

Radio and Small Scale Business Promotion: A Study of Increased Preference for *Hit FM* Calabar, Cross River State

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Abstract

This study is set to investigate increased preference for Hit FM radio station Calabar as a medium for promoting businesses by small scale business owners'. There are other radio stations that had existed within the city before the advent of Hit FM in January 2016. The study assumes that Hit FM may have adopted a unique and attractive broadcasting style. The objective of this paper is to discover the factors that are responsible for the increased preference. The paper is an empirical study and adopts the qualitative method using structured interviews for eliciting information from randomly selected members of the small scale business owners' community who promote their businesses on *Hit FM* Calabar. Findings indicate that the Hit FM is more preferred by small scale business owners because it is newly established with very attractive programmes that appeal more to the educational, informative and entertainment needs of their audiences. Also, the station has geometrically grown a large fan base with a very wide reach, which has endeared business owners to increasingly promote their products on Hit FM Calabar. Administratively, the station has employed very young and experienced On Air Personalities. The study concludes that advertising on Hit FM has made a very positive and significant impact on small scale businesses. The study recommends a high maintenance culture and periodic retraining of Hit FM staff for delivery of more quality programmes and the need for other radio stations in Calabar to rebrand.

Key words: Hit FM, Preference, Promotion, Radio, Small Scale Businesses.

(241 words)

15 Key words for index: advertising, audience, broadcasting, deregulation, mass media, on-air-personality, preference, promotion, qualitative research, radio, reach, small scale business, sponsors, transmission, trendy.

Introduction

Between the two famous electronic media of advertising, Belch and Belch (2005, p. 382), define advertising as any paid form of non personal presentation and promotion of ideas, goods or services by an identified sponsor and state that “television has often been the ideal advertising medium because of its glamour and excitement while radio gets no respect from many advertisers”. This position seems to be inadequate and lagging in substance when viewed against the electronic broadcasting industry in Nigeria. Apart from the audio, visual and motion capacities of television, technological advancements including the evolvement of electronic bill boards, internet or computer platforms such as whatsapp and facebook, and the transit media have significantly challenged the preference for radio as a medium for promotion of small scale businesses in Nigeria.

In Calabar, Cross River State, the increase in the number of small scale businesses has aroused a necessary competition among department stores owners, water producing factories and some fast food/eateries such as Crunchies, De Choice and Mr Fans. With the opening of a big department store like Spar Shop in the second quarter of the year 2016, smaller Department stores such as Sparks Shop, Favourite Supermarket and Divine Favour, which have existed before as some of the most famous venture, have a stiffer competition to face in terms of attracting the attention of their customers.

Again, with the availability of various media platforms for promoting business, owners of small scale businesses are faced with the dilemma of which medium or media to patronize as most effective in terms of cost and reach. Most complicated is the fact that three radio stations exist currently in Calabar: the oldest being Cross River Broadcasting Corporation (CRBC) Radio, then the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria’s Canaan City FM and the latest privately owned Hit FM.

Hit FM Calabar is the first privately-owned radio station in Cross River State. The station was launched on the 16th of December 2015 and began test transmission for a month. The radio station was officially commissioned on the 18th of January and

commenced a 24-hour broadcast. Hit FM is privately owned and can afford to be dynamic to satisfy the promotional needs of business owners. The station interacts with its audience – its audience, through the social media platforms that allow for customer-seller interaction especially on issues that may not need public attention. Hit FM staff (AOPs) are intelligent, young, experienced, committed and friendly both on air and off-air. They bring in a lot of creativity to bear even on the models of promoting business owners.

From careful observation, Hit FM Calabar seems to be the most patronized among the existing radio stations in Calabar, in terms of small scale business promotion. Hit FM receive promotional signals from small scale businesses such as Akogate water, Keves Night Clubs and fast food restaurants. Many more business owners are increasingly promoting their goods or services on Hit FM Calabar. This study therefore seeks to confirm the reasons for small scale business owners' preference or choice for promotion on radio. Specifically, the thrust of this paper is to assess small scale business owners' reasons for increased preferences of Hit FM Calabar among others.

