

# Public Interest or Advertiser's Interest: On Whose Side is the Media?

Jesse Ishaku & Woyopwa Shem

*Department of Mass Communication, Taraba State University, Jalingo, Nigeria*

**Abstract:** This research work examines the role of the mass media vis-à-vis public interest and advertiser's interest. Ideally the mass media are supposed to be adequately funded so as to avoid shackles of control from whatever angle. This is because without adequate funding of media organizations, they may not be able to perform their constitutional role of keeping the public abreast of the happenings around them. There are instances where some media stations are forced to go out of circulation or unable to dish out news and programs at the appropriate time for the fact that the resources are inadequate or even lacking. As a result, media organizations prefer to advertise to public interest news in order to stay afloat. Random sampling technique was used to select 383 respondents from across Nigeria Television Authority (NTA) Jalingo, its public as well as advertiser's/advertising agencies, out of which only 378 responded to the questionnaire administered. Interviews were also conducted. The research work reveals among many things that, advertising has been found to be one of the major streams of revenue for media organizations. This situation has however, affected the performance of the media in carrying out their constitutional responsibility of protecting the interest of the public and holding government officials accountable to the masses. The study therefore recommends that, although advertising serves as one of the major sources of revenue upon which the continuous survival of media organizations largely depend on, that does not mean the interest of advertisers/advertising agencies should temper with the media's sense of judgment in such a way that will make the media deviate from their constitutional role of championing the interest of the masses.

**Key words:** Advertising, Public Interest and the Mass Media

## I. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The role of the mass media in any given society can never be overemphasised. This is because, the media is said to have an enormous influence on the audience based on the stimulus response theory. Considering the fact that media messages can reach great distances simultaneously, business conglomerations, captains of industries and multi-national companies have realised the importance of this medium of communication and have resorted to using it to inform and persuade a good number of people to know and possibly buy their products or services. This situation eventually turned the mass media whether television, radio, newspapers or magazines into a child of necessity for the advertisers/advertising agencies. However, as the years have progressed and the methods and techniques of advertising became advanced and quite sophisticated; the issue of intentional imprecision, enticement and creating consumerism

and needs where there has been none before and/or turning luxuries into necessities became a major (Latif, Shah, Syed, Halepoto, Nazar, & Shaikh, 2012).

Be that as it may, this trend(s) has actually redefined the workings of the media which is now considered as an industry involved in the production and manufacturing of consent/ideas in line with the political economy of communication. The political economy of the media which is originally influenced by Marxist thought on economics, studies the manner in which the economic base of society determines the super-structure and consequently influences the cultural and political spaces within the society; international division of labor, ownership, modes of production and the importance of class structures and struggles. Advertising which is broadly defined as messages primarily designed and intended to persuade audience members to purchase particular goods and services by an identified sponsor(s), is an essential element of most media organisations, especially the broadcast media because of its immediacy and timeliness.

Mass media the world over are seen as businesses just like any other business in capitalist societies. What distinguishes the media from other industries or businesses is the nature of commodities they produce. Their products are also ideas objectified into cultural products (e.g. television shows, news stories, music). That dual nature of cultural products as both commodities and ideas is a theme present in all definitions of critical political economy of communication. Murdock and Golding (1973, p.205) defines the political economy of communication as "an understanding of the basic features that underpin and shape the economic context and political consequences of mass communication." They argue it is necessary to see mass media organizations as "first and foremost" profit based businesses producing commodities.

Inarguably, most media organizations heavily rely on advertising revenue to fund and sustain their programmes and operations, while different businesses and companies also depend largely on the media advertising slots in order to publicise their own products or services. However, the development in Information Communication Technology (ICT) and the Internet has prompted many advertisers/advertising agencies to earmark and channel some portion of their advertising budgets to that medium. This situation has made broadcast industry to seek and explore other new ways to generate revenue in order to stay afloat. This shift also made many businesses and companies to hire

advertising agencies to handle their advertising, which often is developed as integrated campaigns to be broadcast on TV, radio, the Internet as well as the print media. In addition to being responsible for the production of the adverts themselves, advertising agencies generally; are also responsible for finding and securing the best placement of the adverts, at the best rates, in suitable newspapers/magazines, radio and TV programs in local, regional and/or national markets.

The broadcast media especially the television is one of the most effective advertising medium as it combines sounds and moving images in passing information to a wider and scattered audience. This unique feature makes television advertising one of the most expensive and needful as advertisers buy time from TV stations to broadcast their commercials. The timing of adverts placement on the TV often determines the amount to be paid. The amount charged for adverts seems to be cheaper when fewer people watch the TV, as in the early morning hours and gets very expensive during prime time evening shows. Sometimes advertisers pay a lot of money to get their adverts on TV during special programs, like the Olympic Games, World Cup, Premier Leagues etc. 'Infomercials' have become very popular in the last few years. They are normal TV shows that focus on the sales of certain products whereby details on how to buy the product (telephone numbers etc.) are repeated many times during the programme (e.g. Super stories, This Life etc.).

