

MEDIA USABILITY AND ADVANCEMENT OF REGIONAL POLITICAL AGENDA IN WEST AFRICA: APPRAISING KNOWLEDGE GAP AMONG RESIDENTS OF GHANA AND SENEGAL

USABILIDAD DE LOS MEDIOS Y AVANCE DE LA AGENDA POLÍTICA REGIONAL EN ÁFRICA OCCIDENTAL: EVALUACIÓN DE LA BRECHA DE CONOCIMIENTO ENTRE LOS RESIDENTES DE GHANA Y SENEGAL

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Abstract

This work was on “Media usability and advancement of regional political administration: An appraisal of the knowledge gap on regional political agenda among residents of Ghana and Senegal”. The objectives were to find out the common medium of communication; how often do information about regional politics reach residents; what has been the major barrier of getting information about regional politics to residents of West African Countries. The scope was limited to Ghana and Senegal. The theoretical framework was on the agenda setting and the Social Responsibility theories. It adopted the online survey method on a population of 52,929,398 million persons. The sample size was 384 persons while the instrument was a structured questionnaire. Findings showed that information reach peoples by radio at 196 or 51%, indigenous media 22 or 6%. It showed that verbal form of communication thrives more than the print and social media for information in African countries.

Keywords

Advancement, Ecowas, Governance, Media, Politics

1. INTRODUCTION

The Golden book has it that no man is an island. So also are the communities, the states and the countries. Each country though with elements of independence has some areas of reliance on other countries. On regular basis, countries enter into negotiations, seek assistance on security, financing of education, health, housing environmental control and very many other matters. This activity of seeking reliance by countries cover the advanced nations, the developed countries and the developing countries. Countries and countries interact to aid one another even on the resolution of political quagmire. This is usually a product of communication by the effective use of a specific channel of communication from the fold of the media. Hence, it is through the aid of the media that problems and achievements of countries are made known to one another to substantiate demands of assistance needed for development and growth (Deane, 2016). The media plays a dire role in determining public opinion, influencing policy, and nurturing democratic governance. Dagron (2001) compared the mass media, particularly radio networks as the most influential communication to nation building, the voice of planning, teacher of new skills, and extender of effective markets. Mass media could be connected to inspire the independent states of Africa into development, rapid economic growth, efficiency, and literacy (Waisbord, 2001). In West Africa, a region considered with political instability, socio-economic challenges, and ethnic diversity, the media's duty remain boundless. Grounded in the contexts of the Agenda-Setting Theory and the Social Responsibility Theory, this work explores how the media in West Africa influences regional politics while navigating its obligations to society.

1.1. *Statement of the Problem*

In the 70s, about 17 countries in the West African region entered into mutual understanding which covered political growth, economic progress and social interest. This agreement was signed on the platform of an organization christened, Economic Community of West African States, (ECOWAS). For many years, the respective countries have made valuable contributions to the existence of the organization with milestones in the political survival of some of the countries despite ideological differences in the region. Prior to independence, some of the countries like Ghana and Nigeria were under colonial administration of the British government, whereas others like Cameroons Togo, as well as Senegal, Liberia, Benin Republic were under the regime of the French government. The influences of the colonial governments has not ceased despite independence from colonial administrations but often and often fall to military coups and military administration. The non- separation from the umbilical cord of the colonial masters often cause disloyalty to the missions and directives of the ECOWAS. The non- adherence and implementation of ECOWAS policies by certain countries weaken the political collective powers of the member states or countries. For instance, in 2024, three independent member countries, Niger, Burkina Faso, and Mali

announced their withdrawal from the ECOWAS. This means that the mandate, economic contributions and the promotion of all social affairs by the three countries were no longer binding and had ended. The exit of the three countries came when ECOWA attained 49 and had already laid the foundation for the establishment of an Economic, Social and Cultural Council in West Africa with a regional consultative meeting of civil society organisations, to re-awaken and leverage citizens' inclusion in governance.