Statement of the Problem

Small scale businesses in Calabar are finding it difficult to find unique or small platforms like radio to tell their stories and attract customers because the existing communication channels do not engage what would have attracted them. With the advent of Hit FM, the situation seems to be changing as there appears to be an influx of messages from small scale businesses at the expense of other radio stations in Calabar.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this paper therefore include:

- i. To access major reasons why small scale business owners increasingly preferred to promote their businesses on Hit FM despite the existence of other radio stations in Calabar, Cross River State.

- ii. To evaluate small scale business owners' benefits of promoting their business on Hit FM Calabar.
- iii. To identify the most attractive factor in the modus operandi of Hit FM.

Research Questions

- i. What are the major reasons for business owners' increased preference for Hit FM Calabar as their first choice for radio advertising among other radio stations in Calabar?
- ii. To what extent is advertising on Hit FM Calabar more beneficial to advertising on other radio stations in Calabar?
- iii. To what extent is the modus operandi in Hit FM more spectacular than that of other radio stations in Calabar?

Theoretical Background

The study of business promotions on radio and audience preference for Hit FM is examined within the framework of the Uses and Gratification theory. Ike (2005, p. 276) states that the Uses and Gratification Theory was introduced in 1974 by J.G. Blumber and E. Katz. The theory states that media audience take active part in the communication process and they are goal oriented in their media uses. The theorists claim that a media user (small scale business owner) seeks out a media source that best fulfills his needs. The focus of the theory was shifted from media production and transmission functions to media reception and consumption functions where consumers of media messages choose, pay attention to, interpret and retain the promotions that appeal to their needs. This theory is tested under the assumption that small scale business owners have a particular reason why they patronize Hit FM; the gratification derived from the use of the station for advertising.

Radio and Small Scale Business Promotion in Nigeria

After an impact survey of available media of behaviour change communication, Iyorza (2016, p.127) concludes that radio, followed by television and billboards, is the

most effective tool for reaching out to consumers in Cross River State. There are many definitions of the term *Radio* because of existing contexts which the word can be applied. In the context of transmitting signals for the purpose of communication, Smith and Gervelis (2003, p.1) define radio as “...the technology that uses the electromagnetic radiation with wave length to carry information, using sound, by systematically modulating some property of electromagnetic energy waves transmitted through space, such as their amplitude, frequency phase or pulse width”.

Thus, radio as a device, has some electromagnetic waves that are major transporters of sound from a speaker to the receiver in a given location. ‘Mass media’ refers to channels of communication that can reach out to a large audience with messages at the same time and Schrank (1986, p. 56) recalls that radio was the first of the electronic mass media. This implies that other electronic communication media including television and film were produced after radio. Citing Marcus (1986), Nwanwene (2005, p.38) states that:

radio sprang into popularity in the 1920s virtually overnight but as a promotional medium. The radio industry, on the defence since television’s ascendancy in the late 1950’s, has proven amazingly resilient in the face of competitive pressures. As the industry evolved, management showed admirable readiness to change and cope with the demands of an ever more crowded market place.... Its success as an advertising medium laid the foundation for commercial practices upon which television’s success would rest.

The above assertion captures radio growth in Nigeria as an instrument that stirred the growth of businesses in the country. There is an indication that the growth of businesses assisted by the radio industry gave television broadcasting a boost when TV evolved; a feat that later challenged the speed of radio’s popularity. Despite the challenge, radio’s qualities remained unique. Hasan (2013, p.166) describes radio generally as a medium that takes message to illiterate and highly educated simultaneously. The medium is cheap and affordable to advertisers, with the capacity to deliver instant messages. The medium does not always require power line for operation

so people in remote villages' devoid of power line can also receive messages from the medium.

As a promotional medium, Okpara et al (1999) identifies some demerits of radio to include poor permanence, poor coverage, and visual deficiency and channel fragmentation. Other disadvantages include partial listenership and messages cluttering. Despite the advantages and disadvantages, radio is still a powerful tool for communication for the purpose of marketing, promotion, entertainment, education and information, especially to various communities with the urban and rural areas.