Similarly, television and radio advertising is believed to be beyond the reach of so many entrepreneurs. Although TV/radio advertising on national media stations can be quite expensive, advertising on local stations and cable television can be quite affordable. Also, when compared with other types of adverts, small and medium scale businesses may find out that, TV advertising can create the necessary persuasive impact and deliver more customers who are loyal to a particular goods or services than any other type of advertising campaign. For good results, business owners should have a proper knowledge and understanding of the market as well as the audience specific needs so that the money spent on broadcast advertising is not wasted. Planning is an essential ingredient for the business owners approaching broadcast media for the first time. Also, talking to advertising representatives from different TV and radio stations, other business owners and customers can help in that direction.

Experts suggest an entrepreneur should take the following steps into consideration before diving into broadcast advertising:

- (i) Establish your target market by asking yourself who your customers are and, who you want to reach with your advertising. This may seem obvious, but many advertisers don't have any idea of who they are selling to.
- (ii) Set a rough budget for broadcast advertising. Come up with an amount that will not strain your business but will allow you to give broadcast advertising a

good try. Most media stations suggest running adverts for at least three months. This can easily cost several thousands of naira for a TV campaign. Radio generally costs a little less, although rates vary widely depending on the size of the market, the station's penetration, and the audience of the show on which you want to advertise.

- (iii) Contact sales managers at TV and radio stations in your area and arrange to have a salesperson visit. Ask salespeople for a list of available spots on shows during hours that reach your target audience.
- (iv) Talk to other businesspeople in your area about their experiences with broadcast advertising. While salespeople from TV and radio stations can be very helpful, they are, after all, trying to sell you something. It's your responsibility to be a smart consumer.
- (v) Ask about the "audience deliver" of the available spots. Using published guides, ask the salesperson to help you calculate the cost per thousand (CPT) of reaching your target audience. Remember, you are buying an audience, not just time on a show, and you can calculate pretty exactly how much it's going to cost you to reach every single member of that audience.
- (vi) Inquire about the production of your commercial. As a general rule, TV stations charge you to produce your commercial (prices varies), while radio stations will put your adverts together for free. However, some independent TV stations will include production for free if you enter into an agreement to advertise for at least three months. And with a similar contract, some radio stations will provide a well-known personality to be the "voice" of your business at no extra cost.

The relevance of revenue in every media organisation can never be overemphasised. This is because for the mass media stations to survive in the long run require that they ought to have constant stream of revenue or cash inflow. And it becomes onus on media managers, strategic planners and marketing forecasters to devise a means of sustaining their organisations even as competitions is driving down advertising rates in both broadcast and print media. While the development in ICT has usher in the proliferation of numerous television and radio channels as well as countless newspapers and magazines, there is no corresponding infrastructure to support the presence of these channels. The issue of audience fragmentation, selective exposure, selective attention and selective retention has further compounded the media bids of sustaining itself through adverts and other commercials. Also, under reporting of subscription fees and other related issues have slowed down the rate of advertising revenues virtually every year. When faced with such a scenario broadcast and print media are looking various avenues to increase revenues in order to stay afloat.

Some of the alternative sources of revenue for media organisations ranges from retransmission consent fees, paid digital subscriptions to digital game publishing. Others include, commercials, sales of airtime to freelance presenters, donations, grants and sponsorships etc. However, as the whole world is shrinking into a global village as postulated Marshal McLuhams and with the development and changes in social, economic and cultural arenas at both national and international frontiers; the main stream media such as newspapers, magazines, radio and television are going through an increasingly stable development path in recent times. This new era has culminated into a more flexible and frequent exchange of business and social information thereby giving advertisers a more reliable and convenient channels for the promotion of their goods and services. This situation has made mass media organisations to become one of the major favourable and credible promotional platforms for advertising, such that news and advertising are increasingly becoming interdependent and interwoven, mutually competing for TV/radio broadcast time and/or newspaper/magazine pages published. It is therefore evident based on the foregoing that; the development in advertising is bound to have increasingly important influence on the development of mass media generally.

Presently, the development and popularization of the broadcast media, specifically the radio and the television have made them to become some of the major carriers of advertising because of their ability to reach farther distances, spread quickly, vivid syncing of audios and images etc. which often times result in capturing the minds and attention of both advertisers and consumers respectively. Similarly, after the 1980s, different computer programmes have been employed in advertising design and planning for the ever-changing audience and market. And with the aid of high technology in varying levels, advertising has become part of the day to day information dissemination and consumption. There is no doubt that the development in advertising has caused a lot of impact on the mass media be it positive or negative.

#### *Statement of the problem*

The issue of funding in the Nigeria mass media is a very vital and sensitive factor in which the mass media continuous existence and sustenance is hinged on. Some media organizations are forced to be biased in their reportage, go out of circulation and at times unable to dish out news and programs at the appointed time simply because the means of survival (finance) is not forthcoming. Ismail, Pali and Shem (2021) substantiate that the economic reality in Nigeria encouraged the media to devise other means of survival and these means of survival are inimical to the social responsibility role of the media. Therefore, this study seeks to critically explore the sources of revenue for media organizations; the roles commercials play in the mass media and also examine whether the mass media survive without advertisement. Similarly, the study seeks to understand whether commercials (adverts) are integral part of broadcast

media stations, and also to ascertain whether advert said in effective profit maximization by media organizations.