The ECOWAS Commission's on Political Affairs, Peace and Security had equally outlined the focus of the regional organization in a consultative phase for a sustainable citizens' council and forestall existential threat with strategic communication. It had hoped to deal with the issues of gaps in the relations between the governing elite and the people, using inclusive citizens' representatives' platforms, the traditional institutions, religious and community leaders, to organize the ECOWAS Sustainable Energy Forum and a Committee for Recognition of the Community Origin before the end of 2024. Perhaps, it had known that the laudable strides were overshadowed by contemporary political developments and banked on the media institutions to feed the public. Hence, it launched an innovative media engagement of a weekly media briefing to address the gap in the dissemination of information on achievements of the region. For consolidation of results, ECOWAS thanked the media for its previous support and assured of availability to respond promptly to media inquiries on weekly media briefing. The statement of the problem lies whether the ECOWAS and media new partnership have live to expectations in the interest of people in the region particularly on issues of democracy and politics in the region.

1.2. Objectives of the study

Which medium of communication has been effectively utilized in making information available about ECOWAS regional politics to residents of West African States?

How often do information about ECOWAS regional politics get to residents of West African Countries?

What has been the major barrier of getting information about ECOWAS regional politics to residents of West African Countries?

1.3. Scope

The scope of this study was limited to only two countries of Ghana and Senegal. It was meant to cover the countries earlier governed under the British and the French colonial masters. While English remains the major language in Ghana, French dominates the language sphere in Senegal.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. *Media and Democracy*

In precise perspectives, it is an uphill task to separate media and democracy. Curran & Seaton (2018) says that the relationship between media and democracy cannot be discussed in isolation because the media serves as a cornerstone for democratic principles. It is the medium through which information flows, public discourse takes place, and accountability is enforced. The obvious reason is that media as channels of communication are operated by human beings to serve social interest of people and democracy from its common definition is a system of government operated by people and for the people. The focus or end point of the media lie to serve the people and democracy is also operated to serve the people. Hence, the interest of two concepts remain people centric in all ramifications. Media institutions may find it difficult to be in existence without the existence of the people whose activities turn out the raw material of processing for news, features, editorials, letters and photographs that form contents of media institutions. The media rely on the people to conduct events and the people live in places that also create news. On the other side of democracy, as a system of government, whatever is regarded as the tenets are only made known to people through the media. Nobody would know anything about democracy from origin, concepts, founding fathers, operations, acceptance, rejection, achievements or failures where the media does not exist. Therefore, the existence of the media and the existence of democracy cannot be discussed at the exclusion of one another.

2.2. *Media and Challenges of West African Regional Politics*

The relationship between media and politics in West Africa is symbiotic yet fraught with tension. Across the West African countries there is no country without a reasonable number of radio stations, television houses, and newspaper industries. There is no country also where the social media is not allowed to operate. The availability of these main-stream media of communication are supported by the unrestricted access to indigenous sources of communication. There are informal communication outlets as schools, churches, peer associations and groups as well as pressure groups. There are town hall meetings, folk tale groups, dance and theatres. All these add to cause the free flow of information on many aspects including politics and democratic institutions. Some of the organized and registered media outlets serve as watchdogs, exposing corruption, human rights abuses, and electoral malpractices. At the same time, they are instrumental in fostering political dialogue and educating the masses.

Before and during elections, these media institutions and the informal groups serve as channel for voter education and political campaigns as well as in the assessment of socio-political organizations. However, biased reporting and the dissemination of fake news

exacerbate political tensions. For example, during the various presidential elections, the media's role in highlighting the peaceful transition of power underscored its potential as a tool for democratization (Darboe & Sowe, 2017).

In political conflicts and political unrest, including the civil wars in Nigeria, Liberia and Sierra Leone, the negative roles of the media highlight the need for responsible media and peace journalism, which emphasizes reconciliation and de-escalation, has been working to foster unity (Lynch & Galtung, 2010). However, the challenges include:

Censorship and Intimidation: Journalists often face threats, harassment, and imprisonment, limiting their ability to report freely. For instance, the imprisonment of investigative journalist Omoyele Sowore in Nigeria illustrates the suppression of dissenting voices (Amnesty International, 2020). Financial constraints also pose challenges to media in West Africa. The issue is that many media outlets rely on advertising revenue, making them susceptible to commercial and political influences. Digital Disinformation has also come to join the list of challenges facing media institutions. The proliferation of social media has introduced new challenges, including the spread of fake news and propaganda.