One major factor that has erupted from the growth of the radio industry in Nigeria and in every part of the world is competition among radio stations. Effiom (2006, p.126) states that the deregulation - the removal of government control - and consequent expansion have introduced competition and variety among the various electronic media establishment in Nigeria. Ike (2005, p. 25) defines broadcasting as a method of transmitting radio, television or internet signals to a number of recipients (listeners and viewers) that belong to a large group.

King (1996, p. 38) asserts that "all broadcasting stations are perpetually competing with each other". Apart from the competition among radio broadcasting stations, small scale business owners are also caught in a dilemma of which station to patronize. Okpara, Anyanwu & Inyanga (1999, p. 43) identify seven qualities that advertisers or business owners consider in any medium before promoting their products. These factors include cost, medium's selectivity, coverage ability, medium's flexibility, permanence, production quality and trade acceptability.

A small scale business is synonymous to sole proprietorship business which Rachman and Mescon (2005, p. 26) define "as a business owned by just one person, an enterprise that is easy to go into, which permits the sole proprietors to take personal decisions". Examples of small scale businesses include building materials stores, auto tire and accessories stores, liquor stores, sports and recreational clubs and funeral homes and crematories. Others include seed and garden supply stores, sporting goods manufacturers, engineering, laboratory and scientific equipment, hardware stores and office supplies and

equipment. Also to make the list are local laundries and dry cleaners, used car dealers, gas stations, restaurants, bakeries, grocery and meat stores and car washes. Partnerships, a legal association of two or more persons as co-owners of a business can be considered as a small or medium scale business.

Small scale businesses are in dire need of promotion. Belch and Belch (2005, p. 15) define promotion as “the coordination of all seller-initiated efforts to set up channels of information and persuasion to sell goods and services or to promote an idea”. Promotion ordinarily is one of the marketing mixes. Others include price, place and product. Promotional activities are sub-divided into advertising, public relations and publicity, personal selling, sales promotion and direct marketing. Thus any of these forms, especially those transmitted on radio can be classified as promotion. McCarthy (2008, p. 12) posits that promotion requires effective communication and can be targeted at final consumers, industrial customers, retailers or wholesalers. Recently, with the growth of businesses, there has been an upsurge in the business of promotion on radio, but the reasons for preference of radio among other media are not clear.

Method

The qualitative research approach was employed. The qualitative research method relate to “quality” of variations in experience or the meaning of experience for different people and classify events or phenomena and ask questions like ‘how?’. Consequently, the semi-structured interview with loose set of questions was designed. Interview guide schedule was used to generate data for the study, while the Yin’s (1984) explanation of building model was used to analyze the data gathered from the interview. The population of the study includes more than 40 small scale business owners in Calabar Cross River State who advertise on Hit FM, as well as 25 management staff and On-Air-Personalities of Hit FM. A sample of six managers of small scale businesses and five staff of HIT FM, including AOPs, are randomly selected and interviewed.

Basic questions for the interviews for small scale business owners include:

- i. What are your reasons for choosing Hit FM Calabar as a platform for promoting your business?
- ii. How have you benefited from promoting your business on Hit FM Calabar?
- iii. Why would you say you have enjoyed significant prospects in advertising on Hit FM Calabar?

Questions for the management and staff of Hit FM include:

- i. What operational strategies have made Hit FM an attractive radio station for small scale business owners to promote their businesses?
- ii. What personal innovation have you introduced to make your programme unique and attractive?

Results

Six managers of six small scale businesses are interviewed. Questions for the interview bother on reasons for preference to publicize their business on Hit FM amidst other available radio stations and the impact of such publicity on the prospect of their businesses. Those interviewed included Miss Kate Osuoha (Marketing Manager of Akogate Water), Mr Nestor Izu Ogu (Manager of Keves Hotel and Night Club), Mr Famous Obua (Manager of Native Delicacies Restaurant) and Mr Imo Obong (Media Consultant for the 2016 Alternative/Complimentary Medicine Exhibition in Cross River State). Others were Miss Grace Brown (Supervisor at Baby Shop, Calabar Mall) and Mr Osita Anaeto (Director of De Choice Fast Food and Restaurant).

