Investigating the effects of the proliferation of commercial broadcasting on public service broadcasting: The case of Rivers State of Nigeria Broadcasting Corporation.

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Masters in Journalism and Media Studies of Rhodes University,

By

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Abstract

1992 marked a turning point in Nigeria’s broadcasting history as the country formally deregulated her broadcast space. However, it was not until March 2002 that the first commercial radio station was established in Rivers State, a broadcast environment hitherto monopolised by Radio Rivers. The coming of the first independent radio station in Rivers State in March 2002 was followed by the establishment of two other stations in October 2003 and November 2003 respectively. As important as these events in broadcasting in Rivers State are, however, media scholars have argued that in most societies where such change has taken place, public service broadcasters have tampered with their values of being an open space where individuals and groups can come together to be educated, informed, and entertained.

This study investigates the extent to which the proliferation of commercial broadcasting outlets has affected Radio Rivers’ public service programming and scheduling. Using a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods, through in-depth interviews and analysis of the mandate and programme schedules, the study established that while Radio Rivers still maintains some public service values, its current programming policy is driven by the need to compete with the commercial broadcasters. This is evidenced in the decrease in the programme space allocated to current affairs and educational programmes on the schedule, (the genre of public service broadcasting), and the increase in attention to advertisements and entertainment programmes, (the genre of commercial broadcasting). The study also confirms the adverse effects of dwindling financial resources as forcing public service radios to compromise on their public service values, as majority of programmes on Radio Rivers current programme schedules are now geared towards attracting advertisers rather than serving the public good and interests. However, the study proved that it is not in all cases that the entry of commercial broadcasters into Rivers State broadcast space has undermined Radio Rivers public service values. Indeed, in leading to the expansion of interactive, news, and the diversification of entertainment programmes spaces on Radio Rivers’ programming schedules, the proliferation of commercial broadcasters has yielded some positive effects on Radio Rivers public service values and contribution to the public sphere.

The study further highlights the need for some policy reforms at Radio Rivers, such as the introduction of licence fees, increased government funding and loosening government’s current control over the station. In addition, there is the need for the edict establishing the station to be amended to reflect the current trends in broadcasting in Rivers State, and above all to reposition Radio Rivers to sustain public good and public interests in its programming.
# Table of Content

## Preliminaries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abstract</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Table of Contents</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedication</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of Financial Support</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Tables</td>
<td>viii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Appendices</td>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Chapter One: Introduction

| 1.0 Introduction                              | 1    |
| 1.1 Background of the study                  | 1    |
| 1.2 Statement of the problem                 | 4    |
| 1.3 Objectives of the study                  | 5    |
| 1.4 Research issues and assumptions          | 6    |
| 1.5 Significance of the study                | 7    |
| 1.6 Methods of study                         | 7    |
| 1.7 Thesis outline                           | 8    |

## Chapter Two: Theoretical Perspectives and Literature Review

| 2.0 Introduction                              | 10   |
| 2.1 Theoretical Framework                     |      |
| 2.1.1 The concept of public service broadcasting | 12   |
| 2.1.2 The concept of commercial broadcasting  | 13   |
| 2.1.3 Public service broadcasting versus commercial broadcasting | 15 |
| 2.1.4 Public service programming              | 18   |
| 2.1.5 The impact of dwindling funding on public service programming | 19 |
| 2.2 The Public Sphere                         | 24   |
| 2.2.1 The media and the public sphere         | 26   |
| 2.2.2 Radio as a public watchdog              | 29   |
| 2.2.3 Radio as agent of public representation and diversity | 30 |
| 2.2.4 Radio for informed citizenry            | 31   |
| 2.2.5 Radio in entertainment                 | 32   |
| 2.3 Conclusion                               | 33   |

## Chapter Three: Historical Perspectives of Radio Rivers

| 3.0 Introduction                              | 34   |
| 3.1 A brief history of radio broadcasting in Nigeria | 34   |
| 3.1.1 The history of Radio Rivers             | 36   |
| 3.1.2 The aims of Radio Rivers                | 37   |
| 3.1.3 Programming at Radio Rivers             | 38   |
| 3.2 The liberalisation of radio broadcasting in Nigeria | 40 |
| 3.2.1 The establishment of commercial radio stations in Rivers State | 42 |
| 3.3 Radio Rivers today                        | 43   |
| 3.4 Conclusion                               | 44   |
Chapter Four: Research Methodology
4.0 Introduction......................................................................................45
4.1 Research design..................................................................................45
4.2 Sample selection................................................................................46
4.3 Population sampling.........................................................................47
4.4 Sample size.......................................................................................48
4.5 Research procedure..........................................................................49
4.5.1 Document analysis.......................................................................50
4.5.2 Semi-structured interviews.........................................................51
4.6 Data processing and analysis..........................................................54
4.7 Conclusion.......................................................................................56

Chapter Five: Findings on Radio Rivers Mandate and Programme Schedules
5.0 Introduction......................................................................................57
5.1 Perceptions of Radio Rivers’ mandate..............................................57
5.2 Perceptions of public service broadcasting....................................61
5.3 Perceptions of commercial broadcasting......................................63
5.4 Perceptions of performance of Radio Rivers.................................64
5.5 Effects of commercial broadcasters on Radio Rivers’ public service values ......66
5.6 Effects of commercial broadcasters on Radio Rivers’ funding ..............67
5.6.1 Effects of government funding......................................................68
5.6.2 Effects on commercial revenue sources....................................69
5.7 Programming and scheduling policies...........................................73
5.7.1 Programme production..............................................................74
5.7.2 Programme schedule.................................................................74
5.8 Past and present programme schedules........................................75
5.8.1 Trends in programming and scheduling.....................................76
5.8.2 Survey of schedules for the period of study...............................77
5.9 Time-Space allocation on programme schedules............................80
5.9.1 News and Current Affairs Programming..................................80
5.9.2 Advertisement programming.....................................................85
5.9.3 Entertainment programming.....................................................87
5.10 Conclusion......................................................................................89

Chapter Six: Discussions and Interpretations of findings
6.0 Introduction......................................................................................91
6.1 Discussion of findings for public service merits.............................91
6.2 Radio Rivers’ contribution to the public sphere..............................95
6.2.1 Public watchdog.........................................................................95
6.2.2 Agent of diversity and representation......................................98
6.2.3 Informed citizenship.................................................................99
6.2.4 Entertainment..........................................................................101

Chapter Seven Concluding Reflections and Recommendations
7.0 Introduction.....................................................................................102
7.1 Radio Rivers in identity crisis........................................................102
7.2 Suggested reforms to enhance Radio Rivers’ public service values.....108
7.3 Limitations of study.......................................................................113
7.4 Summary......................................................................................114

Bibliography and References ................................................................116
Appendices
Appendix A: Interview schedules
   A(i) Interview schedule for policy makers
   A(ii) Interview schedule for decision makers and managers
   A(iii) Interview schedule for producers and journalists
Appendix B: Radio Rivers’ Programme Schedules (January – March 2000)
Appendix C: Radio Rivers’ programme Schedules (January – March 2004)
Appendix D: Letter of introduction
Appendix E: Rivers State of Nigeria Broadcasting Corporation Edict No. 8 of 1973
Appendix F: Radio Rivers’ categories of Programme types
Appendix G: National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) Decree No 38 of 1992
Appendix H: National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) Amendment Decree No 55 of 1999
Dedication

To the memories of my parents:
late James Obelema Da-Wariboko,
and
late Comfort Isabella Owen.
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An academic project of this nature definitely requires the input of several people, those listed below, and many who for lack of space cannot be listed, but whose valuable contributions have made this study successful.

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BTC, as I would prefer to say in my local Izon dialect ‘Omiete, Omielamam, and Enyiminiro’.

My prayer for you folkes at BTC is that may God continue to bless and crown all your efforts and services to the knowledge industry and humanity with resounding success.
## List of Tables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Table 1: Study population</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 2: Categories of respondents interviewed</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3: Programme schedules for the selected period of study</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4: Government expenditure on salary and wages for the period</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 5: Government expenditure on equipment for the period</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 6: Commercial revenue generated for the period of study</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 7: Volume of weekly and quarterly programmes aired</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 8: Programmes weekly space allocation</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Appendices

Appendix A: Interview schedules
   A(i) Interview schedule for policy makers
   A(ii) Interview schedule for decision makers and managers
   A(iii) Interview schedule for producers and journalists
Appendix B: Radio Rivers’ Programme Schedules (January – March 2000)
Appendix C: Radio Rivers’ programme Schedules (January – March 2004)
Appendix D: Letter of introduction
Appendix E: Rivers State of Nigeria Broadcasting Corporation Edict No. 8 of 1973
Appendix F: Radio Rivers’ categories of Programme types
Appendix G: National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) Decree No 38 of 1992
Appendix H: National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) Amendment Decree No 55 of 1999
Chapter One
Introduction

This study examines how the proliferation of commercial broadcasters has affected public service programming and scheduling at the Rivers State of Nigeria Broadcasting Corporation (RSBC), known on air as Radio Rivers. From a media studies perspective, the study is premised on the fact that the proliferation of commercial broadcast stations may not only affect Radio Rivers as a public broadcaster, but that, in its attempt to serve the public good, Radio Rivers is changing its traditional public service programming values and, its contribution to the public sphere. Therefore, this study aims to find out whether Radio Rivers, in the face of competition from commercial broadcasters, provides a genuine space for the different segments of the population to be educated, informed, and entertained, in line with its original public service mandate.

This chapter will provide a general background to the study from both global and local perspectives, and offer the reasons for my interest in the study. In addition, it will outline the objectives of the research; discuss the research issues and assumptions; give the significance of the study; describe methods used in the study; and explain the structure of the thesis.

1.1 Background of the study

The study was conducted in Port Harcourt, the capital of the Rivers State of Nigeria, where Radio Rivers and all three of its commercial competitors are located. In addition, Port Harcourt is also the commercial hub of Nigeria's oil and gas industry, hosting the country's largest petrochemical plant, two refineries, a nitrogenous fertilizer plant, two deep seaports, and a liquefied natural gas plant among other industrial establishments. This economic position could no doubt be the reason for its attraction for private media investors, and the current proliferation of commercial broadcasters.

Radio Rivers was established as a public service broadcaster by the Rivers State of Nigeria Broadcasting Corporation Edict Number 8 of 1973. By this edict, the station was to be: “responsible for providing and maintaining radio, television and other broadcasting services, on behalf of the Government of the State for so much of the State as may from time to time be reasonably practicable” (RSBC Edict, 1973). As a public service broadcaster, Radio Rivers is expected to be funded by the public, and operated as non-profit organisation, aimed at providing education, information, and entertainment to all people within its coverage area (McQuail, 2000). This understanding, McQuail (2000) argues further, mandates all public
service stations to carry programmes which may not have outright commercial interests, and therefore, may not be attractive to commercial broadcasters, but are essential for the citizens to be properly informed, educated, and entertained.

As a former colony of Britain, Nigerian broadcasting is modelled after the traditional British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) public service programming model (Kolade, 1974). The BBC’s mission expressed by its founding managing director, John Reith includes values which are defined as independence from all vested interests, not operated for profit motive, accessible to every member of society, and programmes that satisfy every taste (Teer-Tomaselli et al., 1994). Thus, programming at Radio Rivers, like all other radio stations in the country before the entry of the commercial stations, tried to meet the ideals of providing information, education, and entertainment, as well as acting as a forum for projecting the views of government and the public.

Prior to 1992, radio broadcasting in Nigeria was the domain of the state. That is, all radio services and broadcasting networks were established and controlled by the state, both at federal and state levels, as private ownership of radio was not allowed under the country's laws. But in 1992, following the decision of the federal government to establish the Nigerian Broadcasting Commission (NBC) under Decree Number 38 of 1992, as the national regulator of all broadcasting issues, private participation was legalised, leading to the liberalisation of the airwaves. With this law, privately owned radio stations began to flourish in the country. However, it was not until March 2002 that the first private radio station, Rhythm 93.7 F.M., was established in Rivers State, followed by Treasure F.M. in October 2003, and Ray Power 106.5 F.M. in November 2003, and thus Radio Rivers lost its 29 year monopoly of the airwaves. The consequence of this development for Radio Rivers is that, if it is to continue to fulfil its mandate as the voice of the people, for their educational, informative, and entertainment needs, it must redesign its daily programmes. Such a measure could impact on its above-mentioned traditional public service values. Therefore, given the pressure from commercial broadcasters, it is imperative that Radio Rivers may have to restructure certain areas of its programming schedules in line with the new challenges without having to lose its public service values.

This problem is made even more problematic by the difficulty in distinguishing between the roles of public service broadcasters and commercial broadcasters if “all licensees of broadcasting facilities are deemed to be 'public trustees' operating their stations in the public
interest” (Branscomb, 1976:9). Vane and Gross (1994:147) argue that, “commercial radio transmits its products via signals that pass through the nation's airwaves. These airwaves belong to the public”. These statements suggest that, technically, both public service and commercial broadcasters act as public trustees. Close examination of their agendas, however, reveals significant differences in their interpretations of how their services serve the public good.

Besides defining the mission of public service broadcasters, Reith (in Teer-Tomaselli et al., 1994:48) identifies the following factors: “political neutrality, non-commerciality, accessibility to all the strata of the population, and balanced programming”. However, nowadays, these factors may have been made irrelevant by rapid advancement in technology, and privatisation, which make many channels and programme choices available to the listeners. Given the impact of technology in making more frequencies available on the electromagnetic spectrum, and private sector participation in radio ownership, many PBS stations now appear to compromise on their non-commerciality values by carrying advertisements as well as “more entertainment, and less educational and public affairs programmes” (Teer-Tomaselli et al.,1994:48).

In addition, faced with the increasing burdens of huge facilities, large staff, and dwindling funds, radio broadcasting is now said to be moving towards a convergence of the public service and commercial models. Indeed, as Tomaselli (1989:31) argues: “public service broadcasting as we know it internationally, exists nowhere in its pure state”. The current changes in public service broadcasting values resulting from: “the increased competition and commercialisation on traditional public service broadcasting organisations in Western Europe led to extension of broadcast time and adjustments in programming” (Hulten and Brants, 1992:122).

Radio Rivers, a public service broadcaster, faces similar challenges to its global counterparts. One consequence of these challenges from commercial broadcasting stations which this study set out to investigate is that Radio Rivers' programme schedules could be moving more towards entertainment and away from public affairs. This change in programming, necessitated by competition from commercial broadcasters, is with the view of maintaining its audiences and revenue sources in order to sustain its public service broadcasts (Blumler, 1992).
Therefore, for *Radio Rivers*, the entry of commercial radio stations into a broadcast environment that it had monopolised for almost 29 years may not only have affected its programming and schedules, but also its revenue sources. Hence, for the station to maintain optimum public service programming, it has to generate additional income from commercial sources - a situation which could potentially lead to changes in its public service values.

In the face of the competition arising from the proliferation of commercial broadcasters, how *Radio Rivers* ensures the maintenance of its public service broadcast ideals is of interest to media scholars and stakeholders in the station. It is, therefore, my interest to investigate how *Radio Rivers* is reacting to these trends, and to ascertain if the entry of commercial stations impacts on traditional public service values which the station is under mandate to promote.

### 1.2 Statement of the problem

The media, “distributes the information necessary for the citizens to make informed choices; they facilitate the formation of public opinion by providing an independent forum of debate; and they enable the people to shape the conduct of government by articulating their views” (Curran 1991:29). From this statement, the question arises as to the impact of increased competition from commercial broadcasters on public service broadcasters to provide Nigeria’s 250 ethnic groups and a number of distinct languages the forum of debate and information that would help to shape the conduct of government and bring about socio-political integration (Ndolo, 1988). Thus, from December 19, 1932, when the BBC set up an experimental radio-receiving station in Lagos to pick up its short-wave transmissions until the deregulation of broadcasting in 1992, broadcasting in Nigeria has been the exclusive domain of the state. That government controlled broadcasting for so long, Kolade (1974) argues, is because broadcasting in Nigeria was deemed to play an important role in the tasks of national development. Programmes on Nigeria’s broadcasting systems, modelled after the BBC, were thus tailored to cover the following fields in addition to news: education, current affairs, religion, sports, and children (Kolade, 1974). However, after the 1992 deregulation following the setting up of the Nigeria Broadcasting Commission (NBC), by Decree No. 38 of 1992, the instrument of control of broadcasting began to be shared between the government and the private sector. The importance of this is that public service programming and schedules on the public radio channels are bound to be affected.

In addition, the policy of the liberalisation of the medium of communication has its roots in the Libertarian theory of the press, which argues for private individuals exercising formal and
informal control over the common property of the state, including the use of the electromagnetic spectrum for broadcasting (Siebert et al., 1976). In addition, Siebert et al. (1976) argue that the mediation role of broadcasting based on the theory is to help discover truth, and enable everyone to participate in the process of solving political and social problems by presenting all manner of evidence as the basis for decisions. Thus, while private participation has helped to expand the scope of the media as a forum for public education (enlightenment), information (awareness), and entertainment (amusement), these media trends are believed to be “promoting a continuation of the shift away from involving people in societies as political citizens of nation states towards involving them as consumption units in a corporate world” (Golding and Murdock, 2000:77-78). Increased commercialisation led some traditional public service broadcasters, in the case of Western Europe, to extend their broadcast time and adjust their programming (Hulten and Brants, 1992). In addition, Blumler (1992 cited in Hulten and Brants, 1992:121) notes, with regard to television in the USA, “The conditions for competition in the market and the processes that guide organisational strategies leave no broadcaster unaffected”. Similarly, in Nigeria, the effect of liberalisation of broadcasting forced the public service broadcasters to change the format of their programming (Betiang, 2004). Thus, in the process of competing, public service broadcasters make some of their programmes attractive to advertisers, while those that are not so attractive, no matter who and what issues are being addressed, could be removed from the schedule or shifted to non-prime broadcast time.

This study, therefore, examined how the entry of commercial broadcasters affected public service programming and schedules at Radio Rivers and strategies adapted by the organisation to continue to serve its audience without jeopardising its public service broadcasting mandate.