2.3. Review of Related Literature

Jawia, Maksum & Bustami (2024) in a study "Qualitative content analysis of *Point Media* portrayal of ECOWAS military intervention in the Gambia", examined how the *Point News Media* portrayed the ECOWAS military intervention in The Gambia. ECOWAS had intervened when former President Yahya Jammeh refused to step down after losing the 2016 election. The media had discussed the intervention's legality and legitimacy in promoting the democratic transfer of power in the region. Initially, the intervention was praised for successfully promoting democratic change in a region prone to coups. However, the public later requested the withdrawal of the intervention force. The study analyzed 64 news articles published between 2017 and 2023. Ten frames were identified: dissatisfaction, ECOMIG mandate, ECOMIG success, instability, legitimacy, reassurance, social service, support, uncertainty, and confrontation. The Point news media portrayed the intervention negatively, in 45 or 70% news articles characterized by dissatisfaction and confrontation in implementing the intervention's mandate. This negative depiction contributed to the shift in public discourse towards requesting the ECOWAS military withdrawal. The study used qualitative content analysis as a data gathering and analysis method to explore the portrayal of the intervention. This method allowed the researchers to identify the different frames used to depict the intervention. By presenting the findings in simple language, the study recommended increase accessibility and understanding of the democratic political agenda of Ecowas organization in West Africa.

Hamajoda (2016) in the research "Informing and interacting with citizens: A strategic communication review of the websites of the ECOWAS parliaments" evaluates the ECOWAS

members' websites based on a modified version of the guidelines recommended by Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) in 2009. The appraisal under several headings, suggested to help parliaments plan and oversee their websites in a modern age where the internet provide a continuously significant platform for interacting and communicating with the general public. The study finds out that while 11 or 73% of the member States websites score well on general information about their parliaments, they lacked updates in making their websites a one-stop point for political information about their countries, and a fulcrum for interaction between legislators and citizens and a real time deliberation on burning national and regional issues despite the current availability of suitable interactive tools on the internet.

These reviews are important to this current work as it had centered on content analysis of media service rather than the aim of this work to explore the perception of the people rather than content analysis of media service and the instruments of communicating with the public.

2.4. Theoretical framework

Two theories applied are: the Agenda setting theory and the Social responsibility theory. On one hand, the Agenda-setting theory posits that the media does not tell people what to think but rather what to think about (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). In West Africa, this theory becomes pertinent as media outlets often highlight issues such as governance, corruption, and electoral integrity. For instance, during the 2019 Nigerian presidential elections, media coverage played a significant role in prioritizing discussions around economic policies and national security (Ojebode & Adesina, 2021). However, media ownership and political affiliations frequently skew the agenda. Private media, controlled by influential political figures, often prioritize stories that favour the proprietors, thereby undermining objective reporting (Oso, 2020). In contrast, state-owned media tends to emphasize government achievements, sidelining dissenting voices.

On the other hand, the Social Responsibility Theory advocates that media organizations must balance freedom of expression with societal obligations. This theory, developed in response to libertarian media systems, emphasizes ethical reporting, accuracy, and the need to serve the public interest (Hutchins Commission, 1947).

In West Africa, the application of this theory is often hindered by financial constraints, limited access to information, and political interference. Despite these challenges, initiatives like investigative journalism in Ghana and Nigeria have demonstrated the media's commitment to accountability in revealing high-level corruption in administration, leading to significant reforms (Alabi, 2018). In the context of the study titled "Media Usability and Advancement of Regional Political Agenda in West Africa: Appraising Knowledge Gap among Residents of Ghana and Senegal," both Agenda Setting Theory and Social Responsibility Theory play important but distinct roles in shaping the analysis. On the importance of Agenda

Setting Theory, this theory explains how the media shapes what people think about rather than what to think. In this study, it helps to explore how the media in Ghana and Senegal highlight (or downplay) regional political issues, which can influence public awareness and concern. The theory helps to examine why some topics within regional politics become prominent among certain segments of the population, leading to differences in knowledge levels across groups. By setting the media agenda, news outlets may indirectly support or resist regional political agendas (like ECOWAS integration or regional security), affecting public engagement and understanding. It allows a comparative analysis of how Ghanaian and Senegalese media prioritize political content, potentially reflecting different national interests or levels of freedom and access.

