of which are heightened during emergency rule scenarios.

Understanding Public Response in Crisis Communication

Public response in crisis communication refers to how citizens react, emotionally, cognitively and behaviourally to information disseminated during political or social emergencies. In the face of an emergency rule, public reactions may vary from compliance and anxiety to outrage and protest. The media, particularly radio, plays a crucial role in framing these responses by shaping the narrative surrounding the crisis (Olutokun & Ajayi, 2017). In Nigeria, where traditional media often operate under political pressures, public trust in alternative voices such as radio stations with localized appeal becomes paramount. Public response is influenced by the perceived legitimacy and clarity of government actions communicated through the media. When communication is ambiguous or propagandist, it often triggers scepticism and resistance (Edeani, 2019). In Rivers State, public response to the emergency rule has been heavily mediated by the tone and content of radio broadcasts. Where radio reports are perceived to highlight the people's suffering or repression, public responses have leaned towards protest and civil disobedience.

Social identity and communal affiliations also mediate public responses during crises. In heterogeneous regions like Rivers State, public sentiment often aligns with ethnic, cultural, or political group interests. Radio, therefore, becomes a space where these diverse responses are negotiated and expressed (Agba, 2020). Program hosts and callers often interpret government actions through these lenses, further shaping community reactions and potentially fuelling group-based mobilization. Furthermore, the speed of public response is heightened by the immediacy of radio communication. Unlike print media or television, radio can capture real-time emotions and feedback, which makes it both a barometer and catalyst for public action (Obono, 2016). In this light, radio does not merely report public response; it co-constructs it. Understanding this dynamic is essential for assessing how media content influences political behaviour during states of emergency.

Protest Discourse in the Media

Protest discourse refers to the communicative strategies, narratives, and rhetoric used to express dissent, advocate for change, or resist power structures. In the context of radio broadcasting, protest discourse includes direct calls to action, narratives of injustice, and symbolic expressions of defiance (Idowu, 2016). During the emergency rule in Rivers State, protest discourse has been prominently featured on radio programs, with audiences using the platform to articulate grievances and challenge the legitimacy of the state's actions. Radio provides a relatively safe and accessible channel for citizens to engage in protest discourse, especially in environments where public gatherings may be restricted. Listeners can contribute anonymously, thus mitigating the risks of government surveillance or reprisal. As a result, radio becomes a crucial site for subaltern voices those marginalized or silenced in mainstream political discourse to be heard (Ojebuyi & Salawu, 2020). This democratization of discourse ensures that public dissent is sustained even in restrictive political climates.

The nature and tone of protest discourse vary, depending on the framing by both broadcasters and participants. While some programs present balanced discussions that include government representatives and critics, others take on a more combative tone, amplifying dissatisfaction and mobilizing emotional responses (Uche &

Ngwu, 2021). These differences reflect editorial decisions and ideological leanings of individual stations, which, in turn, affect the credibility and influence of the protest narratives being disseminated. Finally, protest discourse on radio can have far-reaching consequences, including shaping policy debates, inciting collective action, and fostering solidarity among oppressed groups. However, it also poses ethical and security challenges, especially when content crosses into incitement or misinformation (Olutokun & Ajayi, 2017). Thus, while radio is a vital tool for protest discourse, it must be wielded with caution and responsibility, particularly in volatile political environments such as that of Rivers State under emergency rule.

Uses and Gratifications Theory

The Uses and Gratifications Theory was propounded by Elihu Katz, Jay Blumler, and Michael Gurevitch in 1974 posits that media audiences are not passive recipients but active participants who selectively engage with media content to satisfy specific needs such as information, personal identity, integration, entertainment, and social interaction. The theory assumes that individuals consciously choose media channels like radio to gratify particular psychological and social desires, especially during times of crisis when they seek clarity, assurance, or collective expression. In the context of emergency rule in Rivers State, this theory is relevant as it helps to explain why citizens gravitate towards radio programs that allow them to voice opinions, understand the political climate, or participate in protest discourse. However, the theory has been criticized for being overly individualistic and neglecting the broader social structures that influence media use. Despite this, its emphasis on audience agency makes it a suitable framework for analysing radio engagement patterns and the motivations behind public responses to political tension.