On the other hand, four On-Air Personalities (OAPs) and one Administrative staff (The Human Resources Manager) from Hit FM were interviewed. Questions bothered on subjective opinions on why small scale business owners preferred to promote their goods and services on the station. The second question focused on the unique attribute that has given Hit FM's performance edge over other radio stations. The OAPs interviewed were: Patience Abenmire (News Caster), Ima Udeh (Presenter of *Late Morning Hit*), Duke Emmanuel (Presenter of *Hit Drive Time*) and Friday Awade also known as Last Prophet

(Presenter of The Pidgin English *Otwetwe* Show). The human resource manager interviewed is Miss Agbo Ayi.

From the interviews, results show that the following reasons account for the increased preference of Hit FM Calabar:

New, Participatory, Trendy and Attractive Programmes

Abenmire explains that most small scale business owners prefer to patronize Hit FM Calabar to other existing radio stations because the station is new, trendy or popular and targets the youth. The programmes are also participatory, attractive and interactive. Ayi and Duke (2016) corroborate that Hit FM is attractive because the programmes are creative and trendy while the radio broadcasting culture is unique. Awade (2016) adds that the “use of Pidgin English excites the non-literate audience and encourages them to participate freely on his programmes.”

Greater Percentage of Youths in the Fan Base and Wider Reach

Udeh holds that Hit FM is attractive because the programmes are “social media based and appeal to urban life style and to young listeners”. She says “the station is new with fresh programmes and unique style of news broadcasting and amazing work force who work with a family spirit complementing one another where necessary. Results also show that Hit FM has an overwhelming audience and operates more independently with a wide reach - large geographical area - covering Akwa Ibom State, Ebonyi State and Rivers State. Ogu (2016) describes Hit FM as a station with “a geometrically increasing audience base with a friendly personnel and presenters with interesting approaches to programmes that everyone wants to listen, including taxi drivers and market women”.

Experienced and Lively On-Air Personalities

On effective operations, the station’s management employed experienced young men and women who present their programmes based on research and a spirit of team work from AOPs of diverse cultural backgrounds. Obua, Osuaha, Anaeto and Ebong (2016) share the same opinion that the station attracts businesses because of its good music, attractive talk shows from the lively On-Air-Personalities, in addition to wide coverage and popularity which is lagging in other existing radio stations within the city.

Discussion

Hit FM station is new and the implication is that anything new attracts patronage from business owners who want to go with the trend. Hit Fm also has wider reach and its signals are received in Akwa Ibom State, Rivers State and Ebonyi State and business owners prefer stations that can help them reach out to a wider audience as much as possible. Belch and Belch (2005, p. 321) support the attractive advantage of reach and state that reach figures are important because they indicate potential new exposures and provide an estimate of frequency. Hit FM radio station also appeals to different segments of the audience especially the youth. Hasan (2010, p. 377) considers radio's reach and appeal to illiterates, neo-illiterates and highly educated receivers at the same time as a great advantage in radio broadcasting. Business owners preferred a station that appeals to various audiences who listen to the programmes.

Again, the radio station attracts sponsors of adverts because of their interesting programs including good music and interesting talk shows. Hyde (1995, p. 347) recounts that during the 1970s and '80s down to the '90s, some radio stations became quite eclectic in the music they played and this enlarged their appeals to their target audience. Hit FM programmes are quite attractive with the spices of music that appeals to a wide category of audience. The attractiveness of the station also stems from the participatory nature of the programmes that tends to dwell on trendy and contemporary issues of the day. This has given Hit FM a very large fan and audience base and has promoted urban life style which many business owners capitalize on to promote their businesses.

The radio station promotes the interest of the less literate members of audience and encourages their participation through the Pidgin English programme *Otwetwe* the taxi drivers, artisans and market women. Infact, one of the staff of Hit FM and another business owner, Mr Osita Anaeto of the De Choice Fast Food Corroborate that Hit Fm will be continually preferred as long as its programmes appeal to the youths, taxi drivers and diverse segments of the audience. Consequently, all business owners who advertise on Hit FM Calabar agree that their patronage of the station has significantly and

positively improved the number of their customers base and has also given their business the much deserved awareness despite the comparative higher cost of advertising on the much patronized radio station.