1.3 Objectives of the study

This study investigates the effects of commercial broadcasting on public service broadcasting by examining how the entry of commercial stations has affected Radio Rivers’ public service programming and schedules, as well as its traditional role and values as a public service broadcaster. That Radio Rivers, under conditions of competition, may have adopted certain shifts from public service programming towards commercially-oriented schedules is not something new in broadcasting. Indeed, in broadcast situations the world over, similar to that which Radio Rivers currently faces, changes have always happened, and to a great extent where the liberalisation, and hence commercialisation of media services have been embraced
(Blumler, 1992). However, how these changes affect Radio Rivers, and what steps it has taken in reaction to these changes is of interest to me.

In essence, this study examined whether, in the face of competition from commercial broadcasters, Radio Rivers still maintains its public service mandate, providing space for different segments of the people to be educated, informed and entertained, or whether it has abandoned its public service mandate and embraced commercial broadcasting.

1.4 Research issues and assumptions

In undertaking this research, I was guided by the assumption that Radio Rivers, as a public service station in its 29 years of existence before the coming of the commercial stations to Rivers State had through its different programmes enabled its listeners to be educated, informed and entertained, and participate in the various debates aimed at finding solutions to their common political, social and development problems (Teer-Tomaselli et al, 1994; Curran, 1991). That Radio Rivers has been fulfilling this role more than any other medium of mass communication in the state is anchored on illiteracy and poverty, which makes newspapers and television out of the reach of many people. Even where newspapers and television are available, the lack of social infrastructure, like roads and electricity in most rural parts of the state, makes it difficult for most inhabitants of the state to be served by media, other than the radio (Awotua-Efebo et al., 1999). Therefore, Ndolo (1988) argues, radio provides the best medium for the achievement of national integration in Nigeria. For Rivers State, then, Radio Rivers remains the most effective means of communication by which the people can gain access to information, education, and entertainment.

However, as more and more commercial radio stations are established in Rivers State, there is the fear that as Radio Rivers competes it could be losing its public service role, since competition leaves no broadcaster unaffected (Hulten and Brants, 1992). Therefore, competition as a result of the proliferation of commercial broadcasters could leave Radio Rivers changing its programming and scheduling format, from education, information, and entertainment programmes, (the genre of public service broadcasters), in favour of entertainment, information, and education programmes, (the genre of commercial broadcasters). Such new programming and scheduling could affect the station serving its public service broadcasting mandate.
1.5 Significance of the study

Given that Radio Rivers had been the only radio station in Rivers State for 29 years, the entry and subsequent proliferation of commercial radio stations in Rivers State could impact on how Radio Rivers performs as a public service broadcaster. Hence, it is my interest to investigate how this new development in Rivers State’s broadcast ecology, affects Radio Rivers, and whether or not Radio Rivers still maintains its public service values in the face of competition from commercial broadcasters.

This study will, therefore, be significant in two ways. On the theoretical level, it will interrogate the theories of public service broadcasting (PBS), and Habermas' public sphere, which posit that a publicly funded broadcast system be an open space where individuals and groups can come together to be educated, informed, and entertained (Habermas, 1989). In addition, the study will examine the Liberal-Pluralist idea that freedom and public expression are best served when media institutions are left to compete. Thus, the study will generate additional knowledge on the operation of the theories of public service broadcasting and public sphere as they apply to Nigeria’s broadcast industry. In addition, as a practical study, this research will generate knowledge on how political, bureaucratic and professional leadership, within public service broadcast media faced with competition from commercial broadcasters, re-strategise programming and scheduling policies to ensure their continuous existence and the maintenance of their original public service mandate.

1.6 Methods of the study

This study has employed both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies, but is largely qualitative, using semi-structured interviews with policy makers, programme producers, and journalists, in combination with a comparative study of programme schedules of January – March 2000, and January – March 2004 at Radio Rivers. McQuail (2000) argues that, for the purpose of analysing mass communication (for instance assessing change or criticising performance), we need to be able to characterise the content of particular media and channels. In using semi-structured interviews, which is a qualitative research technique, the study focuses on how the various respondents responded, as well as their interpretation of certain themes, such as public service and commercial broadcasting concepts, public service programming, public watchdog, and diversity and representation roles of the media. Such an approach is appropriate “for the understanding of the role of commercialisation in
programming, as it allows for analysis of experiences and perceptions of programming personnel from their own point of view” (Chikunkhuzeni, 1999:4). In addition, I will analyse the mandate establishing Radio Rivers for information on what goals the station was established to achieve, and how its operators view these goals.

1.7 Thesis outline

This research, which has adopted comparative analysis approach to studying the programming schedules of Radio Rivers, covering two quarters of different years: January - March 2000 and January – March, 2004. January – March 2000 is the era when Radio Rivers was the sole radio station in Rivers State, and January – March 2004 is when all the three commercial stations had been established, and Radio Rivers had to compete with them for a share of the broadcast market and of the advertising revenue. In studying the mandate and comparing programme schedules, I am interested to find out if, as a result of the competition from commercial radio stations, Radio Rivers has changed its original public service values by broadcasting programmes that resemble those of its competitors and the effect of this on its role as a public space for dialogue.

The study consists of seven chapters. The first chapter, the 'Introduction', presents a general background, the concerns, objectives and methods used, and an overview of the whole study.

Chapter two, titled 'Theoretical Perspectives and Literature Review', discusses the debates surrounding public service broadcasting and the arguments concerning the influence of a proliferation of commercial broadcasting on public service programming. This is against the background of providing an empirical understanding of the research issues and assumptions outlined in Chapter 1. The chapter also reviews the role of public service broadcasting as a forum for enhancing public dialogue - an aspect located within Habermas' concept of the public sphere.

Chapter three, termed 'Historical Perspectives of Radio Rivers' discusses the history and development of radio broadcasting in Nigeria and looks at the programming structures at Radio Rivers. This is aimed at providing an empirical understanding of the issues and policies affecting programming, and the effects of funding on the role of Radio Rivers as a public broadcaster. The chapter also reviews Radio Rivers’ programming mandate in line with the public service broadcasting approach which contends that programming in a public
service station should be strong on public issues and representative of the citizenry without yielding to influences from private, commercial, and political interests (Habermas, 1989).

Chapter four, titled 'Research Methodology', focuses on the methods, procedures and techniques used in the study. It further discusses how data was collected, processed and analysed. It considers, also, the reasons for analysis of documents, and programme schedules, and using in-depth interviews in the study.

Chapter five, titled 'Findings on *Radio Rivers*’ mandate, and programming schedule’, presents the findings of the research from a study of the mandate establishing *Radio Rivers*, and the station’s programme schedules of January – March 2000 and January – March 2004, corroborated with the views, from the in-depth interviews, of respondents involved in policy formulation and programme planning and production. In addition, within chapter five, I discuss the implications of the proliferation of commercial broadcasting on *Radio Rivers*’ public service mandate against the background of issues raised in the review of the literature. In this chapter, I also focus on how interviewees are responding to the competition from commercial broadcasters and whether or not these responses have led to a shift in *Radio Rivers*’ public service broadcasting ethos.

Chapter six, titled 'Discussion and Interpretations of findings’, discusses the findings of the study in accordance with the research issues and assumptions mentioned in the Introduction.

Chapter seven, titled ‘Concluding Reflections and Recommendations’ reflects on the current state of affairs at *Radio Rivers*, and offers suggestions on possible programming policy reforms for *Radio Rivers* in the light of the findings of the study and in line with the public service broadcasting interests and public good ideals and contribution to the public sphere which the station is established to promote.
Chapter Two
Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

This chapter, divided into three major parts, presents a review of the existing literature on the theoretical arguments and debates surrounding public service broadcasting (PBS), Habermas's concept of the public sphere, and other issues relevant in this study. The first section includes this 'introduction' which offers an overview of the chapter, followed by the 'theoretical framework', in which I explore the different claims about the influence of commercial broadcasting on public service broadcasting. The second part of the chapter critiques the claims set out in the theoretical framework, focusing on the differences between the concepts of public service and commercial broadcasting. Following that is an explanation of the term 'public service programming', exploring the concept to define media public service responsibilities. The part continues with an overview of the impact of dwindling public funding on public service broadcasting values, and ends with an overview of the crisis in the application of the concept of public service broadcasting in contemporary society. The third major part locates the research within debates of Habermas' concept of the public sphere. In this section, I apply the concept to preview the contribution of the media, particularly radio, to the public sphere, foregrounding my understanding with the public watchdog, agent of public diversity and representation, and informed citizenry, and entertainment roles of radio in the public sphere. The chapter concludes with a survey of the themes discussed in all the sections.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

This study is located within debates surrounding the role of public service broadcasting (PBS) in contemporary society and the Habermasian concept of the public sphere.

McQuail (2000:156) defines public service broadcasting (PBS) as “a system of broadcasting that is publicly funded and operated in a non-profit way, and is required to meet various informational, educational and entertainment needs of all citizens”. In essence, a public service broadcaster exists to educate, inform, and entertain the public with a range of popular programmes that are available and accessible to all (or the majority) of the citizens (Blumler, 1992). Thus, PBS programmes must meet the interests and tastes of the population as a whole and serve as a platform for public participation in the activities of a society. This role of
public service programmes mandates public service broadcasters to air programmes which may not have commercial or majority appeal, but which are essential for ensuring an informed citizenry. In contrast, commercial broadcasters must operate as profit making entities as their operations are rooted in commercial interests. Thus, the main difference between a public service broadcaster and a commercial broadcaster is that the former is ideally not established for profit, while the latter is primarily driven by commercial interests.

The goal of universal accessibility requires that a PBS, through good programming, should inform, mobilise, and give voice to everyone. Therefore, universal accessibility of the public service station, Fourie (2003) argues, does not only mean technical accessibility, but also the need to ensure that everyone can understand and follow its programming. Therefore, the public service broadcaster should ensure that its programming is popular, providing a kind of public forum that is not restricted to a few.

This argument draws heavily on Habermas’ discussion of the ‘public sphere’ – a public space between the economy and the state in which public opinion is formed and ‘popular’ supervision of government is established (Curran 1991). Within this model, the media, free from economic and state pressures, should provide a forum for rational-critical debate. Curran writes:

From his [Habermas’] work can be extrapolated a model of a public sphere as a neutral zone where access to relevant information affecting the public good is widely available, where discussion is free of domination by the state and where all those participating in public debate do so on an equal basis. Within this public sphere, people collectively determine through the process of rational argument the way in which they want to see society develop, and this shapes in turn the conduct of government policy. The media facilitates this process by providing an arena of public debate, and by reconstituting private citizens as a public body in the form of public opinion. (1991: 83)

Thus, from Habermas' concept, it is clear that the public sphere requires a 'forum' that is accessible and where a variety of social experiences can be shared, and where 'rational' views can be expressed to check on issues without hindrance. An understanding of the public sphere as a forum in which the various views of individuals and groups in a contemporary society are expressed, underscores the role of the media in the theoretical framework of this study.
In summary, the theoretical framework of this study will be based on the two concepts briefly analysed above: public service broadcasting and public sphere. At this point, I will go into a detailed analysis of the concepts involved, beginning with public service broadcasting.

2.1.1 The concept of public service broadcasting (PBS)

There is no absolute definition for the term 'public service broadcasting', but Reith (in Teer-Tomaselli et al., 1994:48) defines their mission as to “educate, inform, and entertain”. The emphasis of public service broadcasters on education, information and entertainment, Blumler (1992) argues, emanates from the broadcasters’ financial reliance (wholly or predominantly) on licence fees levied on each household with a radio. Thus, public service broadcasters can be defined in terms of their source of income as mainly licence fees payable by every member of the public that receives its services. By this equality of payment, public service programmes were tailored to satisfy every taste. Bolin (2004) argues that the mission of the public service broadcaster is also seen in terms of publicity; that is, the arena of public conversation within the society. With this mission, public service broadcasters are not only expected to be neutral and non-partisan in their programming, but are also expected to give ‘equal time’ to all parties in the educational, informative, and entertainment processes.

Jjuuko (2003) further posits that, in most nations, the 'public service' model of broadcasting was implemented to fulfil specific obligations to the public. In Africa, however, public service broadcasting, is defined in terms of state-owned television and radio establishments that are not only financed by the state through the tax payers funds, but are also controlled by the state (Jjuuko, 2003). Thus, the PBS concept can be used to describe national broadcasting systems, certain broadcast institutions, or a mixture of programmes aimed at providing service to the public.

The role of the public broadcasting service, Kupe (2001) argues, is located in the media theory of creating an open public sphere that facilitates the circulation of information as a resource for the empowerment of all citizens. The media thus acts as a forum for the debate and discussion of issues that enables people to form opinion and make choices. In this way, the PBS offers individuals and social groups the opportunity to express their opinions on contested issues and plays a role in helping to bring the society together.

Other media commentators, such as Bechan (1999), also argue that it is the duty of public service broadcasters to be involved in enhancing individual quality of life and empowering individuals
and social groups to participate equitably in the political and social discourses of their society. Public service broadcasters, therefore, in helping to transform the society through mobilization, also transform the listener from an audience and consumer of broadcast signals to an informed and educated, as well as entertained citizen (Fourie, 2003). Fourie (2003) further argues that public service broadcasting should, therefore, provide true, unbiased information that can guide the free forming of opinion. It should provide a forum for public discussion in which individuals and social groups can participate, and thus foster social cohesion. To do this, a public broadcaster should not only be responsible for providing entertainment and information, but also educational programmes dealing with a variety of public issues that makes it different from other broadcasting services.

In summary, public service broadcasting is expected to play the following four key roles: provide a forum in which members of the public are informed and educated on their civic responsibilities; provide a new source of entertainment, thereby helping to solidify relationships between different sections of the community; create a new space for the expansion of these relationships; and integrate different public groups within the society. These four fundamental roles of public service broadcasting are discussed in greater detail in subsequent sections of this study, but I will now discuss the concept of commercial broadcasting.

2.1.2 The concept of commercial broadcasting

The concept of commercial broadcasting is rooted in a broadcasting model governed by advertisement and its values are dominated by entertainment, information and education. By their dependence on advertisement, commercial broadcasters becomes less sensitive, on the part of producers, to listeners’ preferences, as they simply produce programmes to meet general tastes (Curran, 1991). This trend, Curran further observes, encourages the production of programmes for a global market. Thus, one flaw of the commercialisation of broadcasting is that it produces different publics of consumers of the same broadcast products. Furthermore, the introduction of more competitors into the broadcast market has been found to reduce advertising revenues rather than increase them, both by spreading them between a greater number of channels and by splitting potential audiences into even smaller groups (Seaton, 2000). As more channels enter the broadcast terrain, whatever advertising is available has to be shared between the different channels. With the sharing of the advertisements, the main incentive remains the attraction of the largest possible audience
(Seaton, 2000). Hence, the competing channels tend to produce a variety of programmes of the same or similar genres for a large audience with the view of making money.

Advertising-financed broadcasting thus has a bias towards the mass market. Such mass market, free market theorists argue, leads to greater freedom of choice for the producers and consumers of media products (Siebert et al., 1976). However, the mass market runs into public good problems - that is, audiences without strong economic powers, whose tastes and need would require a little extra cost to be met, could possibly be excluded (Brittan, 1989).

In addition, the free market strategy, Curran (1991:47) argues, “tends to lead to a narrowing in the ideological and cultural diversity of the media, and promotes cultural uniformity.” Thus, while private participation in media may help to support individual liberty and freedom of expression within the polity, Golding & Murdock (2000:77-78) believe that the growing trend of private ownership of media promotes a “shift away from involving people in societies as political citizens of nation states towards involving them as consumption units in a corporate world”. Thus, liberalisation, paradoxically, may involve enslavement to a different ethos: one driven by commercial demands.

However, faced with this situation, commercial broadcasters do sometimes carry public service programmes to enable them to reach a larger audience, and to justify their exclusive use of the limited public frequencies (Chikunkhuzeni, 1999). This also reinforces the idea that broadcasting is a social and political activity (East Africa Conference of Broadcasting Policy and Regulation, 2001). Thus, Betiang (2004) argues, the commercialisation of broadcasting in Nigeria has helped to provide balance, and strengthen programming, and in many ways refined programming on public stations and, at the same time, widened the public sphere. These claims seem to imply that the liberalisation of broadcasting has helped to further the ethos of public service broadcasting in Nigeria for the common good and interest of the people. Thus, commentators of neo-liberal economic persuasion posit that only free markets can guarantee diversity of expression and open debates (Hutchins, 1947). They further argue that the media must be free to operate as an open market, where the public ultimately decide what to read, listen to and view, free from any form of state interference.

However, the problem that comes with the liberalisation of media ownership is that the high level of capitalisation in most sectors of the modern media restricts market entry to powerful capitalist interests (Curran, 1991). In short, commercialisation of broadcasting produces
media oligopoly and conglomerates which control the distribution of information and ideas (Curran, 1991). The result is that, in the commercial media, news and information become a commodity to be bought and sold and only those with the means can afford to do so. Thus, with commercial broadcasting, news, current affairs, and educational programmes are no longer the main reason for the media’s existence, but are seen as mere additions on the schedules aimed at creating a supportive environment for advertisements (Kurpius, 2003).

In addition, with advertising as the backbone of commercial broadcasting, media products such as programming are tilted towards satisfying their sponsors, and away from the people (Golding and Murdock, 2000). This approach presents the audience to be satisfied as a commodity to be bought at a price determined by the size and social composition of the audience that the particular programme attracts. Thus, Seaton (2000) argues that, with commercial broadcasting, broadcasters do not sell programmes to audience but audiences to advertisers.

### 2.1.3 Public service broadcasting versus commercial broadcasting

Murdock (1992) argues that, whereas commercial broadcasting regards listeners as consumers of products, the public service ethos views them as citizens. Thus, public service broadcasting, in characterising its audience as citizens, brings people together as a community to discuss their common problems, thereby helping to cement links between the home and the country, while commercial broadcasting fragments its listeners into consumers of common products rather than unifying them.

The free market theory, on which the ideals of commercial broadcasting rest, Curran (2000) argues sees consumers as the best judges of what is in their interest. This produces a system that supposedly gives people what they want: a diverse output to choose from and media that is affordable and independent of government (Curran, 2000). On the other hand, public service broadcasters, the free-market supporters argue, are controlled by the elites who impose their cultural values on the public (Curran, 2000). The public service broadcasters are thus seen as being vulnerable to the elites and government pressure, especially as they are dependent on state finances.