Framing Theory

Framing Theory was developed by Erving Goffman in 1974 and further advanced in media studies by scholars such as Robert Entman (1993), examines how media outlets construct meaning by selecting certain aspects of reality and emphasizing them through language, visuals, and repetition. The core tenet of the theory is that the way an issue is framed significantly influences how audiences interpret and respond to it. The theory assumes that media frames serve as cognitive shortcuts that help audiences make sense of complex events, especially during emergencies. In this study, the theory is particularly relevant in assessing how radio broadcasters frame narratives about emergency rule and how these frames shape listeners' perceptions, emotions, and actions including protest mobilization. A major criticism of framing theory is its lack of clarity on what constitutes a frame and how framing effects can be empirically measured. Nonetheless, the theory remains a valuable tool for understanding the role of language, tone, and agenda-setting in protest discourse and public response in politically volatile contexts like Rivers State.

Empirical Review

Uche and Ngwu (2021) in their study titled "Civic Participation and Radio Broadcasting in Nigeria: A Study of Political Talk Shows," This study investigated how political talk shows on Nigerian radio stations promote civic engagement and democratic awareness. The study used a mixed-method approach, combining content analysis of selected radio programs with audience surveys across urban areas in Enugu State. Findings revealed that

political radio shows significantly influenced listeners' political awareness and encouraged audience participation through call-ins and social commentary. The study is similar to the current research as it explores how radio broadcasts drive civic participation and public engagement during politically sensitive periods. However, the dissimilarity lies in focus; while the reviewed study examined political talk shows generally, the current study specifically addresses the protest discourse and public response to emergency rule in Rivers State, emphasizing crisis communication.

Idowu (2016) studied "Media and Political Protest in Nigeria: The Case of Occupy Nigeria," This study examined how various media platforms, particularly radio and online media, facilitated public protest during the Occupy Nigeria movement. The objective was to assess the media's role in mobilizing citizens and framing the fuel subsidy removal protests of 2012. Employing a qualitative content analysis of protest coverage and interviews with media professionals, the study found that radio was pivotal in spreading protest narratives and encouraging mass participation, especially among grassroots communities. This study shares a close similarity with the current research in that both explore protest discourse and how radio acts as a catalyst for public mobilization. However, the key difference lies in the context; the reviewed study centres on a national economic protest, whereas the current study focuses on a politically induced emergency rule within a localized setting in Rivers State.

Obono (2016) in the work titled "Radio and Crisis Communication: Listening in Uncertainty," This study explored the function of radio as a medium for disseminating crisis-related information in conflict-prone Nigerian communities. The study's objective was to examine how rural populations engaged with radio content during periods of insecurity and political instability. Utilizing ethnographic methods including in-depth interviews and participant observation in Cross River State, the research concluded that radio is perceived as a trusted and culturally aligned source of information during crises, and it helps foster both resilience and protest among marginalized populations. This study aligns with the present research in its focus on crisis communication and radio engagement. Nonetheless, it differs in scope and audience; while the reviewed study focused on rural conflict zones in general, the present study investigates the specific impact of radio discourse on public response during emergency rule in an urban and politically tense region like Rivers State.

Gap Identification

The reviewed literature collectively affirms the significance of radio broadcasting in shaping public engagement, civic awareness, and political discourse, particularly during crises and periods of socio-political instability. Studies by Uche and Ngwu (2021), Idowu (2016), and Obono (2016) demonstrate how radio serves as a trusted medium for mobilizing public opinion, facilitating protest communication, and enhancing participatory democracy. These works highlight the active role of audiences in interpreting and responding to radio content, especially during national or regional upheavals. However, a critical gap remains in the contextual analysis of how radio engagement influences public response specifically within the framework of emergency rule, as declared in politically volatile environments like Rivers State. Most existing studies tend to focus on national protests or general political awareness, without isolating the nuanced influence of radio

protest discourse in a localized state of emergency. This study fills that gap by examining the intersection of radio broadcast content, public sentiment, and protest actions in the unique socio-political climate of Rivers State under emergency rule, offering insights that are both timely and regionally specific.