## II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

There are quite a number of extant literatures that are related to this current study. Asemah (2011) states that, the Nigerian media are faced with diverse economic issues because the country is characterized by high rate of unemployment, inflation, fluctuation of workers' wages, the continual depreciation in the value of Naira and the attendant increase in the cost of living which affects the communication industry. The above situation according to Ismail, Pali and Shem (2021) is a serious threat to the media industry especially the broadcast media because they will spend more on production thereby making "profit" the watchword for survival. Inyang and Etta (2017) substantiate that one of the forces that influences the Nigerian mass media is advertising. Inyang and Etta (2017) further added that advertising has greatly influenced the practice of journalism in Nigeria. Most independent media organisations in Nigeria depend on advertising for survival. The above claims imply that revenue from advertising, according to Agbanu and Nwamuo (2009), remains a major source of media finances.

Corporate organizations in Nigeria spend millions of naira annually on the advertising of their products and services. Nigeria, one of the largest advertising markets in Africa, spent \$425 million in 2017 (Guttmann, 2019). Only South Africa and Morocco spent more on advertising than Nigeria with \$2.7 billion and \$820 million respectively. In 2018, the country spent \$419 million, while in 2019; it spent about \$450 million on advertising. Between 2017 and 2019, the country spent over \$1.031 billion (N371.18 billion) on advertising. Most of the advertising spending, according to Nairametrics (2019), was on TV and Video, with \$156 million in 2018, \$165 million in 2019, and \$177 million in the first half of 2020. Outdoor or Out of Home (OOH) advertising followed with \$118 million in 2018, \$125 million in 2019, and \$131 million in the first half of 2020. Internet recorded \$73 million in 2018, \$86 million in 2019 and \$99 million in 2020, while radio recorded \$42 million in 2018, \$44 million in 2019 and \$47 million in 2020. The newspaper recorded \$26 million in 2018, \$25 million in 2019, and \$24 million in 2020. In light of the above, this study seeks to appraise advertising as a source of revenue in the Nigerian mass media with particular interest on how advertising has to some extent determines what constitute news.

#### *Theoretical underpinning*

This study is hinged on the Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT) and Culturalist Theory (CT). Uses and gratification theory is a mass communication theory that was propounded by Elihu Katz, Jay Blumber and Michael Gurevitch in 1974. The theory belongs to the indirect effect theory. It is concerned with what people do with the mass media instead of what the mass media do to people. The assumption is that the people influence the effects that the mass media have on

them. The people are not just passive receivers of the messages, but active influences of the message effects. This is because they selectively choose, attend to, perceive and retain the messages on the basis of their needs, beliefs, etc.

The uses and gratification theory takes a more humanistic approach to looking at the media use. Blumber and Katz believe that there is not merely one way that the populace use the media. Instead, they believe there are as many reasons for using the media, as there are media users. According to the theory, media consumers have a free will to decide how they will use the media and how it will affect them. Blumber and Katz's values are clearly seen by the fact that they believe that the media consumers can choose the influence media have on them as well as the idea that users choose media alternatives merely as a means to an end.

The uses and the gratification theory is the optimist's view of the media. The theory takes possibility that the media can have an unconscious influence over our lives. The idea that we simply use the media to satisfy a given need does not seem to fully recognise the power of the media in today's society. Uses and gratification research has been concerned with why people use the media. The core assumptions of the theory according to Elihu Katz, Jay Blumber and Michael Gurevitch in 1974 are:

- (i) The audience is conceived as active. This idea focuses around the assumption that the viewers are goal oriented and attempt to achieve their goals through the media source.
- (ii) In the mass communication process, much initiative in linking need gratification and media choices lies with the audience member. This is encompassing the idea that people use the media to their advantage more often than the media use them. The receiver determines what is going to be absorbed and does not allow the media influence them otherwise.

Culturalist theory was developed in the 1980s and 1990's, and claims that people interact with media to create their own meanings out of the images and messages they receive. This theory sees audiences as playing an active rather than passive role in relation to mass media. One strand of research focuses on the audiences and how they interact with the media; the other strand of research focuses on those who produce the media, particularly the news. These theorists emphasize that audiences choose what to watch among a wide range of options, choose how much to watch, and may choose the mute button or the VCR remote over the programming selected by the network or cable station.

Studies of mass media done by sociologists parallel text-reading and interpretation research completed by linguists

shows that, when people approach material, whether written text or media images and messages, they interpret that material based on their own knowledge and experience. Thus, when researchers ask different groups to explain the meaning of a particular song or video, the groups produce widely divergent interpretations based on age, gender, race, ethnicity, and religious background. Therefore, culturalist theorists claim that, while a few elite in large corporations may exert significant control over what information media produces and distributes personal perspective plays a more powerful role in how the audience members interpret those messages.