Traditional public service broadcasters hold the view that the role of broadcasting is not merely to satisfy or gratify a favourite consumer demand, but also to address important political, social, and cultural functions (Curran, 2000). To them, for instance in public affairs coverage, public
service broadcasting is not merely committed to reporting the news impartially, as demanded by the Libertarian ethos, but should also give due prominence to all sectors in society. By doing so, Curran (2000) further argues, public service broadcasting ensures that people are properly briefed to exercise their rights and obligations as citizens, and contribute to the healthy functioning of the society, by helping to expand the public sphere. In contrast, market-driven media tends to favour entertainment, instead of information and analysis, and thus shrinks the society's arena of public debate.

However, because of the shrinkage of the public space, the question arises as to whether it is possible for public service broadcasters to provide universal service, accurate information, and quality services that appeal to a plurality of tastes and interests in the face of competition from commercial broadcasters. Therefore, with deregulation of the broadcast space, there is an emerging convergence: a new model of mixed programming within the public service domain.

As a result of the new programme mix, at the same time as public service programming engages less in public dialogue in order to maximise audiences, commercial stations have adopted a programming model loaded with information to attract minority audience (Hellman and Sauri, 1994). Thus, the hypothesis of convergence in programming suggests that public service and commercial broadcasters are beginning to resemble each other. Such programme scheduling, Hellman and Sauri, (1994) further argue has become common to both the public service and commercial broadcasters as both are more dependent on advertising revenues and schedule the narrowest range of programming in order to attract audiences.

Public broadcasters depend on licence fees and statutory grants from the state for revenue and are answerable to the public on policy matters, while commercial broadcasters are at liberty to make their own decisions about their sources of finance and forms of organisations (Hoffmann-Riem, 1992). Public service broadcasters’ reliance on licence fees and government statutory allocations, could lead to their being too close to politicians and government. This could in turn pose a threat to their independence. Commercial broadcasters, however, are not without their structural problems as “privately-run broadcasters reliant on market forces can be dominated by powerful economic interests” (Hoffmann-Riem, 1992:173). Given that advertisers will invest in channels where they reach their target audiences, and could influence the time of their sponsored programmes, this calls into question the independence of commercial broadcasters from outside interference. In
other words, if being dependent on the state for licence fees and grants means that PBS cannot be free from outside influence, commercial broadcasters’ dependence on advertisement makes them equally bound. Therefore, both public service and commercial broadcasters are affected by their sources of funding.

While most public service broadcasters endeavour to produce most of their programmes in-house, commercial broadcasters rely more heavily on external programme sources (Bens et al., 1992). Because public service invests in making programmes, rather than relying on cheap external sources, it maintains a cultural space through which society can express itself (Curran, 2000). Even in specific programming genres, Bens et al. (1992) further found that the ratio at which public service stations programme informative and educational programmes differs from that of commercial broadcasters. However, during prime time (peak listening times), both public and commercial stations have been found to increase the scheduling of their popular programming, making it increasingly difficult to differentiate between the two channels (Bens et al., 1992).

In addition, public broadcasting is best at binding together and integrating a society as all members have access to a shared, unifying experience, because it does not discriminate against low income groups on the grounds of cost or profitability. The central concern of the free-market, however, is increasingly to divide a society along purchasing power lines (Bens et al., 1992). Thus, PBS’s approach is inclusive, seeking to draw together society in its diversity and to frame public discussion in terms of what serves the general good, whereas commercial broadcasters pull society apart.

However, free-market theorists have questioned the above gains of public service broadcasting. They posit that the public service broadcasting system weakens the often acclaimed impartiality of the PBS because government appoints government-supporters as broadcasters (Curran, 2000). Furthermore, they question the picture often painted of PBS guaranteeing access to broadcasting, as access is often about a right to reception rather than expression, in other words a right to read, listen and watch but not to be read, heard and viewed (Curran, 2000). Public service broadcasters have often based their relevance on the diversity of their programming, a factor that requires a mix of programming that meets the tastes of both minority and majority members of the society, but this philosophy has also been questioned on the premise that PBS programming “does not entail ideological pluralism and the right to communicate” (Curran, 2000:336).
That a public service broadcast station should be non-commercial does not necessarily mean that PBS should not carry advertisements or make a profit if they can, but that their overall programming ethos should not be operated for profit (Branscomb, 1976). However, given that broadcast stations - whether public service or commercial broadcasters - need some financial resources to keep certain programme genres like dance, drama, and folktales on the schedule, PBS have been known to have solicited for corporate sponsorship for their programmes leading to greater commercialisation of their programming schedules (Bens et al., 1992).

Therefore, dependence on advertising and commercial revenue sources poses a threat to the maintenance and development of cultural and national identities. Since commercial broadcasting depends on out-sourcing of programmes; such dependence, it can be argued, could lead to an influx of cheaply produced or imported programmes from other cultural backgrounds rather than locally produced programmes (Bens et al., 1992). This could undermine the national communication system which the PBS is mandated to preserve. This is the underlying argument of the cultural imperialism thesis of the media, which views some aspects of media practice as obstacles to national development (Strelitz, 2000).

Public service broadcasters can be compared to other public services such as telecommunications, public transport, water and electricity supply, postal services, and so on (Fourie, 2003). Fourie (2003) further argues that broadcasting is first and foremost about the provision of a cultural product that speaks to the human mind, emotion, and intellect, and hence it is very difficult for different (private) organisations to provide the same forum for public discussion, and adhere to the same high ethical and quality standards. These are, then, shortcomings of commercial broadcasters. That public broadcasters are able to overcome these and more will be discussed in the next section of this study focusing on public service programming.

2.1.4 Public service programming

Public service broadcasters are meant to carry programmes that put the interest of the society first. Such programmes, McQuail (2000) argues, tend to be neglected in the commercial broadcasting systems since they do not attract advertisers. Thus, the idea behind public service broadcasting is to have programming that is strong on public issues and representative
of citizenry, without interference from private, commercial or political powers (Habermas, 1989).

This programming ideal, Jjuuko (2003) argues, is particularly relevant in Africa, where public service programming is driven by two issues: the concern for political and national integration, and the building of national and cultural identities. Whether it is programming for minorities or strong citizenry, public service programming should, as far as possible, cover different programme genres and aspire to provide more than mere entertainment (Keane, 1991). Therefore, in the public service domain, emphasis is placed on locally produced programmes, in indigenous languages, dealing with issues of polity, culture and related aspects. This ensures that PBS is used for national development, providing access to all to be educated, informed, and entertained. It is through such programming ethos that public service broadcasters give concrete meaning to their mandate and get to understand the people-specific needs (Fourie, 2003). To serve the public interest, Fourie (2003) further advocates that PBS programming should not be subject to any form of censorship, provided that they uphold national laws pertaining to decency, freedom of speech, and the role of the media in a democratic society. How Radio Rivers’ programming, in the face of competition from commercial broadcasters, continues to reflect the divergent views and interests of the public is partly the reason why this study is being undertaken.

2.1.5 The impact of dwindling funding on public service programming

Public service broadcasting has a responsibility not to charge listeners for specific programmes as they have either already paid licence fees or the state has made a financial grant to the station (Hulten and Brants, 1992). However, given the increasing cost of operation, resulting from rising wages and salaries, changes in production systems and broadcast technologies, most public service stations now operate as a duopoly, combining their PBS mandate with some elements of commercial broadcasting. Such operation, aimed at making additional funds in the absence of increased licence fees and state grant, could leave the station with no other option other than to increase its commercial programming content. This is bound to affect its PBS mission, as peak airtime will have to be used for commercial programmes that attract sponsors, while other public service programme genres will have to be aired at times outside prime-time, if at all.

Thus, Hulten and Brants (1992) claim that public service broadcasters’ complete reliance on advertising is detrimental to programming range and a threat to programme quality. They
further contend that advertising is antagonistic to the public service mission because advertising privileges entertainment programmes over civic, educational, and informative programmes. Citing studies in Europe and USA, they argue that sponsorship of programmes kills ‘the spirit of adventure’ in programming, which is a key cultural function of public service broadcasting.

Blumler (1992) notes that advertisers have a lot of influence on programming, especially when they are the sole source of revenue in a competitive environment. With sponsored programmes reflecting the interests of advertisers in their content, design, planning and scheduling, Sawers (1989) argues, market pressure can jeopardise many features of public service programming like programming for diversity, as advertising provides less varied programmes. Therefore, because of increasing pressure on the public service broadcasters for improved revenue collection through an increase in commercial programming, programmes believed to have limited financial value are neglected outright. Hence, commercialisation enthrones discrimination in programming along economic lines.

In her study of *Radio Uganda*, Jjuuko (2002) argues that, because of the need to strengthen their financial resources, public service broadcasters attempt to acquire sponsorship for the production of programmes. This, Jjuuko (2002) further argues, led to various compromises, including sacrificing programme diversity in favour of particular sponsors and preferred programming. Given this, producers cannot initiate their own programmes, but have to depend on sponsors initiated programmes. As a result, the sponsors dictate the content and design of programmes on public service channels (Jjuuko, 2002). This trend does not only compromise and threaten the professionalism of programme producers, but also undermines PBS's values and principles.

Jjuuko (2002) also argues that under conditions of dwindling funds, programme producers have had to lengthen advertisement insertions from shorter 15-30 minute slots to longer blocks of 1-3 hours. Thus, conditions of dwindling funds affect programmes packaging, as programmes are packaged in magazine format, whereby various programmes from a particular genre, are packaged into one. Overall, this approach aims not only to “attract and hold audiences’ attention, but also to keep them from tuning to other stations” (Jjuuko, 2002:52-53). Since broadcast time is limited, this programming format will not only rob audiences of a choice of programmes, but will also prevent the station from running the variety of programmes required for all sections of the public to have a voice.
The poor financial circumstances at *Radio Uganda*, Jjuuko (2003:53) further argues, “compelled the station's programmers to place sponsored programmes in peak times, because of the need to deliver more audiences to advertisers in order to attract revenue”. Thus, in a bid to hold and sustain audiences and to meet their increasing financial burden, many PBS stations are forced to change their programming by giving prominence to commercially sponsored programmes, a move which may undermine the station's public service mandate. Therefore, the shrinking state funding of public service broadcasters appears to be changing the mission of public service radio to one largely targeted at listeners packaged as customers, and, in essence, transforming themselves into commercial broadcasters. This is an indication that, in a commercialised broadcast scenario where a PBS operates, commercialised programming takes prime-time over public service programming.

Chikhunkhuzeni (1999) argues that, as public service broadcasters compete with commercial broadcasters for a place in the market, producers now focus on programmes that appeal to audiences of a certain demographic class, such as small groups with purchasing power. This means that, as producers attempt to satisfy their audience with a programme, some other groups, who could be in the minority are alienated. However, it is against the public service ethos for any public service broadcaster to neglect minority tastes and interests in programming as minority groups are still part of the society and must be catered for.

In addition, Chikhunkhuzeni (1999) argues that giving people more of the same programme because it is popular is a failure on the part of the producers in their duty to provide better choice for a diverse audience. Therefore, programming for commercial interests in a PBS leads to a shift in the ethos from universal and principled programming towards a programme diversity that favours those with the means to purchase programmes. Under these circumstances, minority programming genres necessary for the proper development of the society are treated as secondary, if not neglected outright. However, as Chikhunkhuzeni (1999) discovered that commercialisation of programming at the Malawi Broadcasting Corporation actually enhanced the station's PBS values as it put more money in the hands of producers to produce more programmes that meet the audience's interests and tastes.

Similarly, the arrival of commercial broadcasting in some European countries has been found to have helped the public service broadcasters in the fulfilment of their mandate. For instance, Catalbas (2000) argues that, in Turkey, the arrival of private broadcasters helped to
create a new atmosphere of freedom and openness, and expand the public sphere. He went further to say that the entry of the private stations into Turkey’s broadcast ecology influenced the state broadcaster, *Turkey Radio and Television* (TRT) to open its studios for greater public dialogue. Thus, it can be argued that the existence of commercial broadcasting can help to further the civic ethos and public service broadcasting mandate, and serve the public good and public interests. This implies that it is not always true in every case that commercialisation has deleterious effect on public service programming. However, these views contrast with what Jjuuko (2002) found out with respect to commercialisation at *Radio Uganda*, a public service broadcaster. There, she discovered that commercialisation undermined the station's public service values. However, the impact of commercial broadcasters on *Radio Rivers*’ public service programming mandate is at the heart of this study.

From the above arguments, it is clear that government and advertisers exert enormous influence and power over media output. Therefore, for public service broadcasters that depend wholly on government and advertising revenues for survival, balanced programming for minorities and those without strong economic purchasing power is bound to suffer.

### 2.1.6 The crisis in public service broadcasting systems

Faced with technological advancement, dwindling funds, and political interventions in its decision-making processes, radio broadcasting is now said to be moving towards a convergence of the public service and commercial models. Tomaselli (1989:31) argues: “public service broadcasting as we know it internationally, exists nowhere in its pure state”. One effect of the current change in public service values, resulting from increased commercialisation in Western Europe, is the extension of broadcast time and adjustments in programming (Hulten and Brants, 1992). Thus, with competition, public service broadcasters adjusted their broadcast time, running schedules that match those of commercial broadcasters.

Also identified as eroding public confidence in PBS, is the question of finance where, as a result of decreasing revenue and increasing costs of operation, public service stations find it hard to meet their mandates (Hulten and Brants, 1992). This also implies that they have to depend more on government for increases in licence fees and grants, which make them come under intense political control thereby undermining their major values of political neutrality and impartiality.
With their eyes increasingly fixed on licence fees and grants, Hulten and Brants (1992) argue that the audience has never really entered into the thinking of traditional PBS. They also argue that the licence fee is determined and collected by public authorities, and that most public broadcasting organisations are involved with budget discussions with governments. These trends, they argue, have made public broadcasters fix their eyes primarily on politicians and rather than on the public. Because of this role diversion, public service broadcasters are not able to fulfil their mandate of serving the public good. To avoid these problems, Fourie (2003) argues for sufficient revenue through state grants to support public service broadcasters.

Another area of crisis facing public service broadcasters is the impact of deregulation. With deregulation, “the consumer of media products pays more for products consumed, as broadcasting becomes another good to be sold in the marketplace” (Kuhn 1985:13). The result of this is that PBS begins to witness shifts in values from educational and informative to entertainment programming in order to satisfy the tastes of the popular audience. Thus, with competition for audience, drama, plays and current affairs programmes that identifies a broadcast service as a PBS “may have to be sacrificed” (Negrine, 1985:42). With this trend, Bolin (2004:282) observes that: “it is now difficult to distinguish between programmes produced by public service broadcasters from those produced within commercial sectors”. Thus, public service and commercial broadcasters are seen to serve the same purpose of using the spectrum for the public good (Branscomb, 1976).

In most societies where the termination of the monopoly system of PBS has been undertaken, PBS has been threatened by a sharp rise in the number of commercial broadcast institutions resulting in stiff competition for audiences, who increasingly seek to be entertained. This, Jjuuko (2003) found, weakens informative and educational dialogues, and the link that used to exist between the media and the public.

Therefore, public service broadcasters in competition face a clear dilemma. On the one hand, they have to adhere to public service obligations, while on the other hand, if they fail to rise to the competitive challenges posed by the commercial broadcasters, they stand the risk of loosing their audience and their place in history (Fourie, 2003). Faced with these challenges, public broadcasters are known to have increased the entertainment content of their broadcasting by partially adopting the commercial model of scheduling (increased entertainment programming) while at the same time pursuing their mandate (stressing education and information) (Achille and Miege, 1994). Thus, competition leading to
convergence has led to public service broadcasters adopting commercial production styles, that is, programming schedules that are indistinguishable from the commercial broadcasters (Duncan, 2001).

Therefore, there is a large dilemma facing PBS today: how to be a responsible organ of mass communication, not only for entertainment and unbiased information, but also for educational programming, while avoiding being totally dependent on government and corporate bodies as sources of revenue. In addition, the task facing public service broadcasters in competition is how to maintain universality of service, an impartial space for free expression, plurality and diversity, and good programming that liberates programmers and does not restrict them, all of which they were established to achieve. Therefore, how Radio Rivers, as a public service broadcaster faced with the proliferation of commercial broadcasters, is able to maintain its public service values is also at the heart of this study.

2.2 The Public Sphere
Another theoretical framework of this study is Habermas' concept of the public sphere. Curran (1991: 38-39) argues that, “the public sphere is composed of elite, private citizens who through the media provide their opinion by which government was subject to informal supervision”. The public sphere may also be defined as a collection of places and spaces - from neighbourhood cafes to internet chat rooms - where private individuals can speak their minds in public, form opinions, and become independent agents in governing the state (Dahlgren, 1991; Habermas, 1989; Bennett et al., 2004). Being an existing space, the public sphere takes place when citizens, exercising their rights of assembly and association, gather as public bodies to discuss issues that shape the direction of society (Dahlgren, 1995). Therefore, the public sphere is a forum through which private individuals debate social issues.

From the above understanding, it can be deduced that any time private citizens assemble together to exchange information or views, whether in the village square, town hall, the king's court, parliament, on the pages of newspapers, or even in the radio studios, a public sphere is created. Public sphere, therefore, is a forum where ordinary people can develop and express their views on affairs of state (Dahlgren, 1995). In general, the concept of a public sphere can be said to be synonymous with the process of public opinion or news in the mass media.

Since in the public sphere citizens enjoy the right of assembly, freedom of religion, speech and the press, the public sphere can be equated to the present rights contained in all national
constitutions (Carey, 1993). The 1999 Constitution of Nigeria contains in Chapter 4 under Fundamental Right; in Section 39, Sub-Section 1 as Freedom of Expression, the provision that: “every person shall be entitled to freedom of expression, including freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart ideas and information without interference”. Such constitutional provision, Harbermas (in Berger, 2002) argues is a necessary guarantee for the functioning of the public sphere. From Habermas' work can be conceived a model of the public sphere as a constitutional authority which freely allows access to relevant information affecting the public good and to discussions free of state-domination, carried out on the basis of equality of participants. Curran (1991) observes that within this public sphere, people freely determine the way in which society should develop, and this in turn shapes state policy. The media's role is, therefore, “to facilitate this process, providing a conduit for public debates and by so doing reconstitute private citizens into a public body in the form of public opinion” (Curran, 1991:83).

In addition, such constitutional provision can only be meaningfully exercised if the citizens can share unhindered in the knowledge of others (Garnham, 1996). On the basis of this, the above provision in the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria can be seen as an empowerment of the media to freely share information that will contribute to the public sphere.

