

## Personal and Environmental Variables as Predictors of Adult Audience' Attitude Towards Broadcast News

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**Abstract:** The study sought to determine, the extent to which some personal and environmental variables predict adult audience' attitude towards broadcast news. Sample for the study was made up of 180 randomly selected respondents of both sexes but from heterogenous and diverse backgrounds from 6 local government areas in Ibadan city, Nigeria. Data were collected using "Attitude Towards Broadcast News Scale" with construct validity and internal reliability coefficient of 0.874 (Cronbach coefficient alpha). Data analysis involved the use of Multiple Regression Analysis. The findings showed that the seven personal and environmental variables in the study, when taken together were quite effective in predicting adult audience attitude broadcast news with Multiple R = 0.70 and  $R^2 = 0.59$ . It further showed that only four of the variables viz marital status, type of employment, literacy level and age, exert significant influence on attitude towards broadcast news. The findings have important implications for broadcast media practice, communication and media art students, language, communication and media arts instructors, scholars and professionals, literacy planners, policy makers and the society at large.

**Key words:** Personal and environmental variables, predictors, audience attitude, broadcast news, heterogenous

### INTRODUCTION

Broadcast is an eminently persuasive medium which is omnipresent in people's homes, workplace and even in transit. It is akin to a second skin through which most people stay in touch with their immediate environment and the world at large. Broadcasting is unquestionably of great importance these days.

All the things that make up the individual life styles, news, fashions, habits, attitudes, preferences, opinions and tastes are shaped to one degree or another by the broadcast media. The knowledge of political, social and economic issues is largely formed by the exposure to the broadcast media and most of the entertainment experiences come from the same source.

Since the broadcast media exert such a profound influence on individuals lives on the perception of the world and our reaction to it, it is important that the social responsibility of the industry as regards the dissemination of accurate and unbiased news vis-à-vis the factors which influences peoples attitude to or perception of this important broadcast media's function be looked into. Also, of all the programmes and/or functions of the broadcast media, the news dissemination aspect is perhaps, the most crucial. Broadcast media news programmes include reports dealing with current, local, national and international events including commentary, analysis and sports news. In spite of the impact of

broadcasting on the social, political and economic development, there has been a persistently low regard for and/or confidence in broadcast news from the various broadcast stations. The search for the factors that determines audience' attitude towards broadcast news thus, becomes an important area of research concern for many scholars in the field of language, communication and media arts.

Recent developments in broadcast news have had less to do with changing formats or presentation styles. There seems to be much more factors which influence audience attitude to broadcast news than quality of pictures, news features, substance and/or variety.

There seems to be some personal and environmental factors which determine audience attitude towards broadcast news. And because news is so important to the media organisation and its public, it follows then that no effort should be spared at determining the role of personal and environmental factors in shaping audience attitude towards broadcast news.

The purpose of the present study was therefore to investigate the extent to which personal characteristics (such as age, sex, literacy level and marital status) and environmental factors (such as type of employment, status at work and home location), could determine audience' attitude towards broadcast news. Specifically, the study sought to provide answer to the following research questions:

- To what extent would the independent variables (age, sex, literacy level, marital status, type of employment, status at work and home location), when taken together, predict adult audience' attitude towards broadcast news
- What are the relative contributions of each of the seven independent variables to the prediction of attitude towards broadcast news

**MATERIALS AND METHODS**

**Sample:** The sample was made up of 180 randomly selected respondents from 6 out of the 11 local government areas that make up Ibadanland. In the first instance, Ibadan was stratified into two viz urban and rural. Next, this simple random sampling technique was used to select 3 local government areas from each of the strata. About 30 respondents were then randomly selected from each of the participating local government areas to form the sample population.

The 180 respondents are of both sexes (74 males and 102 females) but from a heterogeneous and diverse backgrounds in term of literacy level, marital status, status at work and home location. Their ages ranged from 21-53 years with a mean age of 36.1 and a standard deviation of 7.26.

**Instrument:** Data for the present research obtained using the Attitude Towards Broadcast News Scale. The instrument was designed by the investigators and consisted of two sections viz A and B. Section A elicited from the respondents, some background information on age, gender, educational level, type of employment, status at work, home location, etc., while Section B consisted of 29 attitudinal items on various aspects of broadcasting and broadcast news. The instrument was a four-point rating scale in which respondents were required to indicate their level of agreement or otherwise to each item. Responses on the attitude items were measured on a weighted value of four through one (where 4 represents a choice of strongly agree and one strongly disagree) for such items where positive responses reflected positive attitudes towards broadcast news. A reverse interpretation was employed for items where negative responses reflected positive attitudes.