### III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopted survey as the main design for this study. According to Wimmer and Dominick (2011) survey research deals with the data gathering for the purpose of describing and interpreting a certain condition, practice, beliefs attitudes, etc. It has to do with administering questionnaires to gather data, and collecting them back from various respondents in order to analyze the data for better result. The reason for adopting survey is due to the design's ability to retrieve data from a large number of people within a short period of time.

The population of the study was Nigeria Television Authority (NTA), its public as well as advertiser's/advertising agencies within Jalingo metropolis. As projected by National Population Commission (2016), the population of Jalingo was 118000 (one hundred and eighteen thousand). The rationale behind choosing Jalingo is because of convenience coupled with the fact that Jalingo is an urban setting hence exposure of residents to diverse advertising is possible.

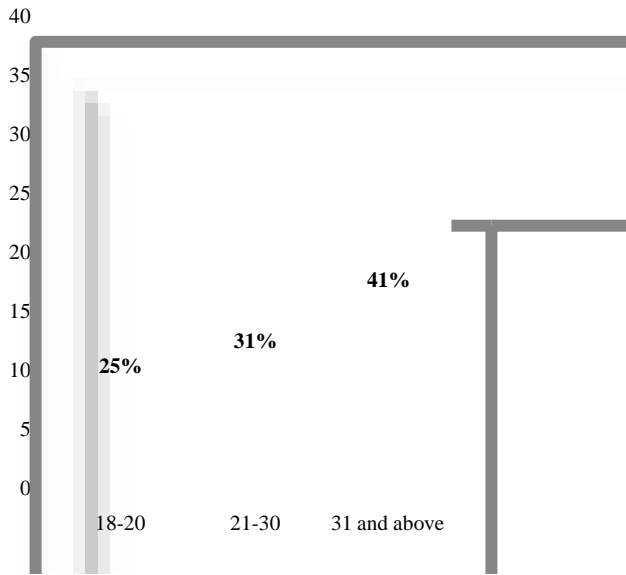
However, because it is impossible to study the whole of Jalingo metropolis in view of the large size of the population, hence, the researchers used the RaoSoft Online Calculator with error limit of 0.5 at the confidence interval of 95 per cent to determine the sample size of the study. With the help of the calculator, the researchers arrived at a sample size of 383. Similarly, the researchers used a random sampling (probability sampling technique) in distributing the research instrument (questionnaire) to the sampled respondents.

#### *Data presentation and analysis*

A total of one hundred and twenty (383) questionnaire items were distributed, out of which eighty (378) were completed and returned representing ninety nine per cent (99%) of the sampled population. The remaining forty (5) items, which represents one per cent (1%), could not be return because the respondents were either highly engaged or did not complete/fill their questionnaire at all leaving the spaces blank.



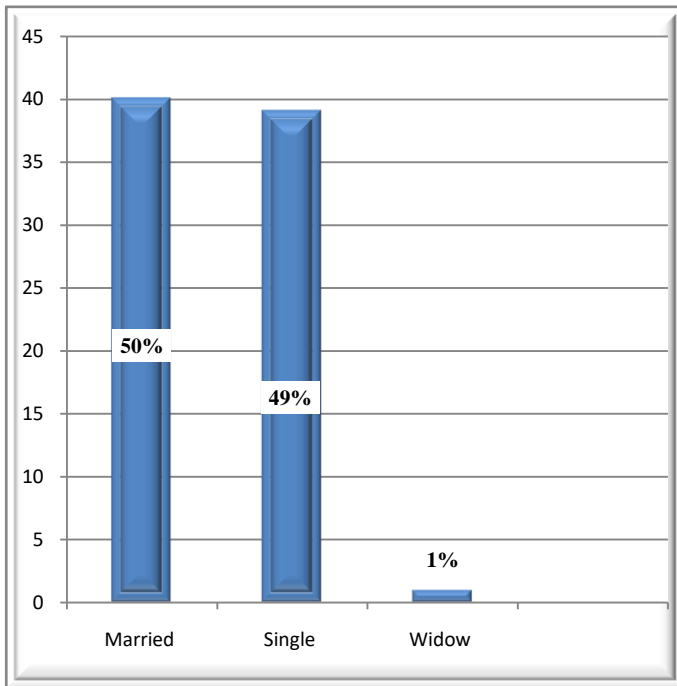
Figure 1: Distribution of respondents' by age



Source: Field Survey, 2021

Figure 1 above table shows that 25% of the respondents fell between the ages of 18 and 20, 31% fell between 21 and 30 age brackets, 44% fell between 31 age and above respectively.