However, despite the different constitutional provisions empowering the media as an open forum for public debate, some media scholars like Garnham (1996) faulted Habermas’ public sphere proposition for equating the face-to-face communication that takes place in literary saloons, coffee shops, bars and budding press in the early bourgeois Europe to today’s mediated communication. Curran (1991:31) further argues that Habermas’ public sphere lacked the capacity to serve “as an equilibrating force” in shaping public opinion, due to its exclusiveness to a small group of economically and politically priviledged men. Therefore, feminist media scholars criticed Habermas for gender partiality, given his failure to denounce the exclusion of women from the bourgeois public sphere of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries Europe (Dahlgren,1995). Furthermore, current realities occassioned by technological advancement have led to the creation of a variety of public spheres; media outlets and other fora for information and opinion sharing which have transformed Habermas’s public sphere into seemingly an utopian concept (Curran, 1991). The import of these criticisms is that there is no grand media public sphere as Habermas seems to have proposed, but “a series of public spheres each organised around its own political structure, media system, and set of norms and interests” (Garnham, 1996:371). But, as Habermas
reminded his critics in those days that “the book came out in the early 1960s, and that if he were to write the book [Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere] today he would have made many changes” (Dahlgren, 1995:11). These many changes which the media and Habermas’ original concept of the public sphere have undergone does not in any way undermine the relevance of the concept which “has become part of the dominant media and political discourses” (Garnham, 1996; Verstraeten, 2000:73). Indeed, the present relevance of the concept lies in its application to the social practices of media institutions which this study is set out to critique. In the next section I will explore how the media in contemporary society contribute to the public sphere.

2.2.1 The media and the public sphere

The public sphere, as we have seen above, represents to Habermas a constitutionally empowered kind of public court, aside from state and economic spheres, where individuals gather to access and judge their state unhindered (Garnham, 1994). Thus, the media, to Habermas, represent places where people can freely express their views (Garnham, 1994). The media, in Habermas’ vision, differed from those of today, a factor made possible by technological advancement, privatisation and management. The new trend in media management, Schudson (1996) argues, sees news as a commodity to be bought and sold and not for empowering and mobilising the public.

Carver (1995) argues that the public space provided by the media today has faded in importance and that the audience whose opinions count are so far only individuals. He further argues that the current trends of commercialisation in the media, especially the broadcast media, have made the contribution of the public service broadcasters to the public sphere problematic. This, Carey (1993) argues, implies that the public space has been disappearing as commercial goals and not public interests now dominate the establishment of broadcasting stations. This statement implies that commercial influences have affected the medias contributions to the public sphere, as Habermas rightly predicted. Despite these shortcomings which Schudson (1996) and Carey, (1993) traced to the unwillingness of the media to interrogate controversial issues, the media remains essentially a protector of public interest and forum for people to be educated, informed and entertained.

Habermas (1989) argues that the concept of the 'free market place of ideas' which aided the development of the capitalist economy, among other things, led to an uneven distribution of wealth and rise in the cost of entry into the public sphere. Curran (1991) argues that, with
commercialisation, today's media has ceased to be an agent of empowerment and rationality, but has become a further means by which the public is sidelined. Bennett et al. (2004) argue that this positioning of the media affects its potential use for public deliberations on different issues. Thus, since government voices rather than the ordinary people now dominate the public media, radio's contribution to the public sphere has been found to serve to reinforce the exercise of state power (Berger, 2002). Jjuuko (2003:26-27) argues that these trends, “represent the current developments and the rise of direct control by private and state interests of the flow of public information in the interest, not of rational discourse, but of manipulation”. Thus, according to Bennett et al., (2004) it is the accessibility, independence, responsiveness, openness and recognition given to the types of issues that the media handles, that in turn affects the quality of opinions subsequently expressed, and determines its contribution to the public sphere.

Reith (1924) views the role of the radio as facilitating a new and better relationship among people. McQuail (1983) argues that radio can cross frontiers more easily than other media and is even increasingly available for short distance communications. It is also the cheapest means of communication globally (Reith, 1924). These statements emphasise the importance of radio as the most available means of informing, educating and entertaining people in all parts of the world.

Fourie (2003) argues that in any society, radio, because of its wider reach, can contribute significantly to creating public awareness and mobilising participation and nation-building, especially in times of political transformation. A public broadcaster like Radio Rivers, at the time that it was established, is expected to perform these roles. To perform these roles, Fourie (2003) argues, the PBS, through its various programme schedules, should provide a forum for interactions between the different sections of society. Given this, if radio is to be a critical voice in the society, then “it should provide a public sphere where the public can express ideas freely and in which information, opinions and criticisms can be circulated independently from commercial pressures or political influence” (Fourie, 2003:166). However, Verstaeten (2000:73) argues that “it is not because the government of a country financed a broadcasting system that this system should guarantee the realisation of the public sphere”. This implies that state-regulated broadcasting systems on which a PBS station like Radio Rivers was founded does not offer a forum where free access to all people to contest and contribute to the public sphere is guaranteed, rather for the elites to control information necessary for the formation of public opinion. In this sense, the idea of a PBS as a public sphere is merely an
idealised concept that has never been realised anywhere in the world (Verstraeten, 2000; Tomaselli, 1989). Meaning that free access to radio as a medium of mass communication can only be achieved in a deregulated broadcast landscape, where editorial and programme independence, as well as institutional autonomy and accountability are sacrosanct. In this way, the radio studio will perform a mediational role as the people's parliament, bringing people together to debate issues without interference from extraneous influences. Thus, the radio, playing the role of mediating in the conversation between people, brings everybody together to debate and decide on core issues of their welfare, in a framework of democratic participation (Jjuuko, 2003).

In addition to its informative, educational, and entertainment roles, broadcasting is called to fulfil a further function: that of “an emancipatory force that empowers the people” (Curran, 1991:43). That broadcasting is able to achieve these societal functions is because it was seen as a public good. This public good ethos calls for editorial independence which will ensure balanced news and current affairs programming at all times. However, the failure of broadcast media to play such roles, Reith (1924) argues, portends danger for democracy. Therefore, for private citizens in contemporary society to come together to share information for the advancement of society would be almost impossible without the media of the public sphere. The media thus help citizens to reach informed decisions about what courses of action to take (Dahlgren, 1991). Thus, the new mediated public sphere offers the citizenry the enabling environment to engage in discussions on how state power is utilized by those in authority (Dahlgren, 1991). This implies that it is through the media that people are able to participate freely in discussions relevant to the public good (Curran, 2000). By so doing, the media assist in resolving social conflicts and defining collectively agreed-upon objectives. By helping to resolve social conflicts, the media become a common space that link together divergent groups, thus becoming a stabilizing element in the society and polity which strengthens its place in any modern society (Curran, 1991).

However, for public service broadcasters and other media to play an essential role in the new public sphere they must be independent, because the media does not only transmit messages but also shape the form and, to a certain extent, the context and content of a message (Carey, 1993). Therefore, radio programming, whether of a PBS or commercial nature, can only contribute to the public sphere in mediated messages and a representational sense. This means that the listeners’ interest and informational needs should be represented in all aspects of radio programming to justify the radio station's existence.
Thus, there are three features which facilitate media contribution to the public sphere: free access for all in the public, freedom of expression, and a lack of emphasis on status in debates (McQuail, 2000). The PBS is central to this process, as they distribute the information necessary for citizens to form informed opinions. Curran (1991) argues that, whether it is to inform, educate, or entertain, the media's contribution to the public sphere is that it is a place in which private individuals and interest groups seek to influence and regulate social relations. From this role of the media can be extrapolated the media watchdog, agent of public representation and diversity, informed citizenry, and public entertainment ideals, which I shall be discussing in the next sections of this chapter.

2.2.2 Radio as a public watchdog
The public watchdog role of the media involves revealing abuses in the exercise of state authority, and facilitating general debate about the functioning of government (Curran, 2000). In a democratic society, the media constitute the institutional framework for carrying out this function of regular monitoring and reflecting on public opinion. This role implies that the media should facilitate a general debate about the functioning of the state and, in that way, protect and promote the interests of society (Curran, 1991). The public watchdog, Schultz (1998) argues, empowers the media, on behalf of the public, to hold the powerful accountable for their actions in the exercise of the powers and authority placed upon them. For the public service broadcasters to play this role, they must operate freely and independently from the state. This is because, once they become subject to state control, the fear is that they will lose their ability to be a watchdog and may even be transformed into an accessory of the state (Curran, 1991). Such public service broadcasters are useless in serving the public good and public opinion. The public watchdog role, therefore, confers on the media the right to speak with one voice for itself and for the public (Schultz, 1998). Curran (2000) further argues that PBS enjoys some 'publicly' based independence that enables them to perform the watchdog role more meaningfully than private broadcasters, because of their strong internal systems of checks and balances and fear of public disapproval.

Originally conceptualised for the print media, the watchdog role in its application has seen the media standing up against abuses by the rich and powerful in society (Curran, 1991). However, there have always been doubts about the effective application of the watchdog role to the broadcast media as the state regulates the use of the broadcast spectrum. Thus, Curran (1991) argues, while it is easy for the press to play this role, the same cannot be said of the
broadcast media because of the scarcity of frequencies on the electromagnetic spectrum. However, reasons for this fear, have been dispelled by technological advancement, leading to better management of the electromagnetic spectrum, - a situation that led to the deregulation of broadcasting in many countries (Seaton, 2000).

Since deregulation means commercial broadcasters become dependent on advertisement revenue from corporate entities, Curran (1991) argues that this may sometimes restrain them from criticising or investigating the activities of corporate establishments, especially their major advertising clients. Therefore, Curran (1991) argues that the free-market compromises rather than guarantees the editorial integrity of the media and impairs their watchdog role. This assumption further calls into question the very foundation of the traditional free-market thesis that commercialisation leads to the independence of the media for democratic purposes. However, since the free-market thesis provides for freedom of expression, public service radio programmers could still use the radio for empowerment by opening their studios for talkshows, panel discussions and interviews by those who hold divergent views from the dominant positions being circulated by the elites to express their views unhindered outside the context of news which is often presented in a stereotypical fashion.

From the above, the establishment of public service broadcasting as a public watchdog, which encourages neutrality and higher stakes programming, seems to enjoy overwhelming support. However, because of dependence on licence fees and state funding, governments have been found to have moved against the public watchdog role for public service broadcast media (Curran, 1991). Such official arm twisting of the PBS can be attributed to have led to their perceived failure to act as watchdog of public interest, leading to their current decreasing contribution to the public sphere.

2.2.3 Radio as agent of public diversity and representation
The representational role of the PBS is anchored in the media's function as agencies of information and debate, providing a forum for the public to make informed choices (Iroh, 2005). That the PBS is able to play this role, Curran (1991) contends, depends on the diversity and openness of the media. The media, he further argues, must be easily accessible and enable societal issues and questions to be articulated and answered by all, including marginalised groups. However, the advent of commercialisation of broadcasting may not enable this to happen, as the goal of profit maximization is likely to compromise these values (McChesney, 2000). Based on these fears, public service radio should be organised in a way
that enables diverse social groups, organisations, and people in wider social dialogue to freely express their views from various positions of interest (Curran, 2000). Thus, radio as an agent of public representation is essential because it encourages wider participation in the society public discourse, and forms a forum which allows the public to receive essential information on how they are being governed.

As an arena by which public opinion is articulated, the Habermasian conception of the media as a mirror of people's will defines the role of the media as the fourth estate of the realm - an organ of representation and presentation of the people's will. Curran (1991) argues that this role puts the media to the equivalent of an election every time the studio comes on air. Consequently, with commercialisation, the media's contribution to the public sphere is ultimately determined by no-one but the listeners, viewers, and buyers (Curran, 1991). Therefore, to act as agent of public representation, the radio must reflect the views and values of the listening public, and present their views on issues.

However, commercialisation, beyond producing more diversity and choice in the media outlets, has also imposed limits on diversity generated by expansion (Curran, 1991). Moreover, a radio operating under the free-market does not necessarily relate to diversity and different types of programmes. Bennett and Entman (2001) and Curran (1991) citing the instance of the U.S, where there is a large increase in the number of broadcast media leading to expanded cultural and genre diversity, observe that the high concentration of broadcast media has failed to achieve a corresponding increase in the ideological diversity of public affairs programming. Therefore, commercialisation of broadcasting does not equate to an increase in radio’s contribution to the public sphere, instead leads to a decrease.

2.2.4 Radio for informed citizenry

For citizens of a given society to exercise their constitutional rights and organise themselves and their aspirations so as to make meaningful contributions to the development of society, they must have access to the broadest possible range of information (Murdock, 2000). This, however, would not appeal to commercial broadcasters, because programming for such a role would not be attractive to advertisers. Murdock (2000) identifies the following as spheres in which such citizenship rights are located: freedom of expression, freedom of movement, freedom of association, freedom of conscience, and the right to participate in the making and exercise of the laws by which one is governed. He contends that, without these rights, it would be impossible for citizens to debate and compete for power. Public service radios
must, therefore, develop and maintain the existence of these rights so that all citizens can know and make use of them (Murdock, 2000).

Opuko-Mensah (in Jjuuko, 2003) argues that radio's public service role is important as the medium to provide information on social and cultural rights through programming. Such public service programmes, (in the form of drama, educational, religious, and cultural programmes as we have seen earlier) must meet the interests and tastes of the population as a whole.

Curran (1991) observes that these different emancipatory roles are best fulfilled through the process of a free-market. Thus, the free-market is supposed to promote a culture of free thinking, essential to self-realisation. This freedom to publish and broadcast ensures that all significant points of view are put forward in the public domain, and that a wide range of information is made available from diverse sources for the public to arrive at good judgement.

### 2.2.5 Radio in entertainment

Reith (1924) argues that broadcasting is not only aimed at bringing relaxation into homes where radio and television are in use, but also transmit information that will enable people to take an interest in and act on events around them. According to Garnham (1996:374), the “entertainment content of the media is clearly the primary tool we use to handle relationship between the systems world and the life world”. Thus, media entertainment is a way of using the media to talk about the processes of our common life, and a means of obtaining another view and understanding of other people in a way that strengthens association between different sections of society (Curran, 1991). Therefore, media entertainment is not merely the media provision of pleasure through popular music, it is also a way in which society communes with itself through music, songs and poetry, hence an aspect of the media contribution to the public sphere.

Curran (1991) views public service radio entertainment as one of the means by which people engage in public dialogue about the direction of society. A drama, musical, or a fictional magazine programme on radio is thus an important dimension in which public dialogue takes place and, in this sense, it is an integral part of the media informational, entertainment and educational roles (Curran, 1991). Thus, public service radio becomes a promoter of cultural development, giving the audience space to interpret their cultural values. By this, the media becomes part of a larger process of meaning-making in society, and then they are central to
how individuals and institutions within society define themselves and others (Chikhunkhuzeni, 1999).

Hendy (2000) argues that radio's primary contribution to the entertainment industry is seen in terms of the patterns of scheduling and selection of music between the different music genres. Because of different music types, radio, Hendy (2000:745) further argues: “helps the process of cross-fertilization between the different categories of taste”. With this reasoning, despite the fact that entertainment is a function of both public service and commercial broadcaster, the entertainment output of the public broadcaster is distinct from that of the commercial broadcaster. The public broadcaster, as in its earliest days in Britain, when there were no commercial broadcasters, gave prominence to all music genres including isolated and minority music types which the commercial media would not want to broadcast (Hendy, 2000). Through such diverse music programming, public service broadcasters help to support and stimulate the development and expression of culture and entertainment (Hendy, 2000). Therefore, liberated by its mode of funding, public service broadcasting has been more sensitive in making entertainment a space on radio to contribute to the public sphere.

2.3 Conclusion
This chapter began with a focus on public service broadcasting and the public sphere as theoretical perspectives in an attempt to develop an understanding of how a public service broadcaster, faced with competition from commercial broadcasters, can continue to inform, educate and entertain its audience without losing its essential roles as: a public watchdog, a platform for debates, and projector of society's cultural values. The chapter concludes with an overview of the contributions of public service broadcasting to Habermas' (1989) concept of the public sphere.
Chapter Three

Historical Perspectives of Radio Rivers

3.0 Introduction
This chapter will discuss some of the historical issues that led to the legal framework and programming policies at Radio Rivers. It will serve to set the tone for the discussion of the findings of the research. Clearly, this is not an exhaustive statement of the history of Radio Rivers and its programming policies. However, in line with the public service broadcasting and public sphere approaches, this historical perspective is vital to understanding the prevailing practices at Radio Rivers before and after the entry of commercial broadcasters, and how the station has kept up its social responsibilities. The chapter will also look at the mandate and aims of the station, and interrogate the issues of programming policies at the station.

3.1 A brief history of radio broadcasting in Nigeria

Before 1 October 1960, when Nigeria became independent, radio broadcasting, like every other public institution, was run by the colonial government. So, at independence, Nigeria like most African countries, inherited the broadcasting systems left by the colonial government (Eko, 2000). Under this system, broadcasting was viewed as a tool for national development and useful for the administration of the country (Uche, 1977).

Radio broadcasting began in Nigeria in 1932 when the colonial office in Lagos, using rediffusion technology, a system that did not use transmitters began to re-broadcast programmes of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) to Nigerian audiences (Iroh, 2005). During the 1940s and up to the mid 1950s, rediffusion was the principal mode of broadcasting in Nigeria, with about 31 000 rediffussion boxes and 3 000 000 radio receivers in the country (Ugboajah, 1975). The programmes broadcast in this system were distributed by landlines from Lagos to the various listening boxes (communal radio units) across the country for which subscribers pay a small fee (Uche, 1977). This payment system, which could be seen as a form of licence fees as people were made to pay before they could listen to the radio, is a characteristic funding system for public service broadcasting (Blumler, 1992). In 1949, broadcasting in the local languages was introduced into the Nigerian broadcasting systems (Bourgalt, 1995). Thus, radio broadcasting in Nigeria started as a national public service, aimed at bringing the diversity of voices in the country into the national polity.
The Nigeria Broadcasting Service (NBS) was formed on 1 April 1951, after the Federal Government decided to convert the major existing rediffusion stations into fully operational radio stations (Uche, 1977). These stations, located in the different regions, were not fully independent as they were owned and managed by the management of the NBS from Lagos. But, because these stations were located in the regions outside the capital Lagos, and operated their own programmes tailored to the tastes of the local environment, broadcasting in Nigeria right from its genesis presents a picture of multiplicity of voices, which is a public service ethos.