The content validity of the instrument was established through peer review by colleagues. Construct validity and internal consistency reliability of 0.874 (Cronbach coefficient alpha) was obtained for the instrument using the pilot test results from 50 respondents from a local government in Ibadan that did not form part of the sample.

**Data analysis:** Factors personal to the respondents viz age, sex, literacy level, marital status and their environmental factors viz type of employment, status at work and home location were treated as independent variables, while the total score on the attitudinal items was taken as the dependent variable. The Multiple Regression Analysis was then computed to provide answers to the research questions raised in the study.

**RESULTS**

**Research question 1:** To what extent would the independent variables (age, sex, marital status, literacy level, type of employment and status at work) when taken together predict adult audience' attitude to broadcast news?

The total contributions of the seven independent variables to the prediction of the criterion variable (attitude towards broadcast news) is shown in Table 1 and 2.

Table 1 and 2 shows that the use of the four personal (age, sex, marital status, literacy level) and three environmental factors (type of employment, status at work and home location) to predict adult audience' attitude to broadcast news yielded a coefficient of multiple regression  $R = 0.70$  and adjusted  $R^2 = 0.59$ .

**Research question 2:** What are the relative contributions of each of the seven independent variables to the prediction of attitude towards broadcast news?

The results of the relative contribution of each of the seven independent variables to the prediction of audience attitude to broadcast news are shown in Table 3. Table 3 shows the various contributions (Beta) of each of the seven predictor variables at 0.05 level of significance.

**Table 1: Summary of regression analysis on sample data**

Regression analysis	Values
Multiple R	0.70
R <sup>2</sup>	0.59
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.58
Standard error	6.91

**Table 2: Analysis of variance**

Source of variation	Df	Sum of squares	Mean square	F-ratio
Regression	7	240.21888	60.0547	1.259
Residual	166	8060.81561	47.6971	

Significant at  $p < 0.05$

**Table 3: Relative contributions of each of these seven independent variables**

Variable	B	SEB	Beta	T	p-level
Sex	-0.1806210	1.081065	-0.130750	-167	NS
Age	-1.0268600	0.496915	-0.177564	-2.066	*
Marital status	0.7911247	0.606482	0.308119	1.305	*
Literacy level	0.2465700	0.381666	0.152201	646	*
Type of employment	0.5481760	0.508875	0.286534	1.077	*
Status of work	0.0878300	0.494574	0.034798	181	NS
Home location	0.0561750	0.730070	0.006148	077	NS

\*Significant  $p < 0.05$

**DISCUSSION**

The results of this study in relation to research question 1 revealed that the seven predictor variables, when taken together seem to be quite effective in predicting adult audience attitude to broadcast news. The magnitude of the relationship between the seven predictor variables and their criterion variate is reflected in the value of  $R = 0.70$  and adjusted  $R^2 = 0.59$  as shown in Table 1.

It could then be said that taking all the variables together, they contributed about 59% variance of adult audience' attitude towards broadcast news. More importantly, since the value of  $F$ -ratio = 1.259 is significant at 0.05 alpha level; it means that the probability of the effectiveness of the prediction occurring by chance is ruled out (Fig. 1).

Many researchers have at different times, pointed out the importance of personal and environmental factors (sex, age, literacy level, marital status, home location, type of employment and status at work) to perception of and attitude to media messages. For example, Trenhohn (1995), postulated that a persons socio-economic background has some influence on his upbringing and consequently, on his attitude and predisposition towards the significant others.

The results of the survey on the broadcast of news published by the BBC (1970) noted that though, virtually everybody claimed to be at least interested in news in general, keen interest increased with age and with increasing educational background. This position is further corroborated by Udoakah (1998) submission that educated elites tend to understand news more than the illiterates.

Also, type of employment, location of residence and status at work all could have accounted for the positive attitude to broadcast news of majority of the audience and this could have contributed to the high percentage observed in this study. The importance and potency of the personal and environmental variables could not be doubted in relation to the result observed in this study. Most of the variables examined in the study have at various times proved to be potent factors in contributing to attitude and attitude change.