Concerning the importance of Social Responsibility Theory, this theory emphasizes the duty of the media to inform, educate, and serve the public good. In this context, it evaluates whether the media in Ghana and Senegal are responsibly informing citizens about regional political developments. Social responsibility underscores the media's role in reducing inequalities in access to information, thus directly addressing the knowledge gaps your study is appraising. It stresses that media institutions should be accountable to the public, which is essential when assessing whether the media act as effective channels for promoting regional political agendas. A socially responsible media system enhances trust and encourages civic participation, which are vital for advancing regional integration and political unity in West Africa.

3. METHODOLOGY

The study adopted the online survey method since it provided a scientific approach of measuring the opinion and perception or attitude of people on the workability of a process or phenomena. The estimated population of the study 52,929,398 million persons drawn from 34,427,414 people in Ghana and 18,501,984 people from Senegal. A sample size of 384 was adopted as recommended by Kreejie & Morgan (1970) for populations above 75,000. Akpan (2022) also harps on restricting the sampling size not above 1000 persons in large scopes while in very small population, the number can be kept at not less than 50 for reliability and convenience of data collection. A simplified questionnaire containing 10 questions was raised to cover objectives and proportionately distributed online to respondents in four countries through electronic (email) data base of major mobile telecommunication network providers.

The proportionate calculation and distribution of questionnaire showed that Ghana had 250 copies and Senegal 134 copies. The answers provided through returned emails sent on Google forms were analyzed by the use of simple frequency tables and supported by pie chart diagrams to ascertain the results and findings.

4. DATA ANALYSIS

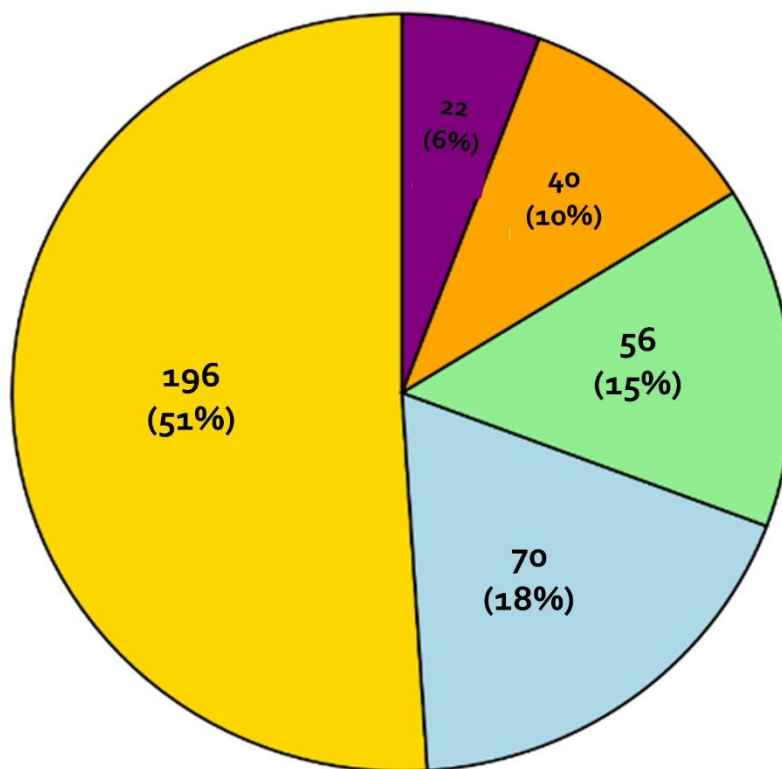
Table 1 and pie chart 1 shows that in the medium which information reach people is by radio at 196 or 51% out of 384 while the least score was recorded by other forms of communication classified under indigenous at 22 or 6% persons. The implication is that oral form of mainstream communication thrives more than the print or technology based social media.