To consolidate its public ethos, broadcasting was removed from the exclusive Federal Government list in 1953, and regional governments were then allowed to participate in the ownership of broadcasting infrastructure (Iroh, 2005). This event was followed by an act of parliament on 1 April 1957, which converted the NBS and its network of 18 stations into a statutory public service corporation known as the *Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation* (NBC), modelled after the BBC (Ugboajah, 1975). The historic 1953 decision to put broadcasting on the concurrent list became the legal framework for the establishment of separate regional radio stations. The first of these autonomous regional stations located at Ibadan was the Western Nigeria Broadcasting Service (WNBS) in 1959. This was followed by the Eastern Nigeria Broadcasting Service (ENBS) at Enugu in 1960, and the Broadcasting Company of Northern Nigeria (BCNN) at Kaduna in 1962. Each of these regional stations, except in the application of frequencies, was wholly independent of the federal government (Uche, 1977). Uche (1977) further argues that the reason for this change was to render broadcasting devoid of government interference and the propagation of the views of the ruling political party. Thus, the NBC was created as an independent and impartial service to allay public fears of government monopoly of the broadcasting industry. Therefore, it could be argued that, right from inception, radio in Nigeria was a public service.

However, following the abolition of the regional structure of administration of the country in favour of states on 27 May 1967, ownership of the broadcasting stations located in the regions was transferred to the states in 1973. In addition, on 1 June 1978, the NBC became defunct, following a restructuring and decentralisation of its management. In its place the *Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria* (FRCN), on air identified as *Radio Nigeria* was created (Ndolo, 1987). Martin (in Bourgault, 1995) argues that although radio infrastructure in Nigeria is widespread, broadcasting in the country guarantees little autonomy, because of government
control of the allocation of radio frequencies and the media industry. Thus, radio in Nigeria prior to the 1992 deregulation lacked the capacity to speak as a voice of the many voices in the polity. This is because government sees radio as a powerful tool which, if managed by private individuals, could be used to threaten the corporate existence of Nigeria (Iroh, 2005).

Thus, throughout the history of broadcasting in Nigeria, between 1932 and 1992, only the federal government and state governments were free to set up and operate radio broadcasters, “although from 1979 the Nigerian constitution guaranteed freedom of speech, including the right to own, establish and operate any medium for the dissemination of information, ideas and opinion” (Hooyberg and Mersham, 1993:42). However, it was not until 1 September 1994, that the first privately owned radio station, Ray Power 100.5 F.M., entered Nigeria's broadcast space (Nwabuikwu, 2004).

There is no doubt that broadcasting is an important social institution in the country's polity. The colonialists realised this and used the more traditional radio broadcast system as a tool of political suppression and cultural imperialism (The Events, 2004). Uche argues that the military has always used radio as a means of out-manoeuvring their co-contestants in the many violent leadership struggles of the country:

Rather than seizing the military armoury, the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) studios in Lagos have always been their prime target. During the February 13, 1976 abortive military coup, the fight for the control of the government of the country began at the NBC headquarters in Lagos, and it was also there that it ended (1977:178).

The above events evidence how radio has become a veritable public space, and an important tool for socio-political mobilization in Nigeria. This is in line with the Reithian ideals of public service broadcasting which is to educate, create awareness, pass information and entertain, and amuse (Blumler, 1992). It perhaps also fulfils a fourth function, that of mobilization (Jjuuko, 2003).

3.1.1 The history of Radio Rivers

Following the entry of the military into the country's political arena on 15 January 1966, and on 27 May 1967, the then government of General Yakubu Gowon abolished the regional structure of the administration of the country in favour of states. As noted earlier, in 1973 the ownership and management of the NBC stations located in the states were transferred to the state governments. One such station, which was located in Port Harcourt, was ceded to the
Rivers State Government. It was this station that became known as the Rivers State Broadcasting Corporation (RSBC), the parent body of Radio Rivers. In order to formalise its complete take-over by the state, the Rivers State Government promulgated Edict No. 8 of 1973 on 24 May 1973 establishing the Rivers State Broadcasting Corporation (RSBC Edict, No. 8, 1973).

Radio Rivers began transmission on 630 kilohertz and 476 meters on the amplitude modulation (A.M) band in 1973 at the premises of the defunct NBC in the city of Port Harcourt, and in 1981 opened a second station transmitting on 99.12 megahertz on the frequency modulation (F.M.) band. The A.M studios’ of the station, were dedicated to grassroots broadcasting, while the F.M studios were more of an entertainment station (Radio Rivers Dairy, 1982). Today, Radio Rivers operates only as an F.M station, as the A.M station has since closed down.

3.1.2 The aims of Radio Rivers

Decreed into existence on 24 May 1973, by the Rivers State of Nigeria Broadcasting Corporation Edict No. 8 1973, Radio Rivers was established:

- to erect, maintain and operate transmitting and receiving stations;
- to install and operate radio distribution services;
- to organise, provide, and subsidise: for the purpose of broadcasting educational activities and public entertainment;
- to collect, in any part of the world and in manner that may be thought fit, both news and information and to subscribe to news agencies;
- to do anything for the purpose of advancing the skill of persons employed in the broadcasting services, or the efficiency of the equipment used in the broadcasting services, or the manner in which that equipment is operated, including the provision by the Corporation [Radio Rivers] or by others, on its behalf, of facilities for training, education and research.


From the edict establishing Radio Rivers, it can be inferred that this mission is in line with the Reithian model of public service broadcasting, which defines PBS as a system of broadcasting that is available to every member of a society, and which provides information, education, and entertainment programmes that will service the need of all sections of the population, and that those responsible for its structure must be given opportunities for their self-expression (Mpofu, 1996). Moreover, the above mission of Radio Rivers, draws enormously from the mission of Radio Nigeria, which provides among other things, “to erect, maintain and operate radio transmitting and receiving stations, and provide facilities for the training, advancement
and enhancement of the skill and efficiency of persons employed in its services” (The Events, 2004:34).

Thus, like most government-sponsored radio stations in Nigeria, modelled after the BBC public service, which include political neutrality and accessibility to all the strata of the population, Radio Rivers was fashioned as a public service broadcaster to meet the public interest in information, education, and entertainment (Teer-Tomaselli, 1994). In addition, the station in its mandate was established to intensively pursue the local production of programmes to meet the broadcasting needs of its audience through skills development.

In summary, Radio Rivers' mandate, as Mpofu (1996) argues, by showing a commitment to the ideals of information, education, and entertainment, and liberated programme makers, can be rightly categorised as a public service broadcaster.

3.1.3 Programming at Radio Rivers
Edict No. 8 of 1973, that established Radio Rivers, also stipulates that programmes broadcast on the station shall comply with the following requirements:

- nothing is included in the programmes to be likely to offend against good taste or decency or likely to encourage or incite to crime or to lead to disorder;
- that the programmes maintain a proper balance in their subject matter and a general high standard of quality;
- that the news given in the programmes is presented with due accuracy, impartiality and objectivity;
- that due impartiality is preserved as respect matters of political or industrial controversy or relating to current public policy;
- that no matter designed to serve the interest of a political party is included in the programmes;
- the programmes broadcast by the Corporation [Radio Rivers], or on its behalf may be sponsored and may include advertisements and sponsored announcements.

RSBC Edict, 1973

These provisions, emphasising that programming at the station ensures good tastes, high quality, balance, impartiality and objectivity, (all virtues of public service broadcasting), manifest that the programming mission of Radio Rivers was fashioned to meet the ideals of a public service broadcaster in the public interest. Such public service programming, as enunciated above, which is also common to most public service stations in Africa, is driven by two concerns. Firstly, by the concern for political and national integration, aimed at
building national and cultural identities and, secondly, by the pre-occupation and use of radio as tool for national development (Jjuuko, 2003).

Thus, by the above programming ethos, Radio Rivers acted as a forum, providing the public with the space for the crossbreeding of ideas necessary for good governance (Betiang, 2004). This is important considering that at the time the station was established in 1973, the country having been through a 30-month civil war (1967 – 1970) and was in transition, Radio Rivers was to help shape the implementation of government policy of political and social integration (Ndolo, 1988). Such historical antecedents, coupled with illiteracy and poverty, make it necessary for broadcasters in Nigeria to communicate to the people in the language they can understand (Iroh, 2005). Thus, Kayode (1974) argues that these factors formed the basis for the introduction of language and education programmes in all broadcasting networks in Nigeria. The introduction of school broadcasting, Amienyi (2004) argues, is aimed at educating the citizen to be socially and politically active in contributing to national development. Therefore, that Radio Rivers which started as an offshoot of Radio Nigeria modelled after the BBC has educational broadcasting in its mandate aims at empowering the people, which is the programming ethos of a public service broadcaster (Curran, 2000).

Radio Rivers had been the only radio station in Rivers State for 29 years, before the commercial stations were established, and, to a reasonable extent may be said to have been successful in educating, informing, and entertaining the people of Rivers State. However, given the country's media policy and structural shortcomings in the industry leading to the shutting out of many voices, Radio Rivers was not quite a site for contesting government policies or actions (Betiang, 2004). This drawback in the station's public service ethos is evidenced in its mandate, the 1973 Edict, which cautioned it against engaging in controversial issues; i.e. “that no matter designed to serve the interest of a political party is included in the programmes” (RSBC Edict, 1973). Although this statement epitomises the station's avowed mandate of political neutrality, it tends to limit its contribution to the public sphere, as a forum where divergent views of individuals and groups in society are articulated, canvassed and expressed in the form of public opinion, in line with Habermas' discussion of the 'public sphere' (in Curran, 1991). However, the same Edict (1973) further provides that:

nothing in paragraph (e) of subsection (1) of this section shall prevent the inclusion in the programmes of properly balanced discussions or the debates in which discussions or debates the persons taking part express opinions and put forward arguments of a political character; and the inclusion in the programmes of party political broadcasts aimed at explaining the views and policies of the various political parties.
The above provision nonetheless makes Radio Rivers a public service broadcaster, even at a time when broadcasting was still regulated in Nigeria. As a public service broadcaster, Radio Rivers’ programmes should not merely serve to educate, inform and entertain, but should also be seen to be balanced, impartial and objective representations of issues, being neither subject to governmental censorship nor expected to follow a pro-government content (Bolin, 2004). By also showing commitment to education and good programming, and emphasising the liberation of programme makers, Radio Rivers is designed to distance the Rivers State Government, the promoter of the station, from programming activities, thereby making it fully independent from all vested interests (Comrie and Fountaine, 2005).

Thus, though established at a time when Nigeria was under military dictatorship, and hence without political plurality, the station, nevertheless, had autonomy in service programming (Eko, 2000). The preservation of this fundamental ideal up until today ensures that Radio Rivers was not only established as a public service broadcaster, but also operates as one.

3.2 The liberalisation of radio broadcasting in Nigeria

Before the 1992 liberalisation of broadcasting in Nigeria, the power to operate a broadcasting service, whether radio or television, was vested in the hands of the federal and state governments (Kolade, 1974). In addition, the federal government was the licensing authority of radio broadcasting, as all governments wishing to start broadcasting services had first to obtain licences from the Federal Ministry of Communication (Kolade, 1974). Even with the deregulation of broadcasting in 1992, resulting in the setting up of the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) under Decree No. 38 of 1992, the power to grant licences was still vested in the Communication Ministry. However, the promulgation of the decree marked the first attempt by government to open up the country's airwaves to private participation.

The Decree gives the NBC the responsibility of:

receiving, processing and considering applications for the ownership of radio and television stations including, cable television services, direct satellite broadcast and any other medium of broadcasting; regulating and controlling the broadcast industry; and regulating ethical standards and technical excellence in public, private and commercial broadcast stations in Nigeria.

(NBC, Decree No. 38, 1992).

However, the NBC Decree No. 38 of 1992 was amended as the National Broadcasting Commission (Amendment) Decree No. 55 of 1999 which gave full autonomy to the Commission to regulate on all broadcasting matters without having to go through the Minister
of Communication to the President. Thus, with the promulgation and operation of these two decrees, broadcasting in Nigeria was no longer the exclusive domain of the state.

The concept of commercialisation in broadcasting is located within the liberal theory of the media, which to use John Stuart Mills (1600, in Karlson, 2003) phrase 'a free market place of ideas', a field in which, free enterprise is the guiding principle. The theory assumes that in a free and open encounter that truth will prevail over falsehood and that market forces will ensure freedom from extraneous control (Garnham, 1996). Within this theory, Siebert et al. (1976: 51) argue:

the functions of the media are to inform and to entertain, help discover truth, assist in the process of solving political and social problems by presenting all manner of evidence and opinion as the basis for decisions, ensure freedom from government controls and domination, and provide a basis of economic support and financial independence through sales and advertising.

Liberal theorists thus assume that, out of the many voices on public issues, some information may be false (Karlson, 2003). However, they argue that the state should not restrict public voice on issues, as to do so would lead to government suppressing opinions that are critical of its actions. Instead, they recommend that all opinions should be allowed, with the public judging for itself, and being able to discard those opinions not in the public interest, while accepting those that serve the needs of society (Siebert et al., 1976). This meant that anyone with the means to do so could own a press or broadcasting outfit and that, in the end, the success or failure of such an enterprise would be determined by the public being served.

However, Siebert et al. (1976) argue that, while the Libertarian theory offers the right to be informed, nothing in the theory offers the publisher or broadcaster the right to assume moral responsibility for the enlightenment and education of the public. From this position evolved the media theory of social responsibility.

The theory of social responsibility provides that: “the media inform, discuss and debate issues, enlighten the public so as to make the right decision, safeguard the right of the individual, serve the economic system as advertisers of goods and services, provide entertainment and maintain freedom from special interests” (Siebert et al., 1976: 74). By these provisions, the media theory of social responsibility thus laid the foundation of media dependence on advertising for survival, as it promoted the sponsorship of views and issues.
With it, anybody who had anything to say or any product to promote could do so. The media became a kind of market place not only of ideas but also of goods and services.

However, political theorists like Murdock (1992) argue that the consumer market media offers an array of competing products, but doesn't confer the right to participate in deciding the rules that govern either transactions or the distribution of wealth and income that allow people to enter the market. “It provides choice at a price, but without empowerment” (Murdock, 1992:19). Hence, it can be argued that private participation in media production and commercial broadcasting, although good, comes at a price: that of preventing broadcasting from serving the public interest or the common good, and contributing to the public sphere.

The questions arise: what impact does deregulation of broadcasting have on the ideals of public service in Nigeria in general and on Radio Rivers in particular, and how is the station in its programming reacting to the competition from commercial broadcasters? Betiang (2004) argues that deregulation may have led to the creation of a real public space through balanced programming in Nigeria's broadcast systems. If this is true, for Radio Rivers to maintain its historic place in the broadcast space it must, as it competes with the commercial stations, maintain its public service programming mandate. How Radio Rivers is able to ensure this is the subject of the next section of this study.

3.2.1 The establishment of commercial radio stations in Rivers State

Until 1992, broadcasting in Nigeria was mainly the domain of the state. Faced with the increasing burdens of huge facilities, large staff, dwindling funds, and competition from commercial broadcasters, after 1992, public service broadcasting in Nigeria, like in other parts of the world, began to move towards a convergence of the public service and the commercial models.

Radio Rivers faces similar challenges to its national and global counterparts. Its case is made more complex by the emergence of three commercial stations in just two years in a broadcast environment it had monopolised for 29 years. This situation could had a strong influence on Radio Rivers’ programme schedules in terms of adjustments in broadcast time and content, particularly with regard to changes in its traditional public service values.
In addition, it is the expectation of the public and media scholars alike that, being located in a developing country, the station should help to promote the social, economic and political well-being of the citizenry by assisting to open up the space for public debates and discourses for more participatory citizenry role (Gamson, 2001). This expectation had long been advocated for the 29 years when Radio Rivers was the only broadcaster in Rivers State. However, it was not until 2002, when commercial stations began to compete with Radio Rivers, that Radio Rivers started opening its studios and schedule for more public interaction and multiplicity of programmes respectively. Therefore, the task facing Radio Rivers in this age of competition is how its programmes can continue to emphasise the three basic ideals of public service broadcasting: to educate or enlighten and inform the public on political, economic, and social developments within the society; to entertain them with programmes of a high standard and good taste; and also empower them for a greater role in the public dialogue process (Tomaselli et al., 1994; Jjuuko, 2003).

Beyond the question of expanding the public space, the liberalisation of broadcasting in Nigeria is said to have its roots in profit making. Betiang (2004) argues that the broadcast media industry is capital intensive, which results in a profit motivation for many private investors and entrepreneurs in this age of deregulated systems. It is also this profit motive that drives most commercial stations in Nigeria to adopt glamour, with highly western entertainment content in programming, in its methods and strategies for information and programme processing, packaging and presentation (Betiang, 2004). The motive for all this is to attract advertisers. Therefore, revenue from advertising becomes the motive for the proliferation of commercial radios in Nigeria (Betiang, 2004). Port Harcourt, as the hub of Nigeria's oil and gas industry is attractive to commercial broadcasters and this could be the reason behind the proliferation of commercial stations in Rivers State. However, the questions arise as to what effect this development might have on Radio Rivers as a public service broadcaster, and how the station maintains its public service values and contribution to the public sphere.

3.3 Radio Rivers today

After 29 years as the sole radio station in Rivers State, Radio Rivers eventually lost its monopoly of the state airwaves following the establishment of three other radio stations in Port Harcourt. Such a situation, Teer-Tomaselli et al. (1994:48) argue, could make Radio Rivers compromise on its public service ethos of “non-commerciality and impartiality”, and lead to changes in its programming menu in terms of content - including more entertainment
programming associated with commercial broadcasting as a way of attracting more commercial patronage. Therefore, how *Radio Rivers* is facing the challenge from the proliferation of commercial broadcasters, which this study investigates, could yield much interesting information.