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative research method utilizing face-to-face interviews to explore the role of radio broadcast engagement in shaping public response to emergency rule in Rivers State. The target population comprised residents of Port Harcourt, Obio/Akpor, and Oyigbo Local Government Areas, three urban centres notably affected by protest activities during the emergency rule estimated at a combined population of approximately 3.1 million people according to the National Population Commission (NPC, 2006, projected to 2023). From this population, a purposive sample size of 30 participants was selected, including radio listeners, civil society members, youth leaders, and political commentators who were active consumers of radio content and were knowledgeable about the political climate. The purposive sampling technique was employed to ensure that participants with rich, relevant insights were selected based on their exposure to radio broadcasts and their involvement in or observation of protest-related events. Data was collected through semi-structured, in-depth, face-to-face interviews, allowing participants to express their experiences, interpretations and reactions to radio discourse during the emergency rule. Thematic analysis was used to interpret the data, identifying recurring patterns, dominant narratives and underlying sentiments related to radio engagement and protest discourse. This approach enabled the study to capture the complexity of public perceptions and the communicative influence of radio in a politically tense environment.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Themes were deduced deductively following the research objectives. The following themes were deduced: Radio as a tool for public sensitization during political crisis; audience engagement and participation in radio protest discourse; and radio influence on public sentiment and mobilization for protest. These were presented and discussed below:

Radio as a Tool for Public Sensitization during Political Crisis

This theme explores how radio broadcasts inform and sensitize the public about the state of emergency, government actions, and civil rights, focusing on how this awareness influences public perception and consciousness during the crisis period. During the face-to-face interviews, many participants highlighted that radio stations played a pivotal role in breaking down complex government announcements related to the emergency rule. Respondents stated that local radio broadcasters, especially those fluent in indigenous languages, were quick to interpret the implications of the emergency rule and provide context for the public. One community leader in Obio/Akpor remarked, “Radio was our main source of understanding. Many people couldn’t interpret what the state of emergency really meant until radio presenters started analysing it in a way we understood.” This suggests that radio functioned as an educational tool for public sensitization.

Several interviewees further emphasized the timeliness and accessibility of radio. In the absence of electricity or internet in some areas, battery-powered radios remained a constant source of updates. A youth activist from

Oyigbo shared that, “While some of us were offline or disconnected, the radio kept talking. They told us what was happening, the government’s position, and even read out citizens’ rights. It was empowering.” This indicates that radio filled critical information gaps in a fast-changing political environment.

Moreover, participants noted that radio broadcasts also included government spokespersons, legal experts, and security analysts who provided multiple perspectives on the emergency rule. This inclusivity helped demystify the motives and limits of government actions. A Port Harcourt-based listener said, “What impressed me was how the radio brought both sides. Even when we were angry, we still heard the government side too.” Such content balance helped prevent misinformation and gave the public a broader understanding.

Finally, radio broadcasts were described as calming and reassuring during moments of panic. Some participants recalled how soothing music, interactive programs, and spiritual content were added to the usual political coverage to reduce fear. A market woman noted, “They knew people were scared, so sometimes they mixed in songs or inspirational talks to make us feel okay. That was important too.” This suggests that beyond informing, radio also played a psychological support role in sensitizing the public during the emergency.

Audience Engagement and Participation in Radio Protest Discourse

This theme examines how listeners interact with radio programs through call-ins, social commentary, and on-air discussions, shedding light on the participatory role of the public in shaping and amplifying protest narratives via the airwaves. Respondents widely agreed that radio platforms, especially talk shows and public opinion segments, created a democratic space for civic participation during the emergency rule. A listener from Rumuola recounted how phone-in programs gave citizens a chance to share their frustrations and opinions. “It was the only place we could talk. If you go to the streets, you might be arrested, but the radio let us speak from our rooms,” he explained. This reflects how radio offered a safe space for expression when physical spaces were restricted.