Table 1. Most used means of communication

Medium	Response	%
Radio	196	51
Television	70	18
Newspapers	56	15
Social Media	40	10
Others (indigenous)	22	6
Total	384	100

Source: the authors

Figure 1 – Distribution of Media Usage



Source: the authors

Table 2 and pie chart 2 shows an analysis of the frequency which information reaches the people. This shows that on Weekly frequency, there was zero response and a nil percentage. This was also the response of person to the variable of Not at all. There was zero response and a nil percentage. It clearly means that on weekly basis persons do get information about

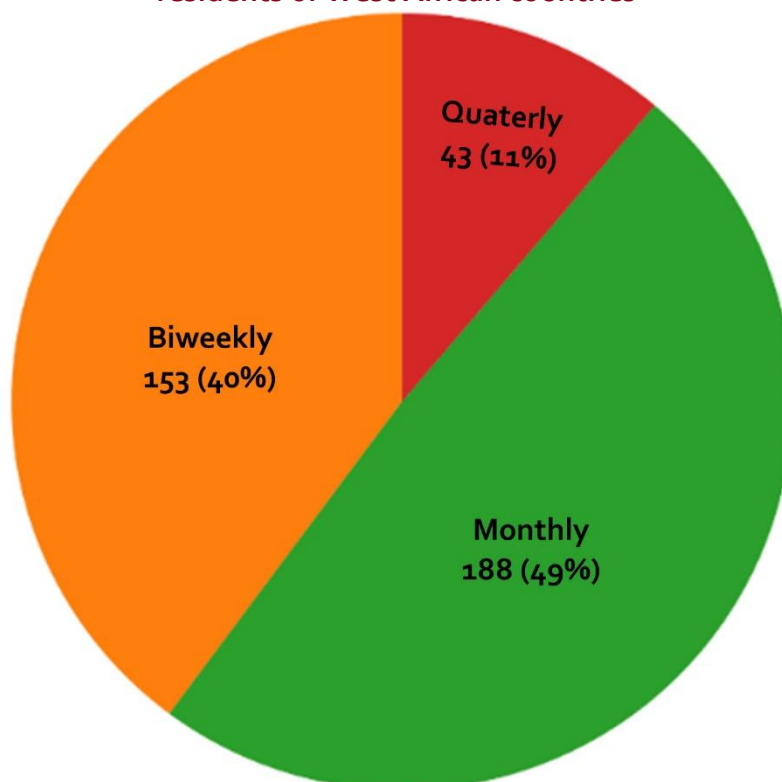
ECOWAS while there also existed no persons that do not get information entirely about ECOWAS. Rather the analysis indicates highest scored frequency on Monthly frequency at 188 or 49 persons out of 384 while the least went to Quarterly at 43 or 11%. Biweekly had a score of 153 or 40%. The result is that information about regional political organization rarely reaches the people. The lack of weekly updates and dominance of monthly/biweekly frequencies show that ECOWAS information does not permeate daily or weekly discourse. The people are not consistently exposed to ECOWAS initiatives unless there is a trigger event, such as a coup, sanction, or peacekeeping deployment.

Table 2 - Frequency which information about ECOWAS regional politics get to residents of West African countries

Frequency	Response	%
Weekly	0	0
Biweekly	153	40
Monthly	188	49
Quarterly	43	11
Not at all	0	0
Total	384	100

Source: the authors

Figure 2 – Frequency which information about ECOWAS regional politics get to residents of West African countries