3.4 Conclusion

From the brief history of radio in Nigeria given above, it is apparent that, before the 1992 liberalisation of the airwaves, radio broadcasting was a state affair, with government owning and operating all radio stations in the country. However, because these stations were used to educate, inform, and entertain the citizenry, and were not established for profit motive they could be equated to public service broadcasters. It is under the same circumstance that *Radio Rivers* was set up in 1973 and operated until 2002 when it lost its 29-year monopoly of the airwaves. The effect of this new development in broadcasting on the station’s programming policies is what this study investigates. To do this, I have looked at the history of broadcasting in Nigeria as a whole and at *Radio Rivers* in particular in this chapter. I have also examined the mandate, and programming policies of *Radio Rivers* with a view to understanding what the station was established to do and whether, as a result of proliferation of commercial broadcasters, it is acting outside of its mandate.
Chapter Four
Research Methodology

4.0 Introduction
This chapter focuses on the methods used in data collection, analysis and processing methods as they relate to the goals of this study. In it, I present the research design, the population of study, the sampling methods, and the research procedures adopted in the study. The methodology will be discussed in the light of the research questions and aims of the study.

4.1 Research design
Although largely qualitative, this study also employed quantitative research techniques in data collection and analysis. The qualitative technique employed in data collection includes in-depth interviews, while a quantitative approach is used for analysis of the documents.

A qualitative research tradition, Bryman (1988) argues, is a commitment to viewing events, actions, norms, and values, among others, from the perspectives of the people who are being studied, i.e. seeing through the eyes of the people. Thus, as the main qualitative research method, the study employed an open-ended interview guide with key policy and decision-makers and producers, who take decisions on policy issues, programme production, and scheduling, and how these decisions affect programmes broadcast on Radio Rivers to generate data on the perceived impact of commercial broadcasters on Radio Rivers. Tim (1993:91) notes that “interviews can yield rich sources of data on people's experiences, opinions, aspirations and feelings”. Therefore, the reason for using qualitative interviews as the main research technique in this study is to ensure that respondents who have diverse experiences could talk about their experiences.

Beside a qualitative research method, I also used a quantitative research method, which requires that data collected can be expressed in numbers (i.e. can be quantifiable) (Bryman, 1988). The main quantitative research method used includes document analysis and content analysis of Radio Rivers’ programming schedules between January – March 2000, and January – March 2004, (the period before and after the establishment of the commercial broadcasters), to see whether there have been changes in programming. In using content analysis in this study, I draw from McQuail’s (2000) argument that, for purposes of analysis of the performance or criticising of mass communication, we need to be able to characterise the content of particular media channels. However, for purposes of this study, this method was only used as a preliminary method devoid of its complexities to analyse the station's
programme schedules. In using the method, I categorised *Radio Rivers*’ programmes using public service principles and programme genre. I categorised the programmes into news and current affairs, advertisement, entertainment and others. That is, ‘News and Current Affairs’, dealing with educational and informative programmes, ‘Entertainment’, including all kinds of light hearted programmes that seek to inform and relate the audience to happenings in their environment, ‘Advertisements’, including all sponsored programmes and spot announcements that generate money, and ‘Others’ which include continuity announcements and the station’s opening and closing formalities.

From the foregoing, it is evident that, within limits, each of these different methods can yield valid information about social phenomena at *Radio Rivers*, although they differ in the kinds of data that they yield (Brewer & Hunter, 1989). As a result, in this study I combined the two research approaches with a view of yielding more and different kinds of information to enable me to answer the research question more fully than any single method would allow (Brewer and Hunter, 1989). This point underscores the reason why the two methods were used for data collection analysis in this study.

### 4.2 Sample selection

Sampling, in relation to social research, is involved in the methods of data collection. It entails deciding on the actual number of documents to examine and relevant individuals from a cross-section of the population to interview (Haralambos and Holborn, 1995). Purposive sampling of documents and open-ended interviews of respondents was used as the method of data collection, because it allowed me to focus in-depth on issues that are in the study.

Because the study aimed to get information on programming at *Radio Rivers*, the respondents for the open-ended interviews were not randomly selected, but selected for their data-generating ability and to ensure a wide range of experiences. This method of sample selection conforms to Bryman's (2001) preposition that, for effective purposive sampling, the satisfying criteria should be administrative and hierarchical. That is, those respondents selected to be interviewed must be people who have authority and power to influence policy, and knowledge about *Radio Rivers* operations.

I also examined the following documents: the edict establishing the station, programme schedules (January – March 2000 and January – March 2004), and records of advertisement takings and revenues for the period of study. These documents are existing official records
and the property of Radio Rivers and so were not merely put together at my request. The existence of these records before my request to see them satisfies the condition that the sources of such documents must be authentic, credible and unbiased (Bryman, 2001).

By interviewing officials who are directly involved in making decisions about programming and broadcasting, and studying the mandate and programme schedules of Radio Rivers, I hoped to gain a deeper and wider perspective into the research question.

### 4.3 Population sampling

Since the study aimed to investigate the influence of commercial broadcasters on public service programming, the respondents chosen were primarily those concerned with media policy and decision making in the Ministry of Information and at Radio Rivers, as well as programme managers and heads of divisions, junior producers and journalists at Radio Rivers. Secondary sources of information included a retired journalist, as a way of balancing and cross checking how Radio Rivers had performed in the past. Thus, the study population consisted of diverse groups of respondents believed to be major actors in the station's existence as a public service broadcaster. Respondents included the following people shown in table 4.1 below:

#### Table 4.1 Study Population

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Date interviewed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Information</td>
<td>6/12/2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director of Parastatal, Ministry of Information</td>
<td>9/12/2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acting General Manager/Director of Programmes, Radio Rivers</td>
<td>20/12/2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director of Commercials, Radio Rivers</td>
<td>27/12/2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director of Finance, Radio Rivers</td>
<td>20/12/2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acting Director of News and Current Affairs, Radio Rivers</td>
<td>5/1/2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deputy Director of Programmes, Radio Rivers</td>
<td>27/12/2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deputy Director News and Current Affairs, Radio Rivers</td>
<td>7/1/2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Director News and Current Affairs, Radio Rivers</td>
<td>14/1/2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior Programmes Officer/Announcer, Radio Rivers</td>
<td>27/12/2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior Reporter, Radio Rivers</td>
<td>17/1/2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retired Controller News and Current Affairs, Radio Rivers</td>
<td>10/1/2005</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Interviews with these respondents were important in assessing the extent to which the entry of commercial broadcasters has influenced the public service programming policy at Radio Rivers. In addition, the interviews with programme managers, producers and journalists were aimed at exploring their understanding of the core public service values which the station is expected to promote. As those who produce programmes and schedules at the station, they play a role as gatekeepers of the public interest.

4.4 Sampling size
Sample size refers to the number of respondents I was willing to interview and what documents were examined. I had to make decisions about those to interview, and what documents to review. These decisions had to be taken in order to position the study concisely in context and to ensure that the sample was representative of the population and to offer information-rich data. The sample used in this research is heterogeneous, incorporating policy makers, managers and staff leading to varied data. I had initially thought to conduct the interviews only with programme policy and decision makers, but instead followed Kvale's (1996:141) advice to researchers to “interview as many subjects as necessary to find out what you need to know”. As such, the sample size was increased to include programme producers, serving and retired journalists. This is because, according to Bryman (2001:95), “increasing the size of a sample increases the precision of the sample, and as the sample increases, sampling error decreases”. However, given that time and cost were important considerations in my data-gathering, the data had to be kept manageable, “since for increment in precision, if the sample size is further increased then the increments of precision becomes an increasingly uneconomic proposition” (Bryman, 2001:95).

The data used in the study from both respondents and programme schedules, is shown in the tables 4.2 and 4.3:

**Table 4.2 Categories of respondents interviewed**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewed respondents</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Decision makers (policy and programme decision makers)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programme managers</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programme producers and journalists</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retired journalists</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>12</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.3 Programme schedules studied for January – March of 2000 and January - March 2004

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Number of schedules</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>January - March</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>January –March</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (2 years)</td>
<td>6 months</td>
<td>182</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I felt that the above data sufficiently represented the sample population. Themes and concepts collected from the data were categorised to give a general picture of the effects of the proliferation of commercial broadcasting channels on public service programming.

4.5 Research procedure

My supervisor gave me a letter of introduction (Appendix D) aimed at conveying to the authorities at Radio Rivers what my study was about, and what the results would be used for. This helped to solicit their co-operation by showing that the interviews were not time-wasting exercises or a test of their performance (Jones, 1996). In addition, the letter of introduction served to clarify any ambiguities which the respondents might have had regarding the ethical consideration of the research (Tim, 1993). Because of the confidential nature of some of the information, and the fact that as the respondents, as civil servants, are under oath in Nigerian Civil Service Code of Ethics not to divulge official information, the introductory letter was very helpful in preparing the ground for the processes of data collection.

After getting official clearance from the Ministry of Information, which is the supervising organ of government, and from the General Manager of Radio Rivers, I had to generate data from library documents, including the edict establishing the station, before proceeding with the interviews (Appendix E). Thereafter, I approached the Director of Programmes who gave me the required programme schedules for the periods under review. Based on the resulting review, I then proceeded with the interviews, working closely with the Acting General Manager/Director of Programmes, and the Acting Director of News and Current Affairs. I made appointments with the 12 respondents listed in section 4.3 above, at a time and venue most suitable for them. Most of the interviews were done during working hours and in the offices of the respondents. Only one respondent was interviewed at his residence.
The recorded interviews, ranged from 45 minutes to 2 hours in duration depending on how informative the respondent was. Before starting each interview, I explained to the respondent the purpose of the study, and that data collected would be treated with strict confidentiality and would not be used for any kind of media publication. All the respondents gave their consent. In the course of the interviews, the probing technique, involving asking and reframing the same question in a manner that helped the respondents to articulate their answers and to generate sufficient information where they had not adequately answered the questions asked, was used (Bryman, 2001). It took 6 weeks, from 6 December 2004 to 14 January 2005, for all the required interview data to be collected. For my interview guide see Appendix A.

4.5.1 Document Analysis

Document analysis involves an examination and analysis of official documents, records, policy papers, and programme schedules. In this study, documentary data obtained includes: the Rivers State of Nigeria Broadcasting Corporation Edict 1973, establishing Radio Rivers; the programme schedules of the station from January – March 2000 and January – March 2004; and statements of advertisement takings and revenues in the same period. These documents I deemed were information-rich and provided meaningful data to help to answer the research problem.

Though these documents seemingly reflect an unbiased state of affairs at Radio Rivers, Bryman (2001:377) warns that documents, “could not be regarded as free from error and distortion. Therefore, documents alone cannot be regarded as providing objective accounts of a state of affairs. They have to be interrogated and examined in the context of other sources of data”. In response to this fear, the data collected from the interviews becomes a source of information on the state of affairs at Radio Rivers. Furthermore, the information collected from the examination of documents were first coded for themes before moving to the interview stage. It is important for this process of data collection to be followed because in qualitative data collection processes, analysis starts after some of the data have been collected which helps to shape the next step (Bryman, 2001).

The Rivers State of Nigeria Broadcasting Corporation Edict of 1973 represents the official proclamation that ushered Radio Rivers into existence. It spells out what the station was established to do and how it has fulfilled its mandate in the 29 years it operated before the establishment of the commercial stations in Rivers State. Thus, I am interested in whether or
not, in the face of present competition from commercial broadcasters, Radio Rivers still fulfils its public service mandate. Besides looking at the station's compliance with the mandate establishing it, part of the tool of this study will be the station's programme schedules (Appendices B and C).

A programming schedule, Ellis (2000) argues, is the choice producers have to make to give identity to their broadcast service. The schedules represent major documents that determine which programmes the station broadcasts in its attempt to meet its mandate. At Radio Rivers, programme schedules are normally planned on an annual pattern of quarterly programming. In locating the programme schedules used in this study, I was guided by the need to compare the public service performance of Radio Rivers when it was the only station in Rivers State, with that of when it has to compete with the commercial stations. Thus, I selected for this study the first quarter of 2000 and 2004, representing periods before and after the establishment of the commercial stations in Rivers State. The programme schedules for these periods were examined for shifts and changes along time allocated to the different programme genres: educational, informative and entertainment. This approach is useful not only to identify changes in programming trends over the period, but more especially to see whether or not the station, in applying these changes, fulfils the Reithian mission for public service broadcasting: to educate, inform, and entertain.

4.5.2 Semi-structured interviews
I prepared three different interview schedules to guide me in my interviews. These schedules were for interviews with firstly the policy makers, the production managers and programme decision makers, finally and for the producers and journalists. According to Jones (1996), anybody gathering information about the daily operation of a corporate entity may need to gather information from both management and junior staff. Jones (1996) further argues that such an approach will yield relevant, diverse information. Therefore, my choice of such a diverse group of respondents was to allow for the integration of multiple perspectives, to familiarize myself with the operations of Radio Rivers, and to develop my understanding of the social processes at play in the day-to-day operations at Radio Rivers.

In preparing the interview guide, I took cognisance of the themes raised in the literature studied, and therefore framed the questions to cover these themes, allowing me to answer the research question. Such approach, Bryman (2001) argues, often allows interviewers to glean the ways in which respondents view their social world and gives interviewers flexibility in the
conduct of their interviews. In addition, a research project does not exist in isolation, but must build upon what has been done previously including recently published research (Kaniki, 1999). Thus, by reviewing the literature, I was able to put my study into context to show how it fits into the field of media studies.

I used qualitative, semi-structured interviews, because, as noted earlier, this offers the prospect of flexibility. With qualitative interviews, “the researcher can change direction in the course of his or her investigation much more easily” (Bryman, 2001:280). This also entailed my using the probing technique in asking follow up questions on what had been said. The use of open-ended or semi-structured interviews and the probing technique was also intended to encourage the respondents to respond to the questions as they wished, and to continue to amplify or clarify what they had previously said or were saying (Jones, 1996). Such an approach was aimed at getting the most useful information from the respondents.

In addition, since most of the questions required that the respondent give his or her definition and application of residual knowledge and show understanding of the concepts, I had to ensure that the questions were short and straightforward. Bryman (2001) suggests that, when asking a question that is supposed to be an indicator of a respondent’s understanding of a concept, we want to keep error to a minimum by simplifying the question as far as possible. This underscores the simplistic and direct nature of the interview guides.

Furthermore, while in the field, I decided to give the respondents the questions ahead of the scheduled date for interview. In giving the respondents the questions ahead of the scheduled date of recording, I wanted to ensure that there was no problem with an interview question due to, for example confusing terms and ambiguities. I wanted to be able to say, as far as possible, that any variation in the answers between different respondents to a question is connected with true variation between respondents and not to variation in the way a question was asked or the way that answers were transcribed from the tapes (Bryman, 2001). In addition, giving the interview guide ahead of schedule was also to ensure that the respondents had planned to put aside sufficient time for the interview (Blanche and Kelly, 1999).

Before starting each interview, the interviewee was assured of the confidentiality of the interview and what the interview was all about. This was to establish (or re-establish) trust, and to assure the respondents that they were a co-enquirer rather than a research subject and that the essence of the study was strictly for academic purposes (Blanche and Kelly, 1999).
also went a step further to have the confidentiality declaration written on the top of every interview guide to reassure the respondent in case they had any misgiving or doubt about the purpose of the interviews. This is especially necessary for as civil servants they are under oath not to disclose official information.

After giving the respondents the interview guide, I proceeded to arrange a time and venue for the interviews. Most of the interviews took place in the offices of the respondents except for one case where it was held in the respondent's home. The essence of having the interview at an agreed venue and time was to ensure a quiet setting and privacy (Bryman, 2001).

Furthermore, the questions were framed to allow the creation of the necessary rapport, and to help respondents to articulate their answers and respond as they wished, thereby generating sufficient information to answer the research question. The essence of adopting this format was to allow me to talk interactively with the respondents, to ask them questions that were aimed at answering the research question, to listen to them, and to gain access to their views (Mason, 2002). In addition, using interviews permitted respondents a greater flexibility to answer questions on their own terms and involve interviewing people about events from their own perspectives. Allowing the interviewees greater flexibility enabled them to reflect on their experiences and the event I was interested in, and also allowed respondents to return to a point previously made to elaborate upon it (Tim, 1993).

The interviews were recorded and then transcribed. This procedure, Bryman (2001:317) argues, “is important for detailed analysis required and that the interviewees answers are captured in their own terms”. It is also necessary for a complete account of the series of exchanges in an interview to be available, and in order not to be distracted by having to take down notes on what the interviewee was saying. In addition, the academic purpose of the study was highlighted by recording the interviews showing the interviewees about the seriousness I attached to what was being said (Blanche and Kelly, 1999). Every word that was spoken by the interviewee was transcribed to ensure that the meaning of every sentence said during the interview was correctly interpreted in the analysis, context and the conversation as a whole (Blanche and Kelly, 1999). Also, transcribing every word of the respondent created a full and permanent record of the respondents’ views for analysis and reanalysis as needed (Jones, 1996). In transcribing the interviews, Bryman (2001) recommends that it is best to allow five to six hours for transcription for every hour of speech. Heeding this advice explains why the interviews took six weeks to be carried out, as each
transcription took place on the same day as the interview, and before the next scheduled interview, to allow me to be aware of emerging themes that I may want to ask in a more direct way in later interviews (Bryman, 2001). Thus, in qualitative interviews there is a thin line between data collection and data analysis, as the two take place simultaneously (Bryman, 2001). The transcribed materials were then transferred onto a word processor to facilitate the moving around of data and the search for particular themes during the data analysis (Blanche and Kelly, 1999).

4.6 Data Processing and Analysis

As noted above, there is little variation between data collection and analysis in most qualitative research. This is because, while data is being collected, a picture of the themes and concepts which the research is aimed at studying will begin to emerge (Bryman, 2001). However, despite the strength of this approach in throwing open the ideas and concepts at once for testing; a more detailed analysis had to be carried out. This is discussed in subsequent chapters of this study. The information gathered from the examination of documents and the interviews of key staff at Radio Rivers and the Ministry of Information were carefully considered with the aim of answering the original research question (Durrheim, 1999). After the data had been collected, reduced and interpreted using themes and concepts such as: public service broadcasters, public service station, commercial broadcasters, liberalisation, social responsibility, civic responsibility, public service values, public service mandate, etc, generated from the literature, and forming the main theoretical ideas of the study.