Many interviewees also acknowledged that through their participation, they felt a sense of solidarity and shared concern. One youth leader mentioned that hearing others speak about their suffering on air strengthened his resolve. “It was like, ‘I’m not alone’. When I heard someone from another LGA say the same thing I felt, it gave me energy,” he noted. This sense of community through radio contributed to the growing protest sentiment across different parts of Rivers State.

Radio presenters were also praised for acting as moderators of the protest discourse. Several participants believed that broadcasters often echoed the public’s frustration but ensured the conversations did not incite violence. One civil society representative said, “Some of the presenters were really smart. They allowed us to vent but also reminded us about peaceful protests and legal channels.” This highlights how radio personalities shaped the tone and direction of public participation.

Interestingly, a few respondents also mentioned that radio engagement helped correct misconceptions and rumours. During the period of unrest, fake news spread quickly, and radio was often used to counter false narratives. A caller recalled, “I once heard someone say the military had taken over all LGAs, but the radio

corrected it that evening.” Thus, radio was not only a platform for participation but also a mechanism for safeguarding the accuracy of the protest discourse.

Radio Influence on Public Sentiment and Mobilization for Protest

This theme investigates the extent to which radio broadcast framing and messaging contribute to the emotional response, collective identity, and physical mobilization of citizens during the emergency rule, especially in the context of protests and civil resistance. Respondents consistently acknowledged that radio discourse significantly shaped how they perceived the emergency rule and the government’s intentions. A political observer stated that radio commentaries “framed the situation as both a threat to democracy and a call for accountability,” which influenced how citizens interpreted the motives behind the emergency rule. Some saw it as an abuse of power, while others saw it as a necessary evil, depending on how the issue was framed by the presenters and guests on the programs.

In terms of emotional impact, many participants confessed that radio narratives stirred strong feelings, ranging from fear to anger, and eventually, courage. A student from the University of Port Harcourt recounted, “At first, we were just scared. But after listening to a few broadcasts where they talked about our rights and why we should speak out, we became more confident.” This emotional arousal through radio talk segments contributed to increased civic interest and discussions in communities.

On the aspect of mobilization, several interviewees disclosed that some radio programs gave informal cues or inspired collective action. Although not explicitly calling for protests, these programs shared times of legal protests, aired songs of resistance, or quoted activists, subtly nudging listeners toward action. A youth from Oyigbo explained, “They never told us to protest, but we understood what they were saying between the lines. That’s how we knew when and where to come out.” This indicates that radio had an indirect but effective role in mobilizing protest movements.

Finally, a few participants highlighted that while radio influenced many to act, it also helped others reconsider violent responses. A religious leader recalled, “I wanted to join a radical group, but the radio kept saying we needed peace. I changed my mind because of that.” Hence, the influence of radio was dual mobilizing protest while also promoting responsible action. This underscores the complexity and power of radio in guiding public perception and behaviour during crisis periods like the emergency rule in Rivers State.

Discussion of Findings

The study found that radio broadcasts significantly sensitized the public during the emergency rule in Rivers State by simplifying complex government pronouncements, offering timely and accessible updates, and incorporating diverse expert voices that clarified the implications of the political situation, thereby empowering citizens with knowledge of their rights and fostering a sense of calm and resilience. The study by Uche and Ngwu (2021), which examined the role of radio in conflict communication in Northern Nigeria, aligns closely with this study’s finding that radio broadcasts were instrumental in public sensitization during the emergency rule, as it similarly concluded that radio serves as a reliable medium for breaking down complex political

developments into accessible information, thereby fostering public understanding and preparedness during crisis situations.