Source: the authors

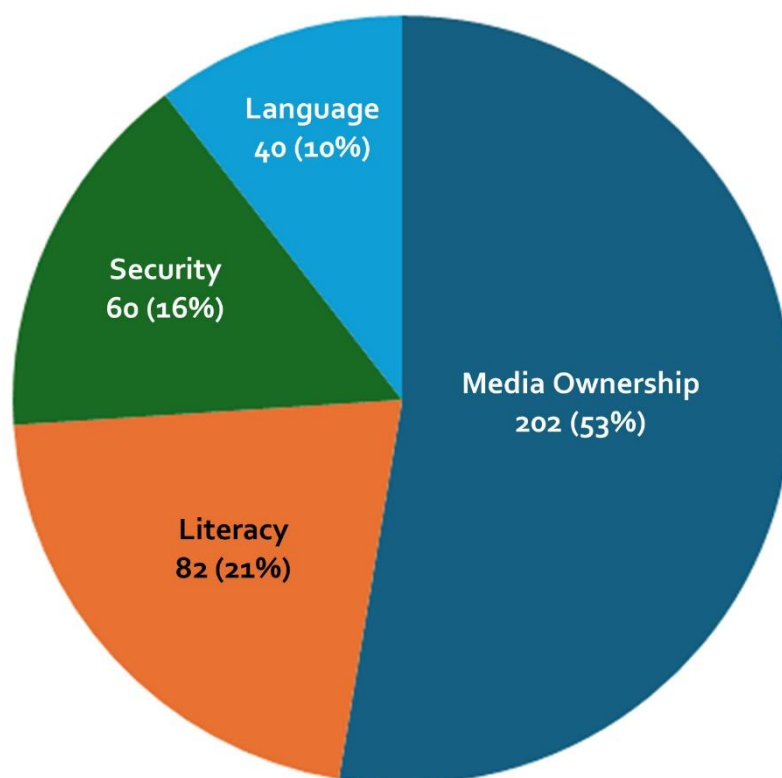
Table 3 was on the barriers that stop regional information from getting to the people. The analysis indicated that media ownership top the list with 202 or 53% while language had 40 or 10%. The implication is that the media has not been accessible to the people to get information.

Table 3 - The major barrier of getting information about ECOWAS regional politics to residents of West African Countries

Barrier	Response	%
Media Ownership	202	53
Literacy	82	21
Security	60	16
Language	40	10
Total	384	100

Source: the authors

Figure 3 – Barrier Response Distribution



Source: the authors

5. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Findings emerged from this research based on the questions raised:

Which medium of communication has been effectively utilized in making information available about ECOWAS regional politics to residents of West African States?

From data analysis in Table 1 and pie chart 1, it shows that in the medium which information reach people is by radio at 196 or 51% out of 384 while the least score was recorded by other forms of communication classified under indigenous at 22 or 6% persons. The implication is that oral form of mainstream communication thrives more than the print or technology based social media. This work agrees with what Okeke, Nwosu, & Ono (2021) that radio has remained a dominant medium of communication and this is due to the fact that its communication contents can be acknowledged at distant homes as a result of its extensive coverage and its permeating nature. It has the ability to reach large audiences because it is relatively inexpensive and can function devoid of electricity. Therefore, it is regarded as the most reachable technology for information dissemination.

How often does information about ECOWAS regional politics get to residents of West African Countries?

Table 2 shows an analysis of the frequency which information reaches the people. No Respondent received Weekly updates as 0% of respondents get weekly information about ECOWAS regional politics. This is a strong indicator of low immediacy and irregular media coverage, even for a regional bloc tasked with major political and security roles. Monthly is the Most Common Frequency with 188 or (49%) of respondents who receive ECOWAS-related information on a monthly basis. This suggests a delayed or periodic awareness, often tied to major events, policy announcements, or regional crises. Biweekly information had 153 or (40%) responses. It showed that a considerable portion receive information every two weeks, suggesting a moderate engagement level, likely influenced by media cycles or institutional updates. Quarterly frequency attracted 43 or (11%). This showed that only few persons hear about ECOWAS once every 3 months, reinforcing that while infrequent, there is still some minimum exposure. On persons who have no information about Ecowas (Not at all), interestingly, there was zero response and zero 0% of respondents who claimed to never receive information.

This implied that basic awareness exists, but the consistency and depth of information was lacking. It indicates that information about regional political organization of ECOWAS rarely reaches the people. This supports the position of Ero (2010) that ECOWAS has communication and outreach deficits, limiting its impact on the everyday consciousness of West African citizens. This means that information on how frequently West African residents obtain information about the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) is limited. It further revealed that many citizens are unaware of ECOWAS protocols and

decisions related to the free movement of persons and goods. This lack of awareness suggests that information dissemination about ECOWAS may not be reaching all residents effectively. This shows in West Africa, the importance of creating public awareness that ECOWAS initiatives rely on effective communication strategies to inform the public. These findings imply that while ECOWAS undertakes various initiatives, the frequency and effectiveness of information dissemination to West African residents vary, affecting public awareness and engagements with ECOWAS policies and programs.