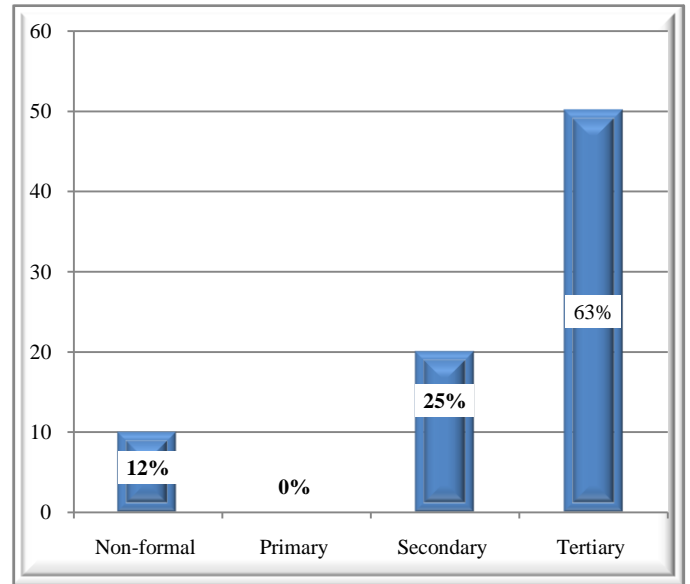
Figure 2: Distribution of respondents' Marital Status



Source: Field Survey, 2021

Figure 2 above shows that, 50% were married, 49% were singles and 1% was a widow.

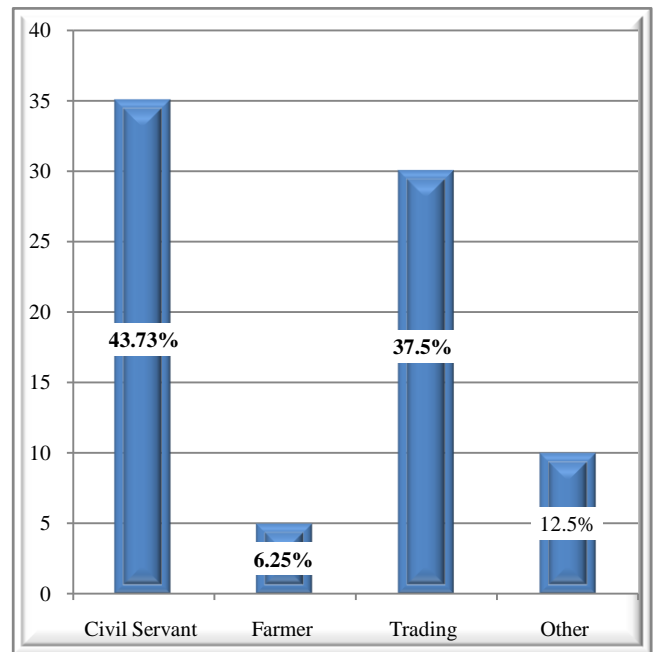
Figure 3: Distribution of Respondents' Educational Background



Source: Field survey, 2021

Figure 3 shows 12% had non-formal education; none had primary education which represents 0%, and 25% of the respondents had secondary education while 63% respondents had tertiary education which represents 63% respectively.

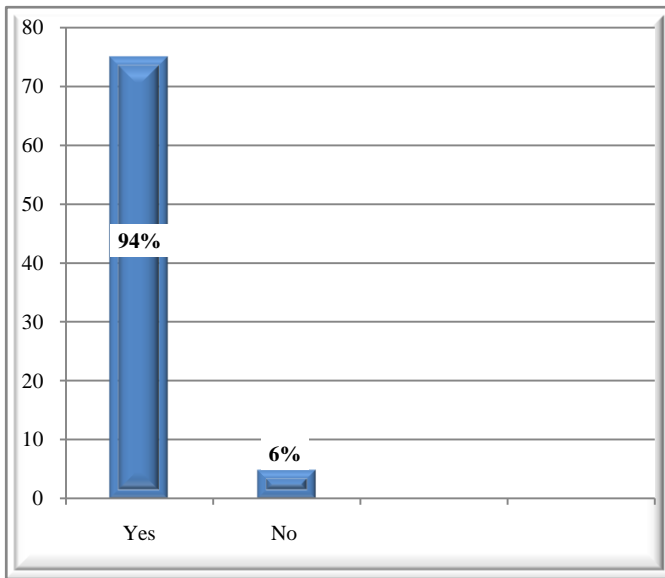
Figure 4: Distribution of Respondents' Occupation



Source: Field Survey, 2021

Figure 4 above shows that, 43.75% were civil servants, 6.25% farmers, 37.5% traders, while 12.5% cut across various occupations.