The Uses and Gratifications Theory (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973) supports the finding that radio broadcasts sensitized the public during the emergency rule. This theory explains that individuals actively seek out media to fulfil specific needs, such as information, entertainment, and emotional support. During the emergency rule in Rivers State, listeners turned to radio broadcasts to satisfy their need for clarity, information on the political crisis, and emotional reassurance. Radio, therefore, served as an essential tool for meeting these needs, making the public more informed and aware of the situation. Additionally, Framing Theory (Goffman, 1974) also provides support for this finding by suggesting that media broadcasts actively shape how people perceive events and issues. Radio broadcasters framed the information about the emergency rule in a way that influenced how listeners understood and reacted to government actions. By emphasizing certain aspects of the crisis and downplaying others, radio broadcasts played a key role in shaping the public's perceptions and responses to the emergency rule. The finding that radio broadcasts sensitized the public during the emergency rule has significant implications for the role of media in crisis communication. It underscores the power of radio as a tool for public education, providing clarity and emotional support during times of political instability. This suggests that media, particularly radio, should be strategically employed in future crises to ensure that the public is well-informed and able to navigate complex political situations, fostering resilience and social cohesion in times of uncertainty.

The research revealed that radio engagement served as a participatory platform for public expression and protest discourse, enabling citizens to voice grievances, interact with others experiencing similar challenges, and shape the protest narrative within a relatively safe communicative space, while radio hosts played a key role in moderating the tone and direction of such civic engagement. Idowu's (2016) investigation into the influence of radio talk shows on public participation in democratic processes reinforces the finding that radio engagement in Rivers State allowed citizens to actively participate in protest discourse, as both studies identify radio as a participatory platform where listeners express dissent, interact with civic narratives, and contribute to shaping public opinion in politically charged environments.

The Uses and Gratifications Theory (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973) supports the finding that radio engagement created a platform for public participation and protest discourse. According to this theory, individuals use media to fulfil their need for self-expression, social interaction, and to seek answers to their concerns. In the case of the emergency rule in Rivers State, radio talk shows and call-in programs allowed citizens to engage in discussions, express grievances, and contribute to the broader protest discourse. This active participation through radio made the audience feel connected and empowered. Framing Theory (Goffman, 1974) also underpins this finding by explaining how media outlets present and structure information in a way that influences how the public engages with an issue. Radio broadcasts framed the discussions around the emergency rule and protests, highlighting certain viewpoints and concerns, which in turn shaped the public's participation and views on the protests. By framing the issue as a matter of public concern, radio

created a space for listeners to engage more actively in protest discussions. The finding that radio created a platform for public participation and protest discourse highlights the critical role of media in facilitating civic engagement and democratic participation. This has implications for how media, especially radio, can be harnessed to promote public dialogue, encourage peaceful expression of dissent, and support active citizen involvement in political processes. It suggests that media outlets should continue to serve as inclusive platforms for public expression, fostering social accountability and empowering citizens to participate in shaping political narratives.

The study showed that radio discourse had a profound influence on public perception and protest mobilization during the emergency rule, as it not only shaped citizens' emotional responses and interpretations of the political climate but also subtly inspired coordinated action through rhetorical cues, while simultaneously discouraging violent responses in favour of peaceful civic resistance. Obono's (2016) research on media framing and protest mobilization in Nigeria directly supports the finding that radio discourse in Rivers State influenced public perception and mobilization, since both studies demonstrate how media content, especially, radio narratives can evoke emotional responses, shape collective identity, and indirectly encourage civil action through strategic framing and symbolic messaging.

The Framing Theory (Goffman, 1974) is central to understanding how radio discourse influenced public perception and mobilization during the emergency rule. Framing theory suggests that the way issues are presented by the media influences how audiences interpret them and take action. Radio broadcasts framed the emergency rule in a way that shaped how listeners perceived the government's actions and the need for protest. By framing the crisis as an urgent issue requiring public mobilization, radio played a significant role in shaping the public's response and motivating collective action. Similarly, the Uses and Gratifications Theory (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973) also supports this finding by illustrating that listeners turn to media not just for information, but for emotional fulfilment and social connectedness. During the emergency rule, radio broadcasts provided a space for emotional engagement, as they not only informed the public but also helped listeners process their feelings about the crisis, which ultimately contributed to mobilizing public sentiment for protest. The finding that radio discourse influenced public perception and mobilization during the emergency rule carries important implications for protest movements and public sentiment. It demonstrates that media can effectively shape collective action by framing issues in ways that inspire engagement and participation. The implication is that radio, as a medium, holds significant potential for mobilizing public opinion and guiding peaceful activism, making it a powerful tool for both political communication and social change during periods of unrest or crisis.