What has been the major barrier of getting information about ECOWAS regional politics to residents of West African Countries?

Table 3 and pie chart 3 was on the barriers that stop regional information from getting to the people. The analysis indicated that media ownership top the list with 202 or 53% while language had 40 or 10%. The implication is that the media has not been accessible to the people to get information. It is a confirmation that media ownership plays a critical role in shaping the dissemination of information about ECOWAS in West Africa. Media ownership patterns significantly influence the framing, coverage, and accessibility of ECOWAS-related news, often limiting the public's understanding of regional integration efforts. Adedayo (2021) had earlier supported those journalists working for media outlets controlled by influential owners often face restrictions, leading to censorship or self-censorship. This prevents objective reporting on ECOWAS's challenges and achievements, creating gaps in public knowledge. In addition, this research findings agree with the position of Ojo (2019) that many media outlets in West Africa are owned or influenced by political elites who use these platforms to advance their agendas. Coverage of ECOWAS activities is often skewed to align with national or personal political interests. For instance, reports critical of ECOWAS's interventions in political crises might be underreported or misrepresented by politically-owned media outlets.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The media in West Africa operates within a complex interplay of political, economic, and social factors. By adhering to the principles of agenda-setting and social responsibility, media outlets have significantly contributed to democratic governance and regional stability. In spite of existing challenges, media in West Africa require concerted efforts from governments, civil society, and the general public to excel. The public and the private media institutions appear ready to build regional politics provided the political institutions act based on policies of seeing the media as partners in progress. Media expect the regional political institutions to encourage policies that support the establishment and sustainability of independent media outlets as alternative voices to the people. A conclusion can also be arrived that radio is the dominant channel. With 51% (196 people) indicating radio as their source of information, it is clear that radio remains a powerful medium for reaching the

public. This is especially significant in areas with limited internet or literacy access, where audio content can transcend language and literacy barriers.

It also can be concluded that there is limited impact of indigenous media: Only 6% (22 people) reported receiving information via indigenous media. This might imply that traditional forms of communication (like town criers, community elders, or local drama) are either not being effectively utilized or are being overshadowed by modern technology. For governments, NGOs, or health campaigns aiming to spread messages quickly and widely, prioritizing radio as a communication channel could yield better outreach. This might include investing in radio advertisements, talk shows, and jingles in local languages. There is a strong need for diversification. Despite radio's dominance, there is a risk in over-relying on a single medium. Exploring ways to integrate indigenous media—possibly through community engagement or localized storytelling—could improve reach and cultural resonance, especially in rural or tightly-knit communities. In all it showed gaps in accessibility or trust on information channels and policy makers in the region. The low numbers for indigenous media might also signal challenges like accessibility, relevance, or trust. Investigating why people aren't tuning into or trusting these channels could help revive their role in community education.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

Regional political institutions should establish independent media and media regulatory bodies to ensure media freedom and accountability outside the media of the respective member countries

The regional political organizations should engage in the capacity building of its media unit employees to relate and be training journalists of frequent ethical reporting and investigative skills.

The governments and NGOs should provide funding for public-interest journalism with editorial independence of reporting political matters across the West African region unbiased.

8. SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE STUDIES

Some thoughtful suggestions for future research are raised to build on the current study. These are that future studies should examine the role of individual media platforms such as television, social media, mobile phones, newspapers, and community meetings to get a fuller picture of information dissemination. Second, incorporating interviews, focus groups, or open-ended survey questions to deeper insights into why people prefer certain media, how they perceive messages, and barriers to accessing information. Third, analyze media usage patterns by age, gender, education level, occupation, and geographic location (urban versus rural). This can help in tailoring communication strategies to specific groups. Fourth, consider tracking changes in media consumption over time to understand evolving trends, especially with increasing access to digital technology and go beyond to investigate the effectiveness

of different media in changing knowledge, attitudes, or behaviors related to the information being shared.

Future research could also explore how to integrate indigenous and modern media effectively—for example, blending storytelling traditions with radio programming or podcasts.

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