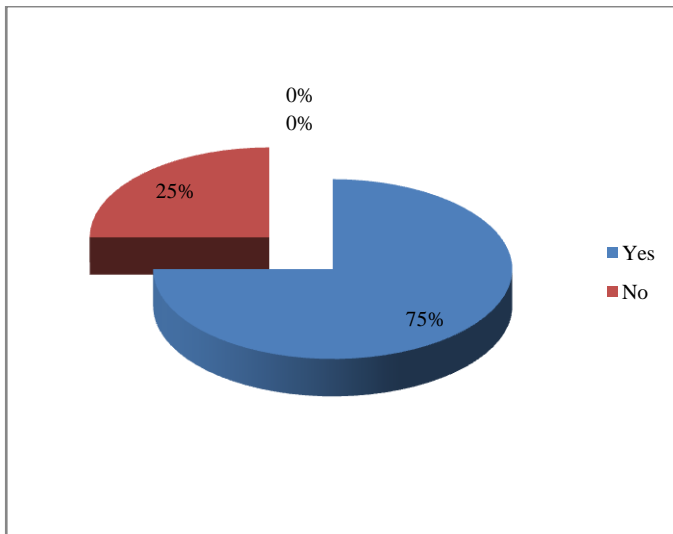
Figure 5: Do you watch television; listen to radio, or read newspapers and magazines?



Source: Field survey, 2021

From Figure 5 above, yes responses of respondents represented about 94% and no responses of respondents represented about 6%. This by indication shows that most of the respondents do watch television, listen to radio and read newspaper and magazine.

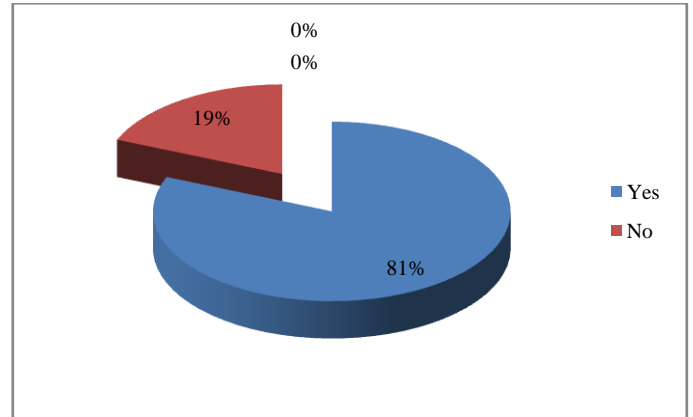
Figure 6: Have you ever watched/read advert or commercials on the radio, television newspapers and magazines?



Source: Field Survey, 2021

From the Figure 6 above, yes responses represented about 75% and no responses of respondents represented about 25%. This shows that many people watch/read/listen adverts or commercials on the radio, television, newspapers and magazines.

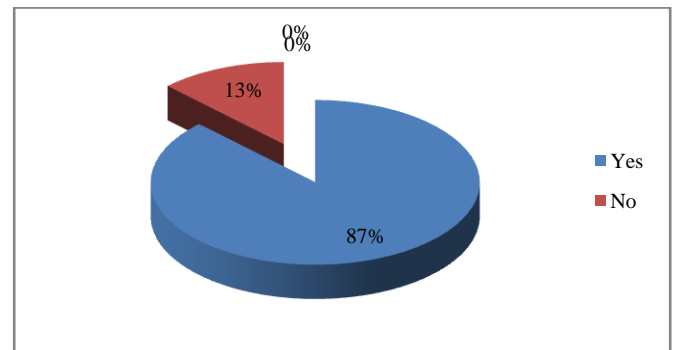
Figure 7: Have you ever advertised your product on the radio, TV, Newspaper or Magazine?



Source: Field Survey, 2021

From the table above, yes responses of the respondents represented about 81% and no responses of respondents represented about 19%. This means that majority of respondents have not advertise their product on the media.

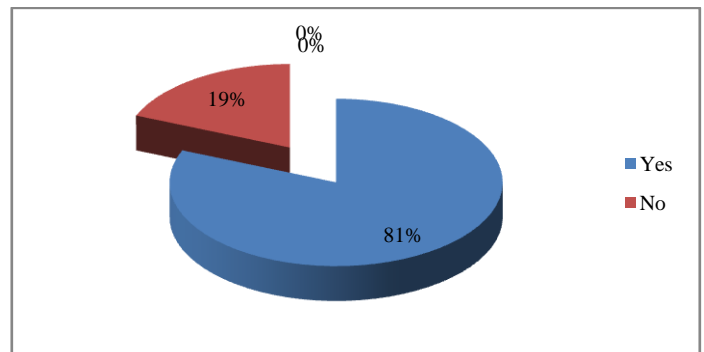
Figure 8: Do you think advert or commercials play any important role in the mass media?



Source: Field survey, 2021

From the Figure above, yes responses of respondents represented about 87% and no responses of respondents represented about 13%. This shows that advertising plays an important role in the mass media.

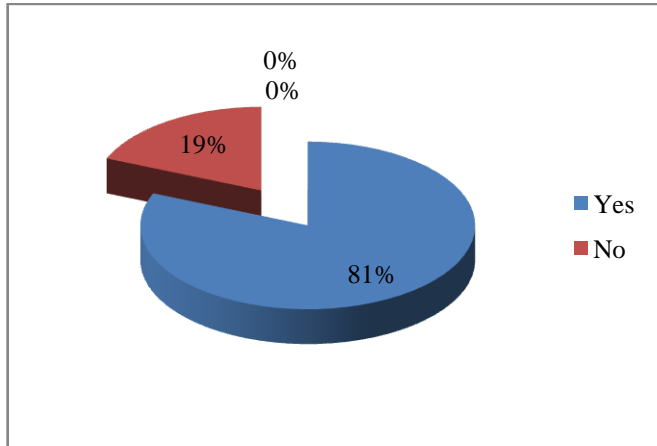
Figure 9: Do commercials or adverts help in providing revenue for media organization?