This indicates that Hit FM is gradually achieving fame among her counterparts and has become very popular. The creativity of the station's staff is renowned and their modus operandi reflects a spirit of unity as in a family and each staff is supportive of the other. This operational scenario and the testimonies of small scale business owners largely suggest that promoting or publicizing small scale businesses on Hit FM has impacted significantly positive on the prospect of the businesses.

Kaluon (2016, p.1), citing the chief executive officer of Hit FM, Mr Patrick Ugbe, states that "...the radio station is established to provide the audience with the best of music, sounds, news and talk shows, and to promote the spirit of setting up small scale business that would make Cross Riverians entrepreneurs and employers of labour". Arotimi (2015, p. 1) also quotes the Executive Director of the radio station of boasting of "very modern digital equipment and young and dynamic On Air Personalities (OAPs)". The OAPs of Hit FM Calabar all had their experiences from the government owned Cross River Broadcasting Cooperation Calabar before migrating to Hit FM. Ugbal (2016, p. 1) reports that by September 2016, barely 9 month after the commencement of 24-hour transmission, Hit FM, transmitting on the 95.9 Frequency Modulation with the pay off line *Best Music Best Talk*, was ranked among the 10 best radio stations in Nigeria in breaking news, business promotion and entertainment.

Conclusion

The study of radio and small scale business owners preference for Hit FM Calabar was necessitated by the fact that two older radio stations: Cross River Broadcasting Corporation (CRBC) radio and Canaan City FM (A Federal Radio Cooperation of Nigeria's Station) exist in Calabar, but proprietors of businesses have showed increased preference for Hit 95.5 FM as a platform for maximally promoting their goods and services. Key objectives were to discover the major reasons for preference of Hit FM, to

assess the impact of advertising business on Hit FM, and to identify the key factors that have made Hit FM preferable.

Most small scale business owners in Calabar had been publicizing their products and services on CRBC radio and Canaan City FM before the advent of Hit 95.5 FM. With the commissioning of Hit FM as a new station, a significant number of business proprietors have shifted their patronage to the new station. Hit FM Calabar programmes are lively and attractive to listeners. The trendy and interesting programmes including music and participatory (phone-in) shows are run by efficient and well experienced On-Air Personalities (OAPs).

This study therefore concludes that Hit FM Calabar has an edge over other radio stations in the city of Calabar and the entire Cross River State because of its newness, flexibility, attractive programmes, wider reach, appeal to more diverse audiences and crop of young, vibrant and talented staff who operate as a family. As long as Hit FM continues to maintain this status, other radio stations in Calabar may likely lose out of business owners' patronage. The staff of Hit FM, made up of young people from different states will continually give Hit FM station a unified and systematic nature of operation characterized by objectivity and fairness.

This study therefore recommends that:

1. The management of Hit FM Calabar should sustain the character of motivation among its staff and encourage AOPs to remain highly creative in the presentation of their programmes.
2. On Air Personalities at Hit FM Calabar should intensify research to discover what business owners would like for effective marketing. The station may begin to run seasonal promotions that will attract more advertisers.
3. Other radio stations in Calabar should emulate the secrets of success in Hit FM, and rebrand their stations' programmes and staff for effective stay in the competition

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Interviews

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Interview with Mr Famous Obua, Manager of Native Delicacies Restaurant, Calabar, Cross River State. September, 2016.

Interview with Mr Imo Obong, Media Consultant for the 2016 Alternative/Complimentary Medicine Exhibition in Cross River State), Calabar, Cross River State. September, 2016.

Interview with Miss Grace Brown, Supervisor at Baby Shop, Calabar Mall, Calabar, Cross River State. September, 2016.

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Interview with Patience Abenmire, On-Air-Personality and News Caster with Hit FM Calabar, Cross River State. September, 2016.

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