Bryman (2001:65) argues that concepts: “are categories of ideas and observation”. Each concept, therefore, represents a label that we give to elements of the social world that seem to have common features and that strike us as significant (Bryman, 2001). The emerging themes from the interviews were then broken down and coded to represent a subject relevant to the research question, with each code describing what a respondent thinks and believes, and giving his or her opinion, ideas, observations and statements. These were then tested for the impact of commercial broadcasters on public service programming at Radio Rivers. The emerging themes from the document analysis were also categorised based on whether or not the programmes fulfil the public service mandate of Radio Rivers in terms of education, information, and entertainment. Furthermore, issues of the role of funding resources were examined, from financial data and advertisement records, to reveal the impact on programming of the financial situation in which Radio Rivers operated during the period of the study.
Having obtained written clearance from the Ministry of Information not only to enter *Radio Rivers* to conduct the study, but also to talk to the staff, I reasoned that, before conducting the interviews I needed to have some insights into how schedules are planned and programmes are broadcast on the station. Therefore, I decided to conduct some exploratory interviews with Abiye Tariah, Acting General Manager/Director of Programmes at *Radio Rivers*, and Silas Anyanwu, Acting Director of News and Current Affairs at *Radio Rivers*. According to the Acting General Manager/Director of Programmes at *Radio Rivers*: “*Radio Rivers* studios now [2004] open at 5.30 a.m. instead of 5.55 a.m. as was previously the case [2002], and close at midnight”. The change of opening time at *Radio Rivers* from 5.55 a.m. in 2000 to 5.30 a.m. in 2004 shows that the station yielded to the competition from the proliferation of commercial broadcasters. In addition, the Acting Director News and Current Affairs at *Radio Rivers* observed that the station has restyled the content and schedule of its news programmes. According to him, “in the 2000 schedule, we [Radio Rivers] used to have *State News and Commentary* aired at 6.30 a.m. for 15 minutes but that was changed on the 2004 schedule to *The World at Dawn* aired at 6.00 a.m. and lasting for 30 minutes”. He justified the changes in the news content on the station's realisation of the need for better public education. Furthermore, I reviewed the 2000 and 2004 programme schedules and noticed the introduction of some new programmes like *News in the Languages* broadcast at 6.30 p.m. Monday to Friday, and a new interactive programme called *Tuesday Morning Live* broadcast from 7.30 a.m. to 9.00 a.m. every Tuesday on the 2004 schedule, but were not broadcast in 2000. The introduction of these new programmes could possibly be due to pressure from the commercial broadcasters.

Therefore, using *ex post facto* (comparative) analysis of programming schedules, a quantitative research tradition which Ellis (2000:35) argues, “uses the immediate past as its most powerful referent in attempting to define the immediate future and so to order the output for that future”, I studied *Radio Rivers’* programme schedules before and after the establishment of commercial broadcasters. The study thus reveals changes in programming schedules between January - March 2000 and January – March 2004, representing the period when *Radio Rivers* was the only radio station located in Rivers State, Nigeria, and when the station had to compete with three commercial stations for a share of the broadcast market.
4.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have tried to review the methods used in this study for data collection, processing and analysis. These methods include: examination of Rivers State of Nigeria Broadcasting Corporation Edict No. 8 of 1973 establishing *Radio Rivers*, and compared the station's programme schedules of January – March 2000 with that of January – March 2004, the period before and after the establishment of commercial stations in Rivers State, respectively. The aim was to compare them for changes in programming resulting from the impact of the commercial stations. In addition to a review of the edict and programme schedules, I also used qualitative semi-structured interviews to gain access to the thinking of the decision makers, programme producers and journalists at *Radio Rivers* to see how they are facing the challenges posed by the entry of the commercial broadcasters. By combining these two research procedures, I aimed to bring out the underlying reasons for programming decisions at *Radio Rivers* and to explore whether or not these decisions were influenced by the entry of the commercial broadcasters into Rivers State.

Details of all the data from the documentation and interviews, supported with significant quotations and relevant literature reviewed, are presented in a narrative form as findings in the next chapter of this study.
Chapter Five

Findings on Radio Rivers mandate and programme schedule

5.0 Introduction
This chapter presents the findings from a study of the edict establishing Radio Rivers and the station’s programme schedule, looking at how the entry of commercial broadcasters has affected its public service programming values. The presentations of these findings are illustrated with the quotations from the interviews with respondents listed in table 4.1, and informed by the aims of the study and the literature reviewed.

The major themes used in this data analysis are: perceptions of Radio Rivers’ mandate, perceptions on public service broadcasting, perceptions on commercial broadcasting, and perceptions of Radio Rivers’ performance. Other themes used in examining the data are: perceptions of impact of commercial broadcasters on Radio Rivers; perceptions of impact of funding sources on Radio Rivers; perceptions of Radio Rivers’ programming and scheduling policies; and survey of Radio Rivers’ programme schedules.

5.1 Perceptions of Radio Rivers mandate
In this section, I explore how operators of Radio Rivers see its mission. All the respondents admitted that Radio Rivers does fulfil its mandate as a public organisation in line with the provision in the edict: “to be responsible for providing and maintaining radio, television and other broadcasting services, on behalf of the Government of the State” (RSBC, Edict No. 8, 1973).

Radio Rivers is modelled after the BBC public service ethos which includes accessibility to all people across the whole geographical space (Reith, 1924; Teer-Tomaselli et al., 1994). Informed by this ethos, Radio Rivers, the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Information posits, “was established to propagate the culture of the Rivers people to the rest of the nation, and to serve the interest of the public” (interview with Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Information, Mike Elechi, Port Harcourt, 6/12/2004). This public interest role, he further argues, “places on Radio Rivers the responsibility of handling and publicising all government policies and actions” (interview with Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Information, Mike Elechi, Port Harcourt, 6/12/2004). Thus, by publicising the activities of the government to the public, Radio Rivers contributes to the public sphere (Habermas, 1989). However, Habermas (1989) argues that a public sphere is made up of elites and private citizens who use the medium to informally control the government (Curran, 1991). Therefore, for Radio Rivers to
have truly contributed to the public sphere it should, through its diverse programmes, also bring the people together to express their views on government actions and activities.

This task is provided in paragraph 13, sub-section 1 (b) of the edict establishing Radio Rivers, which states that: “[t]he Corporation [Radio Rivers] shall satisfy itself that the programmes broadcast by it or on its behalf, comply with the following requirements – that the programmes maintain a proper balance in their subject matter and a general high standard of quality”. Producing good quality programmes and ensuring balance places on Radio Rivers the task of not merely keeping the public aware of the thinking of government but, “since communication is a two-way process, the station must also take the thinking of the public to the government” (interview with Director of Parastatal, Ministry of Information, Mike Oku, Port Harcourt, 9/12/2004). Thus, it can be inferred that Radio Rivers is set up as a medium to enable all the people of Rivers State within and outside government to reach out to one another. Hence, it serves as a public service broadcaster.

A public service station, which, in Africa, is defined in terms of state ownership, financing and control as seen in Chapter 2, offers the people what they want through affordable and diverse output, and a medium that is independent of government (Jjuuko, 2003). This seems to be the state of public broadcasters in Nigeria and of Radio Rivers, as section 14 of the Edict (1973) provides that:

The Corporation [Radio Rivers] shall provide such facilities as may appear to the Corporation to be desirable in the public interest for the broadcasting of – speeches of members of the Executive Council of this State as well as the other States in the Federation and of the Supreme Military and Federal Executive Councils.

The above provisions mean that the decision of the government to set up Radio Rivers in 1973 was to seek a platform to propagate its views to the people. This is why “every government uses this medium [Radio Rivers] to reach out to the public” (interview with the Acting General Manager/Director of Programmes, Radio Rivers, Abiye Tariah, Port Harcourt, 20/12/2004).

Through government use of Radio Rivers to reach the public, the station fulfils an enlightenment role, “by acting as an organ of persuasion of the people on major issues and activities in the State” (interview with Assistant Director News and Current Affairs, Radio Rivers, Bon Woke, Port Harcourt, 17/1/2005). However, public dialogue cannot be complete without the people’s reactions to government actions and activities being taken to the
government. Therefore, *Radio Rivers*: “maintains some reporters in the local government areas to not only bring news concerning the local government, but also news concerning the communities and localities” (interview with Senior Reporter, *Radio Rivers*, Ernest Mbikan, Port Harcourt, 17/1/2005).

As a government station (Jjuuko, 2003), *Radio Rivers* mandate places on the government the powers to appoint members of the Board of Directors. Part Two, Sections 3 (2), 4 (1, 2) of the edict provides: “the appointments to the Board of the Corporation [*Radio Rivers*] shall be made in writing by the Governor.” Although, the discourse of mode of appointment at the station was not the focus of my study, it is important to note that by exercising powers over appointments government was indirectly interfering with the functioning of the station which could undermine its independence and impartiality as a public service broadcaster. Therefore, this method of board appointment at *Radio Rivers*, the Director of Parastatal, Ministry of Information argues, “is just a political thing.” He goes further to argue that: “as politicians [members of the Board of Directors] they are merely interested in themselves and the man who appointed them and not the organisation” (interview with the Director of Parastatal, Ministry of Information, Mike Oku, Port Harcourt, 9/12/2004). This position is shared by the Acting General Manager/Director of Programmes at *Radio Rivers*, who argues that, “they are not there by their hard work or experience in the industry. They are not shareholders; they have no stake in the organisation. They are politicians” (interview with Acting General Manager/Director of Programmes, *Radio Rivers*, Abiye Tariah, Port Harcourt, 20/12/2004). Thus, the edict stipulating that members of *Radio Rivers’* Board be appointed by the Governor, without any kind of public screening, raises serious questions about the station's public service ethos. The frequent use of appointments into the Boards of public service broadcasting organisations as political patronage makes public service broadcasters vulnerable to government pressure (Curran, 2000). Therefore, appointments of members of the Board of Directors and the General Manager of *Radio Rivers* by government could force the station to compromise its role as a public service broadcaster, and of ensuring public interest.

Another major area of ethical conflict confronting public service broadcasting organisations like *Radio Rivers* is the issue of funding. Sections 30, 31, of the edict (1973) establishing *Radio Rivers* provides that:

The Corporation [*Radio Rivers*] may (a) receive moneys appropriated by the Executive Council for the purposes of this Edict and apply those funds in accordance with this Edict and with any terms and conditions attached to
From the above provisions in the edict, the main sources of funding available to Radio Rivers are government grants and borrowings from the financial market, rather than licence fees which are traditionally the main source of funding for public service broadcasters (Blumler, 1992). With these contradictions in its financial mandate, Radio Rivers' financial health is tied to government's financial disposition, which could impact on its ability to meet the radio’s public service values. According to the Permanent Secretary Ministry of Information: “Radio Rivers is state-owned, and is fully funded by the state” (interview with Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Information, Mike Elechi, Port Harcourt, 6/12/2004). Despite being a state-funded station, many respondents argue that Radio Rivers has, since the entry of commercial broadcasters, been facing dwindling financial fortunes because of government’s failure to give a direct financial grant to the station except in instances of equipment breakdown. The Director of Parastatal in the Ministry of Information explains:

Every year the station [Radio Rivers] submits its financial requirements for funding in terms estimates [budget estimates] to the government. But most times not much comes out of it. What has been happening is that the station has been running, and whenever there is need for capital expenditure they [Radio Rivers] run to government. So budgeting in Radio Rivers has become a ritual, a mere dream that is not fulfilled. (interview with Director of Parastatal, Ministry of Information, Mike Oku, Port Harcourt, 9/12/2004)

Other respondents supported the above position that major funding from government for Radio Rivers has not been regular. The Acting General Manager/Director of Programmes at Radio Rivers argues that “getting the people who approve budgetary requirements to really understand why the station needs regular funding outside government purchase of major equipment has not been an easy experience since they are not into broadcasting” (interview with Acting General Manager/Director of Programmes, Radio Rivers, Abiye Tariah, Port Harcourt, 20/12/2004). However, in spite of its lack of direct state grants, Radio Rivers continues to remain on air on account of government also being responsible for settling the station's monthly salary bill (interview with Director of Finance, Radio Rivers, George Pepple, Port Harcourt, 24/12/2004).

In summary, by its mandate, Radio Rivers is a government-owned station, established to take information from the government to the public and from the public to the government. In this
way, *Radio Rivers* through its programmes, acts as a two-way communication channel between the government and the public, and thereby fulfils its mandate as a public service broadcaster. However, this ability to fulfil its public service mandate is seriously hampered by government control and funding.

5.2 Perceptions of public service broadcasting

Reith (in Teer-Tomaselli et al., 1994) defines the mission of a public service broadcaster as to “educate, inform, and entertain.” Respondents showed a general agreement with this theme. “A public service broadcaster is one that is in the process of doing the business of informing, educating, and entertaining the public for the organisation that establishes it. In this case *Radio Rivers* is owned by the Rivers State Government” (interview with Acting General Manager/Director of Programmes, *Radio Rivers*, Abiye Tarhah, Port Harcourt, 20/12/2004). Thus, the fact that *Radio Rivers* is owned by the government of Rivers State, and was established to promote communication between the government and the people, makes it a public service broadcaster (Jjuuko, 2003).

Taking the definition further, the Director of Parastatal in the Ministry of Information argues that: “public service broadcasting is supposed to be a programme or station that caters for the interest of every member of the public” (interview with Director of Parastatal, Ministry of Information, Mike Oku, Port Harcourt, 9/12/2004). The ideal of impartiality ensures that the public service broadcaster as a common utility is available to everyone just as is other public infrastructure (Fourie, 2003). As the Deputy Director of Programmes at *Radio Rivers* puts it:

> A public service broadcaster is a specialist station using the resources of state to beam life-changing information to people. Its instrument is well researched and properly packaged cultural, political, economic and sometimes religious programmes. To a public service broadcaster, feedback is vital, as this enables it to alter its strategy where necessary in a two-way approach to the dissemination of information (interview with Deputy Director Programmes, *Radio Rivers*, Goddy Williams, Port Harcourt, 27/12/2004).

Thus, public service broadcasting is not just another broadcaster, but one with a specific mandate to produce programmes that are strong on public issues and representative of citizenry (Habermas, 1989). For *Radio Rivers*, its mandate is therefore to provide a forum to interrogate the social, political, economic and cultural happenings that could impact on the society. As the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Information puts it: “public service broadcasting outfits are kind of opinion-molders, that give good education, information, and entertainment programmes that will lift the public or society ethos” (interview with Permanent
Secretary, Ministry of Information, Mike Echichi, Port Harcourt, 6/12/2004). This view provides that a public service broadcaster acts as a forum for debate and discussion in which all views, opinions and ideas that will improve understanding among the people are presented. This integrative role enables the public service broadcaster to be involved in empowering individuals to participate in the political and social discourses of the society, enhancing the quality of life and fostering social cohesion. A respondent offered a mixed opinion on whether or not Radio Rivers acted as a public service broadcaster in its first 29 years. The Director of Parastatal in the Ministry of Information argues that:

To an extent Radio Rivers has been a public service broadcaster and to an extent not, because government has subtle control over the station. It is not written anywhere that government is controlling the station, but it [government] exercises certain control over the station (interview with Director of Parastatal, Ministry of Information, Mike Oku, Port Harcourt, 9/12/2004).

The above statement calls into question the performance of the public service mandate of Radio Rivers. So, like public service stations all over the world whose operation can no longer be clearly defined, because of government control, Radio Rivers cannot claim to be a true public service broadcaster serving the interest of the public.

Furthermore, a public service broadcaster can be defined by its sources of funding which are mostly licence fees (Blumler, 1992). As a public service broadcaster, Radio Rivers is expected to tap into this source of funding, but it does not currently do so, because the edict establishing it did not specify that it collects licence fees. According to the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Information: “Radio Rivers does not charge licence fees, and there is no policy in the state that radio listeners should pay licence fees” (interview with Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Information, Mike Elechi, Port Harcourt, 6/12/2004).

However, media scholars have consistently argued for the shielding of the broadcast media from its sources of funding as a way to guarantee their independence and freedom. “If the edict had properly spelt out that Radio Rivers collects and receives licence fees that would have been another sure source of funds to run the station” (interview with Director of Parastatal, Ministry of Information, Mike Oku, Port Harcourt, 9/12/2004). Therefore, the failure of the edict establishing Radio Rivers to empower the station to collect and receive licence fees, and the continued failure of the State lawmaking authorities after 32 years of operation to amend the edict, has made Radio Rivers wholly dependent on government and
advertisement funding sources for survival, a situation which has weakened its public service roles and its contribution to the public sphere.

5.3 Perceptions of commercial broadcasting

In this section, I will discuss the respondents' views on commercial broadcasting. The reason for this approach is to establish the position that a commercial broadcasting outfit is different from a public service broadcaster. Since the focus of the study is to investigate whether commercial broadcasters have impacted on public service programming, it is important that I know what the respondents think so that I can position the findings within the context of the study.

Most respondents viewed the concept of commercial broadcasting as basically for profit. As the Acting General Manager/Director of Programmes at Radio Rivers puts it:

Commercial broadcasting actually has to do with selling the product that you have and in our situation that is airtime and the programmes that we generate. If what you are doing generate funds especially in radio where you have to produce programmes, present music, do educative, informative and entertaining programmes and these bring back money into the organisation then you are a commercial broadcaster (interview with Acting General Manager/Director Programmes, Radio Rivers, Abiye Tariah, Port Harcourt, 20/12/2004).

The logic behind commercial broadcasts is that programming is seen as a way to make profit; hence it is attractive to investors. As noted in Chapter 3, given the growing commercial status of Port Harcourt, it holds an attraction for would-be investors. It could be argued that the proliferation of commercial broadcasting stations in Rivers State, is maintained by profit rather than the desire to entertain, inform, and educate the public, and contribute to the discourse of the media as a market place of ideas. The essence of these stations is to compete for a share of the advertisement market that Radio Rivers has monopolised for 29 years. As the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Information puts it, “the intention of the people who established these stations, I think, is primarily to make money. Their reach, are the companies around, which they want to sell their products and make money” (interview with Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Information, Mike Elechi, Port Harcourt, 6/12/2004). This view is shared by the Deputy Director of Programmes at Radio Rivers, who argues that the commercial broadcasters’ emphasis on entertainment and sales of commercial space runs counter to radio being used as a medium for effecting positive social change and participation in the developmental processes of a society.
All in all, these explanation of the ideals of commercial broadcasting by the respondents have helped to answer the hypothesis in this study that the commercial broadcasting model is different from the public service and that, in a competitive broadcast environment, both can exist side-by-side if their ethos are well spelt out.