Source: Field Survey, 2021

From the Figure above, yes responses of respondents represents about 81% and no responses of respondents represents about 19%. This means that commercials or adverts help in providing revenue for media organizations.

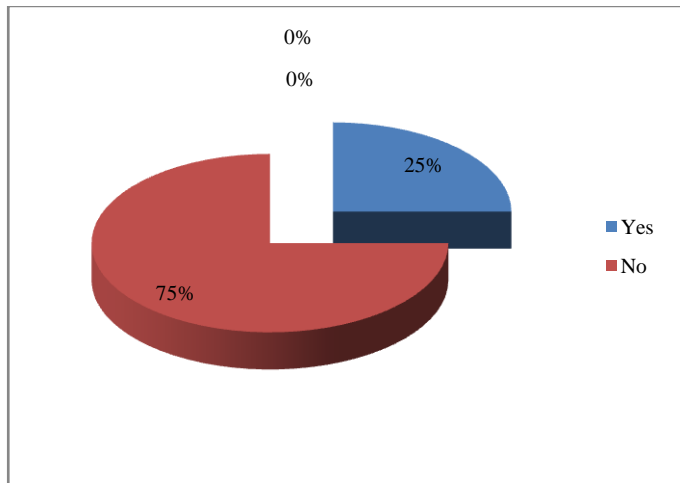
Figure 10: Does the continuous survival of media stations in the long run depend on adverts or commercial?



Source: Field Survey, 2021

From the Figure above, yes responses of respondents represents about 81% and no responses of respondents represents about 19%. This shows that majority of respondents are of the view that the continuous survival of media stations in the long run depend on adverts or commercials.

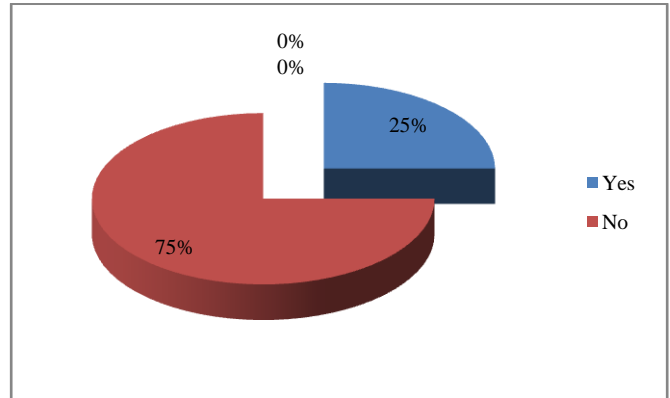
Figure 11: Can media station survive without adverts or commercials?



Source: Field Survey, 2021

From the above Figure, yes responses of respondents represents about 25% and no responses of respondents represents about 75%. This shows that most of the respondents agree that media station cannot survive without adverts or commercials.

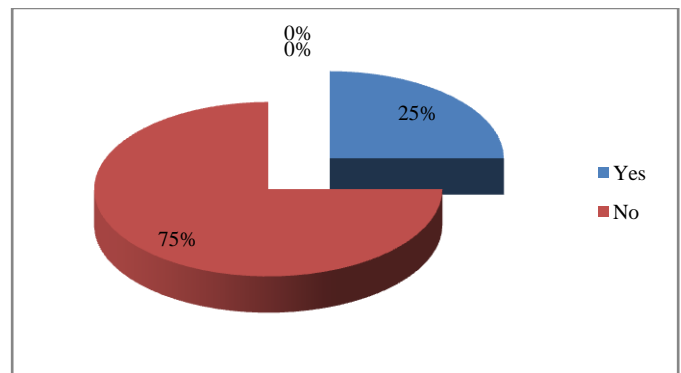
Figure 12: Are there any sources of revenue for media stations?



Source: Field survey, 2021

From table the above, yes responses of respondents represents about 25% and no responses of respondents represents about 75%. This means that there are no other sources of revenue for mass media apart from adverts or commercials.

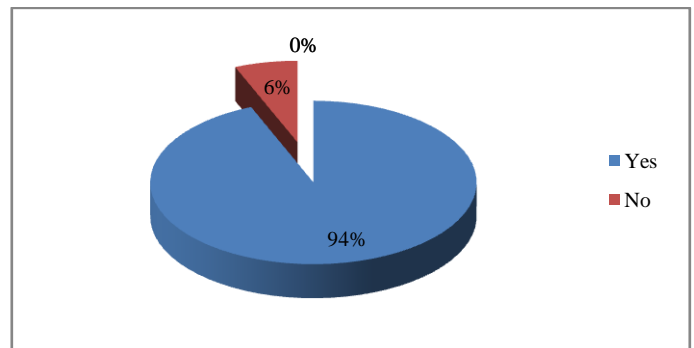
Figure 13: Do locations, area of coverage and size of audience determine the numbers of advert media stations have?