For example, the social categories theory has the basic assumption that members of a given social category (determined by age, sex, socio-economic status, type of employment, status at work and so on), will seek out similar communication messages, which they will also respond to more or less similarly, other things being equal. This position was also supported by the individual differences perspective which noted that individuals differ in their personal psychological organisation, just as

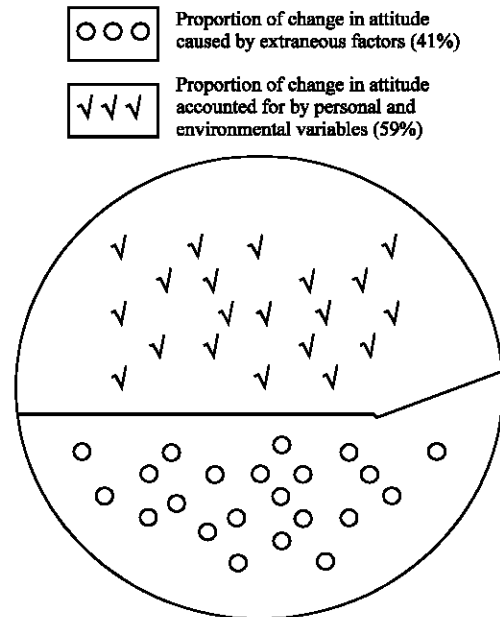


Fig. 1: The extent of the personal and environmental variables taken together that accounted for adult audience attitude broadcast news

studies in the natural sciences had also revealed differential biological endowments. It was discovered that attitude, values and beliefs were learnt in the context of experience and resulted in differences in cognition and perception. The principle of selective attention and perception holds that people pay attention to messages and interpret them in line with their interests, beliefs, values and experiences.

The findings of this study in attempting to answer research question 2 are worthwhile. The seven predictor variables contributed differentially to audiences attitude to broadcast news. The degrees and levels of their contributions are shown in the Beta (B) values observed in each of the variables. From Table 3, it is obvious that marital status (variable 3) contributed most to the prediction with  $B = 0.308$ . This is significant at the alpha level of 0.05.

The present study has expounded and confirmed the importance of marital status to attitude and attitude change. This result strongly reinforces the modern psychology which has shown that other people have a great influence on the attitudes, behaviour and even, perceptions. In addition, Adepoju (2004) explains that these mediating factors are so potent that they render mass media not as a sole cause but a contributory agent in the process of reinforcing attitudes. Type of employment (variable 5) is another important variable contributing relatively to the prediction of attitude to broadcast news with  $B = 0.286$ ; this is next to marital

status. This is not surprising at all for married people are working class people and most likely not students. So, the combined effect of stress of work plus marital demands often tell on their attitudes towards any object, event or situation, broadcast media messages inclusive. And contributing next to the prediction after type of employment is literacy level (variable 4). This contributed significantly to the prediction with  $B = 0.152$  at alpha level of 0.05. This is not surprising bearing in mind the importance of education (literacy level) to attitude change.

More so, it has been established by previous research findings (Onabajo, 1999) that educated people or audience are usually highly motivated to listen and they have a grater news sense than the less educated. And to some extent, education influences attitudes. The present study also seems to have given credence to the submission of Adepoju (2004) that perhaps, the most complex interactions with individual characteristics is related to occupation (type of employment) and education (literacy level).

Another important variable that contributed significantly to the prediction even though, negatively is age (variable 2) with  $B = 0.177$ . The importance of age to attitude and attitude change cannot be over emphasized. Age and literacy level seems to go hand in hand especially in attitude formation or change.

Education appears to be a highly significant factor in determining the rate at which information is acquired from the media. Tichenor *et al.* (1970) have formulated the hypothesis of an increasing knowledge gap between the well-educated segment of society that uses the media to keep itself informed about world events. Alawode found that sharply differing modes of television news presentation did not affect adult viewers interest or the information which they gained but that both were correlated with personal characteristics such as age and education.

In all four variables viz marital status, type of employment, literacy level and age made significant contributions to attitude towards broadcast news. The remaining three variables sex, status at work and home location did not make any appreciable contribution to the variance of attitude. The order of causation therefore is  $V3 > V5 > V4 > 2$ .

### CONCLUSION

The fact that all the variables when taken together to a large extent, predict attitude to broadcast news is

enough evidence to hold to the fact that the variables are potent factors in determining audience' attitude. As such, efforts should be made to always take cognizance of individual differences especially, when planning the broadcast message. This in effect means that the broadcast news producer must take a global view of her audience.

The non-understanding of the audience amounts to inefficiency on the part of the producer. If the broadcast message does not satisfy the target audience then, the producer according to Andah, has not achieved her aim. It is therefore, suggested that broadcast news pattern and philosophy should be dictated by the needs and aspirations of the audience of the audience as reflected by their personal and environmental factors.

Finally, the study has provided answers to the questions that prompted it. However, there is need to state that the identified relative contributions of the seven personal and environmental variables to the prediction of adult audience' attitude need to be seen as tentative and not conclusive. This is because the standardized regression weights (unlike unstandardized weights) may change from sample to sample as a result of sampling fluctuations (Kerlinger and Pedhauzer, 1973; Adepoju, 2004). This therefore, poses a limitation on the power to generalize from one study to another. In addition, systematic research should be undertaken to inform future policy and proper development especially as regards news content.

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