Conclusion

This study concluded that radio broadcasts sensitized the public during the emergency rule is that radio plays an essential role in crisis communication by providing the public with timely, accessible and reliable information, helping to mitigate uncertainty and empower citizens with knowledge during periods of political instability.

The study established that radio facilitated public participation and protest discourse is that radio serves as a vital platform for fostering democratic engagement, offering citizens an opportunity to express grievances, engage in political dialogue, and contribute to collective discussions that shape public opinion and protest movements.

In conclusion, radio discourse influenced public perception and mobilization during the emergency rule is that media, particularly radio, is a powerful tool for shaping public sentiment and driving collective action, as it can frame political issues in ways that inspire peaceful protest and social mobilization in times of crisis.

This study contributes to knowledge by highlighting the pivotal role of radio broadcasts in shaping public perception, engagement, and mobilization during the emergency rule in Rivers State. It demonstrates how radio, as a medium, serves not only as a tool for crisis communication but also as a platform for democratic engagement, facilitating public expression and protest discourse. The study further underscores the importance of media framing in influencing collective action and emotional responses during times of political instability. By examining the intersection of media, public response, and political events, this research enriches existing literature on media's role in governance and social movements, offering valuable insights into the dynamic relationship between radio and political mobilization in crisis situations.

Recommendations

In view of the findings from the work, the following recommendations have been made.

- 1) Radio stations should be used more strategically for crisis communication to ensure the public receives accurate and timely information during political instability.
- 2) Radio should continue to serve as a platform for public participation and protest discourse, encouraging open dialogue and democratic engagement.
- 3) Media outlets, especially radio, should harness their power to frame issues in ways that promote peaceful activism and mobilize public participation during times of crisis.

References

- Adeyanju, A. M., & Okorie, N. (2020). Youth engagement and political discourse on radio: A study of select Nigerian communities. *International Journal of Media and Communication Research*, 2(1), 45-58.
- Agba, P. C. (2020). Participatory radio and democratic engagement in Africa. *African Media Review*, 28(1), 13-29.
- Edeani, D. O. (2019). Mass media and the challenges of emergency communication in Nigeria. *Journal of Political Communication*, 3(2), 22-38.
- Entman, R. M. (1993). Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm. *Journal of Communication*, 43(4), 51-58.

- Idowu, K. O. (2016). Media and political protest in Nigeria: The case of occupy Nigeria. *Journal of African Media Studies*, 8(3), 319-334.
- Katz, E., Blumler, J. G., & Gurevitch, M. (1974). Uses and gratifications research. *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, 37(4), 509–523.
- Nwabueze, C. (2021). Political crisis and media engagement in Nigeria’s South-South. *Nigerian Journal of Communication*, 18(2), 88-102.
- Obono, K. (2016). Radio and crisis communication: Listening in uncertainty. *African Journalism Studies*, 37(4), 67-81.
- Ojebuyi, B. R., & Salawu, A. (2020). Radio as a counter-public sphere: Engaging voices of the marginalised in Nigeria. *Journal of Radio & Audio Media*, 27(1), 108–123.
- Olutokun, A., & Ajayi, G. (2017). Media and governance in Nigeria: Consolidating democracy through communication. *Africa Spectrum*, 52(3), 111-129.
- Orji, C. C. (2018). Radio journalism in contemporary Nigeria: Ethics, challenges, and prospects. *Journal of New Media and Mass Communication*, 7(3), 25–35.
- Oso, L. (2012). *Press and politics in Nigeria: On whose side?* Lagos State University Press.
- Uche, L., & Ngwu, C. C. (2021). Civic participation and radio broadcasting in Nigeria: A study of political talk shows. *Journal of Communication and Media Research*, 13(1), 42-57.
- Uche, L., & Ngwu, C. C. (2021). Civic participation and radio broadcasting in Nigeria: A study of political talk shows. *Journal of Communication and Media Research*, 13(1), 42-57.