Source: Field survey, 2021

From the above table, yes responses of respondents represents about 75% and no responses of respondents represents about 25%. This shows that the locations, area of coverage and size of audience determine the numbers of advert media stations have

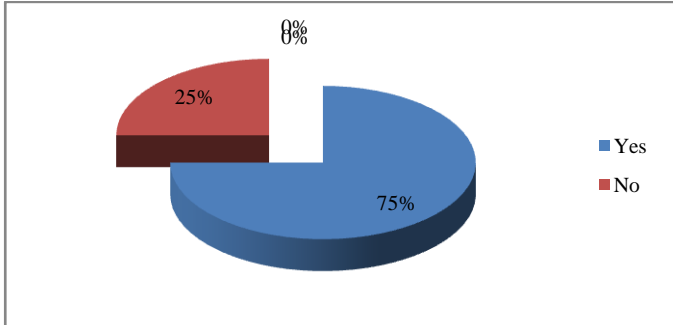
Figure 14: Do adverts or commercial prices of media stations determine advertiser's choice of media?



Source: Field survey, 2021

From the table above, yes responses of respondents represents about 94% and no responses of respondents represents about 6%. This shows that advert or commercial prices of media stations determine advertiser’s choice of media.

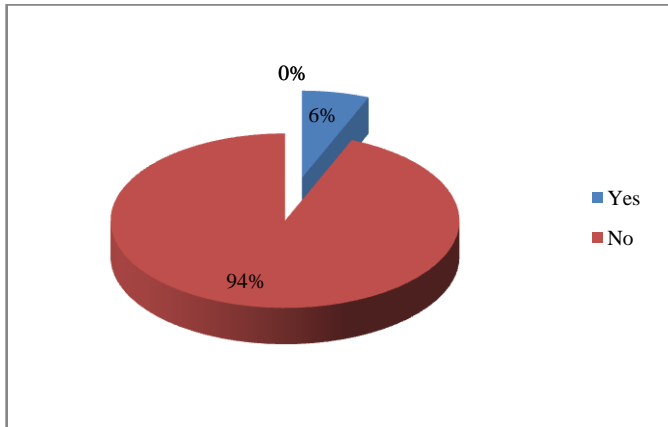
Figure 15: Do advertiser interests affect media sense of judgment in terms of news objectivity or worthiness?



Source: Field survey, 2021

From table above, 60 respondents representing 75% agreed that the interest of advertisers affects media objectivity while 20 respondents representing 25% disagree.

Figure 16: Do you think the media is concern about public interest in their reportage?



Source: Field survey, 2021

From the pie chart above, yes responses of respondents represents about 6% and no responses of respondents represents about 94%. This shows that public interest is not the major concern of media organizations but advertiser’s interest.

#### IV. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings of this study revealed that adverts or commercials are some of the cores sources of revenue in media outfits. The above revelation is in tandem with the findings of Nwabueze, Ezebuenyi, and Ezeoke (2012) who found that the major source of revenue for media houses is advertising, he further unraveled that most news organizations depend on advertisements for their continued meaningful and profitable existence. In the same vein, Okolie (2011) corroborated that advert revenue helps in the financial

development of the Nigerian media, especially the privately-owned ones, to guard their freedom.

Another revelation made by this study is that the continuous survival and sustenance of media stations in the long run largely depends on adverts or commercials. This simply means media organizations cannot survive without adverts or commercial. Finally, findings of this study also revealed that the interest of advertisers in most cases, affect the media sense of judgments as it pertains objectivity, credibility, accuracy and news worthiness.

#### V. CONCLUSION

For the mass media to stay above water level, they need to have constant cash inflow. And one of the most viable sources of revenue for media organisations is advertising which to a large extent influences what the media dish out to its audience either as news or programmes. Revenue as we all know is the backbone of every organisation and the mass media is never an exception. Although the continuous sustenance and survival of media organizations to a very large extent lies on the ads, the media is still expected to champion the interest of the public without any form of control either by the state or commercial entities as enshrine in their constitutional obligations.

#### VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends the following:

1. Since the continuous survival and sustenance of mass media organizations largely depends on adverts or commercials, media stations should make advertising more creative and dynamic, more persuasive, more product match and efforts should be made on more research in advertising in terms of innovations that will make advertising more effective and convincing.
2. Although the mass media major stream of revenue is advertising, that does not mean the advertisers interest should outshine the constitutional role of the mass media which is to champion the interest of the masses and to hold the government accountable to the masses through their watchdog functions.
3. To meet the growing challenges of profit making, for the sustenance of the media organizations, advertising-related services should be given top priority and research should be conducted in that regards.

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