5.4 Perceptions of performance of Radio Rivers

As earlier observed, Radio Rivers was set up to act for the diverse voices of the government and the people of Rivers State as they communicate with each other, thereby fostering common understanding on important issues. However, the question remains as to how effective Radio Rivers has been fulfilling its mandate. To answer this question, I decided to find out from those who take decisions and produce the programmes it broadcasts, whether they have used Radio Rivers to serve the public good. Most respondents agree that before the entry of commercial broadcasters, Radio Rivers did fulfil its mandate. As the Senior Reporter at Radio Rivers argues:

Radio Rivers did not only cover Local Government Councils but also carried information on the activities, and needs of the people. In other areas we have music programmes and lots of other entertainment programmes both for the youths and the elderly (interview with the Senior Reporter, Radio Rivers, Ernest Mbikan, Port Harcourt, 17/1/2005).

In fulfilling its public service mandate of getting the people, 'educated, informed, and entertained', Radio Rivers programmes did not neglect the needs of the minority and those without the means to purchase programmes and space on the schedule. That Radio Rivers was able to render these services is because: “it is the first F.M. station around this part of the country” (interview with Acting General Manager/Director of Programmes, Radio Rivers, Abiye Tariah, Port Harcourt, 20/12/2004).

However, mediated communication, Habermas (1989) argues, is not all about technical accessibility, but also accessibility in terms of where people can freely express their views. Thus, Radio Rivers, the Senior Programmes Officer/Announcer argues “has served as an organ between the government and the people. However, I do not think we [Radio Rivers] have lived up to the maximum expectation since the station is owned by the government, it is highly influenced by government policies and decisions” (interview with Senior Programmes Officer/Announcer, Radio Rivers, Iyaye Ekisseh, Port Harcourt, 27/12/2004). From this viewpoint it is evident that not all respondents agree that Radio Rivers has fulfilled its mandate of impartiality and independence as a public service broadcaster.
Public service broadcasting, Teer-Tomaselli et al. (1994) argue, provides for balanced programmes, which means that the station presents all sides to any debate, issue and information, either as news or programmes. Although Section 13, subsection 2, of the edict establishing Radio Rivers also provides for balanced programming, Radio Rivers’ performance, respondents argue, falls short of playing an effective umpire’s role in the conversation between the public and the government. This failure, a retired Controller of News and Current Affairs at Radio Rivers argues is because of government not only controlling the station, but also the fact that its operators do not air any view seen to be contrary to that of government: “In terms of creating room for several voices and several shades of opinion, then will you say that there are limitations, because the managers of the station [Radio Rivers] do not allow any comment that is perceived or seen as contrary to the position of government” (interview with retired Controller News and Current Affairs, Radio Rivers, Ogbonna Nwuke, Port Harcourt, 10/1/2005). Therefore, the difficulties that Radio Rivers has in fulfilling its mandate as a public service broadcaster is not wholly with the edict establishing it, but also with the operators of the mandate.

Radio Rivers also faces the problem of trying to meet its mandated public service programming values in terms of ensuring universality and diversity in programming, leading to what the Assistant Director of News and Current Affairs at Radio Rivers termed too many programmes on the schedules’. Such a phenomenon, he further argues, diverts the station from fulfilling its public service mandate into servicing other commercial interests. “Radio Rivers ought to be a public service station but we have the problem of commercialisation and congestion so we [Radio Rivers] are not serving the public enough” (interview with Assistant Director News and Current Affairs, Radio Rivers, Bon Woke, Port Harcourt, 14/1/2005). As a result of inadequate funding from government, leading to increased commercialisation of its broadcast content, Radio Rivers, in an attempt to compete with the commercial broadcasters while still remaining in public service, has introduced too many programmes to its schedule. Such a phenomenon may divert the station from meeting its public service mandate. Yet a sure way that Radio Rivers can be less dependent on government and advertising for funding is by collecting licence fees, a situation which is not covered by the edict as has been discussed in the preceding section.

In summary, respondents report that Radio Rivers seems to be losing its public service values and its contribution to the public sphere within contemporary broadcasting history. Their reasons for this include the lack of government grants, political pressures on producers, and
the growing influence of commercialisation. However, as my study argues, in some areas Radio Rivers under conditions of competition with commercial broadcasters has improved its public service values.

5.5 Effects of commercial broadcasters on Radio Rivers' public service values

Having looked at what the respondents understand by the concepts of public service and commercial broadcastings, in this section I am interested in how they view the competition from commercial broadcasters.

As earlier observed, before the first commercial station, Rhythm 93.7 F.M was established in March 2002, Radio Rivers had been the sole broadcaster in Rivers State for 29 years. From the above date onward, the experience of Radio Rivers could include sharing its information sources to sharing its advertisement market. As the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Information puts it:

When it was only Radio Rivers people must advertise their products and had no place to go [except Radio Rivers]. But now [2004] that commercial radio stations have been established, that segment of the audience is now being shared between Radio Rivers and the commercial stations (interview with Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Information, Mike Elechi, Port Harcourt, 6/12/2004).

From the above view, the impact on Radio Rivers, following the establishment of commercial broadcasting outfits in Rivers State, is mostly in the area of the station's advertisement takings. This view is shared by the Deputy Director News and Current Affairs at Radio Rivers who argues that the station’s revenue base has been affected by the arrival of the commercial broadcasters.

As an insider [employee], I know our financial base before now [2005] has been very encouraging, but with the coming in of these stations with powerful transmitters and brand new equipment, we [Radio Rivers and its employees] are experiencing dwindling finances. That means that the bulk of the money generated [by Radio Rivers before the establishment of the commercial stations] through advertisement is now going to these better equipped new radio stations (interview with Deputy Director News and Current Affairs, Radio Rivers, Abraham Oki, Port Harcourt, 7/1/2005).

In all, respondents agree that with the coming of the commercial stations, Radio Rivers has lost a sizeable segment of its advertisement market and revenue to the commercial stations. They also observe that the proliferation of commercial stations has impacted on other areas of Radio Rivers programmes, which I will explore in subsequent sections in this chapter.
However, despite the perceived negative effects of the commercial stations on Radio Rivers’ revenue base, some respondents argue that the coming of these commercial stations has contributed to an improvement in services and quality of broadcasting at Radio Rivers. Commenting on how the competition has enabled Radio Rivers to reposition itself, the retired Controller News and Current Affairs at Radio Rivers argues that:

> Until they [commercial broadcasters] came, Radio Rivers used to run unreliable services. But since the arrival of the commercial stations, creating room for competition, Radio Rivers has at least sat up. Their [Radio Rivers] programming too has been affected (interview with retired Controller News and Current Affairs, Radio Rivers, Ogbonna Nwuke, Port Harcourt 10/1/2005).

Respondents agree that the arrival of the commercial stations has led to a new ethos of programme packaging at Radio Rivers, resulting in an expansion of the news as well as commercial and entertainment genres at the station. The Acting General Manager/Director of Programmes at Radio Rivers’ observes that the coming of the commercial stations has led to Radio Rivers serving its audience better with more information and entertainment programmes from its extended hours of broadcast. Although I will look at the introduction of new programming and scheduling policies at Radio Rivers in the face of competition in successive sections of this chapter, it is important to state here that, given the proliferation of commercial broadcasting stations in Rivers State, Radio Rivers has deregulated its broadcast space, emerging with a new model of mixed programming within its public service domain (Tomaselli, 1989). Thus, the coming of the commercial broadcasters rather than impacting negatively on Radio Rivers’ public service values and contribution to the public sphere, may have enhanced the station’s ability to serve the public good. This position contrasts with what Jjuuko (2002) discovered for Radio Uganda, that the liberalisation of broadcasting in Uganda undermined the station’s public service programming values.

In summary, all the respondents agree that the proliferation of commercial broadcasters in Rivers State has impacted on Radio Rivers, and that, as a broadcaster in competition, in order to ensure its continuous contribution to the public sphere, Radio Rivers has adopted new programming and scheduling policies which were not part of its programme schedules before the coming of the commercial stations.

### 5.6 Effects of commercial broadcasters on Radio Rivers’ funding

In this section, I will discuss Radio Rivers' revenue constraints in the face of competition from commercial broadcasters. I will look at how respondents see the effect of competition from commercial broadcasters on the diverse sources of financing available to the station.
5.6.1 Effects of government funding

The issue of funding has been a major problem facing public service broadcasters all over the world. As Reith (in Teer-Tomaselli et al., 1994) observes, there must be a funding commitment by the public, (in this case government), to support public service institutions in exchange for their services. Faced with competition from commercial broadcasters, government funding of *Radio Rivers* on such items as salary and capital expenditure between the periods under review has been increasing as shown in the table below.

Table 5.1 Government expenditure on salary and wages for the period under review

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<tr>
<td>January 2000</td>
<td>7 652 800.19/69 571</td>
<td>January 2004</td>
<td>11 642 428.47/86 240</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>February 2000</td>
<td>8 461 259.88/76 921</td>
<td>February 2004</td>
<td>11 642 428.47/86 240</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 2000</td>
<td>8 580 413.89/78 004</td>
<td>March 2004</td>
<td>11 557 058.31/85 608</td>
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</table>

Source: *Radio Rivers* Finance Department.

Table 5.2 Government expenditure on equipment for the period under review

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Studio Transmitter Links</td>
<td>2 000 000/18 182</td>
<td>Purchase Unicon solid</td>
<td>36 000 000/266 667</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valves</td>
<td>2 405 000/21 864</td>
<td>state transmitter</td>
<td>12 740 000/94 370</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Installation fee</td>
<td>1 300 000/9 630</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Purchase of valves</td>
<td>13 800 000/102 222</td>
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<td>Fencing of Elelenwo</td>
<td>4 200 000/31 111</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>transmitting station</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Landscaping of Corporate</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>premises</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total (2000)</td>
<td>4 405 000/40 046</td>
<td>Total (2004)</td>
<td>68 040 000/504 000</td>
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</table>

Source: Ministry of Information, Rivers State.

From the above figures, there is a big difference in government expenditures on *Radio Rivers*’ salary and wages and equipment, between the two periods, before and after the establishment of commercial stations. The big difference in government capital expenditure between the two periods that this study was interested in beside the purchase of some new and general maintenance of the station’s equipment, may also be due to the depreciation in the national
currency, the Naira (N) from N110 to $1 in 2000, to N135 to $1 in 2004 leading to an increase in the cost of purchasing the new equipment, and the seemingly higher capital expenditure from the government.

The above reports also show that government spent less when Radio Rivers was the sole broadcaster than when the commercial stations had been established. In other words, as a broadcaster in competition, and in an effort to reposition Radio Rivers to meet its public service mandate, government expenditure on the station was increased.

5.6.2 Effects on commercial revenue sources

The commercial division of Radio Rivers' operation is the main revenue-generating department, handling all advertisements and sponsored programmes (interview with Director of Commercials, Radio Rivers, Felix Kpai, Port Harcourt, 27/12/2004). Because of this crucial role, and since Radio Rivers depends on commercial takings for its daily operation, whatever happens to the station's commercial revenue-generation segment will surely affect the overall performance of the station (interview with Director of Commercials, Radio Rivers, Felix Kpai, Port Harcourt, 27/12/2004). Therefore, this section of the study looks at the impact of commercial broadcasters on Radio Rivers' commercial revenue-generation.

According to the Director of Commercials at Radio Rivers: “Radio Rivers was not built as a commercial station, hence out of the 18 hours of broadcasting in a day, advertisement only account for 6 hours” (interview with Director of Commercials, Radio Rivers, Felix Kpai, Port Harcourt, 27/12/2004). The six hours of advertisement on the daily schedule includes all kinds of sponsored and spot advertisements. This time-space allocation, he further argues: “was in use in January – March 2000, the period before the coming of the commercial stations, and in January – March 2004, the period after because we are not a commercial broadcaster in the strict sense of the word” (interview with Director of Commercials, Radio Rivers, Felix Kpai, Port Harcourt, 27/12/2004). That Radio Rivers, even in the face of competition from commercial broadcasters, only allocates a third of its broadcast time to advertisements is because the station as a public service broadcaster which concentrates on news and public affairs programming (interview with Acting General Manager/Director of Programmes, Radio Rivers, Abiye Tariah, Port Harcourt, 20/12/2004). This position seems in contrast to what happened at Radio Uganda, where Jjuuko (2002) discovered that, because of the need to boost their financial resources, public service broadcasters in competition tended to lengthen advertisement time from shorter slots to longer blocks. However, this does not
mean that Radio Rivers, faced with competition from commercial broadcasters, has not adopted certain measures which have affected its advertisement broadcast. According to the Director of Commercials at Radio Rivers, “Radio Rivers is still commercially viable despite the competition from commercial broadcasters, and the government directive for the station to be self-sustaining” (interview with Director of Commercials, Radio Rivers, Felix Kpai, Port Harcourt, 27/12/2004). He argues: “we [Radio Rivers] have personalised our commercial services, the quality of our programmes are second to none in the region, the high calibre of commercial practitioners in our station, our rates are moderate, and the coverage area of our broadcast, all contribute to our [Radio Rivers] commercial viability” (interview with Director of Commercials, Radio Rivers, Felix Kpai, Port Harcourt, 27/12/2004).

Another reason, given by some respondents for why Radio Rivers is not too adversely affected in the area of advertisement by the entry of commercial broadcasters into its broadcast market is the interest of government in the station, which acts as a pull to corporate bodies. According to retired Controller of News and Current at Radio Rivers:

In a developing setting such as ours, government they say is the biggest industry. You must know where government is going for you to be able to plan your investment, you must know what the policies and politics of government are in order to position yourself. And of course the major advertisers on Radio Rivers are government agencies who are under instructions to patronise the station (interview with retired Controller of News and Current Affairs, Radio Rivers, Ogbonna Nwuke, Port Harcourt, 10/1/2005).

However, the above position does not mean that Radio Rivers’ advertisement takings are not affected by the proliferation of commercial broadcasters in Rivers State. According to the Director of Commercials at Radio Rivers, “in January – March 2000, 5 000 commercials were handled while in the same period in 2004, 3 000 commercials were handled”. Seaton (2000) argues that the introduction of more competitors into a broadcast area reduces the volume of advertising revenues rather than increasing them, because of spreading and splitting potential audiences into even smaller groups among a greater number of channels. Therefore, the commercial stations have affected Radio Rivers commercial takings as could be seen in the overall reduction in the volume of advertisement takings from 5 000 in January – March 2000, to 3 000 in January – March 2004.

Nevertheless, the period witnessed an increase in overall revenue generation for the station (as shown in table 5.4 below) because of government’s directive that the station be self-sustaining leading to the commercialisation of various programmes including its news programmes (interview with Director of Commercials Radio Rivers, Felix Kpai, Port
Harcourt, 24/12/2004). What this means is that anybody who wishes to sponsor a programme for broadcast, including the news, on Radio Rivers is made to pay before such programmes are aired. But, as a public service broadcaster, asking Radio Rivers to generate enough revenue to become self-sustaining, as the government recently directed, is an invitation to chaos as the station was not built as a commercial station respondents argue. As the Director of Parastatal in the Ministry of Information puts it: “because the station [Radio Rivers] was not built as a commercial station, there are problems with that [government self-sustaining directive]” (interview with Director of Parastatal, Ministry of Information, Mike Oku, Port Harcourt, 9/12/2004). He went further to name the age of the equipment and management structure as operational impediments to the station realising the self-sustenance drive.

On the age of the equipment, his argument is that, for the station to generate enough resources to become self-sustaining, the quality of its broadcast must be good enough to keep the audience tuned to the station and to attract advertisers. However, where this is not so, the audience, who now have other choices because of the establishment of the commercial broadcasters, will tune to the other stations, and advertisers are bound to go where the audience goes. Furthermore, because of its civil service structure and the reason that it was supposed to create employment, the station currently faces the problem of a huge staff making demands on its lean financial resources from advertisement takings, and this could impact on the attainment of the self-sustenance directive and its public service values. The Director of Finance at Radio Rivers puts it this way:

The staff structure, having existed for quite sometime there seems to be high level dormancy, people that are no more productive. So if government can fashion a way to take care of these persons the station will improve, and then get fresher hands with new ideas and better ways of improving the station to meet with the current competition (interview with the Director of Finance, Radio Rivers, George Pepple, Port Harcourt, 24/12/2004).

From Pepple’s comments although the entry of commercial broadcasters has helped Radio Rivers to expand its public service values, because of the problem of a large staff, coupled with dwindling advertisement revenue, such gains cannot be matched with the level of performance of the station. With low productively levels reported at Radio Rivers, asking the station to be financially self-sustaining while government is not ready to retrench, means that almost all its programmes would have to be paid for. This implies that a programme genre like current affairs, which is strictly public service, will have to generate money if it is to be aired on the station. Thus, rather than the directive leading to an improved balance sheet for Radio Rivers, it could hamper the attainment of its public service mandate.
Table 5.4 Comparison of overall commercial revenue generated

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month of the year</th>
<th>Amount in Naira/Dollar</th>
<th>Month of the year</th>
<th>Amount in Naira/Dollar</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January 2000</td>
<td>2 000 095/18 183</td>
<td>January 2004</td>
<td>3 777 550/27 982</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 2000</td>
<td>3 010 100/27 365</td>
<td>February 2004</td>
<td>3 111 771/23 050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 2000</td>
<td>2 120 821/19 280</td>
<td>March 2004</td>
<td>3 771 035/27 934</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Radio Rivers Finance Department.

As noted earlier, Radio Rivers experienced a fall in the number of advertisements broadcast between the two periods under review. However, despite this, overall revenue profile increased due to revenue from other sources (including sponsored religious programmes and news, as the station has commercialised its news operation) (see Table 5.4 above).

This increase can also be traced to a review in station's advertisement rates from N1,500 per slot of 60 seconds in the period January – March, 2000, to N3,500 for same duration in the period January – March, 2004. Other reasons that could account for the situation include the increasing cost of operation and the depreciation of the equipment leading to poor returns on revenue. When all of these factors are taken together, then one begins to see why Radio Rivers has not fared better financially under competition than when the station was the sole broadcaster in the state. The station’s moderate advertisement rates respondents argue, makes Radio Rivers the first port of call for any would-be advertiser, especially those in the low income bracket, the majority of whom patronise the personal paid advertisements (PPA) on the station. According to the Acting General Manager/Director of Programmes at Radio Rivers: “most of our people who are fishermen, farmers, workers and businessmen can afford [the airtime], and we discover that when you tell them the time they should listen to their adverts it goes down well with them” (interview with Acting General Manager/Director of Programmes, Radio Rivers, Abiye Tariah, Port Harcourt, 20/12/2004). The low advertisement rates charged by public service broadcasters in competition, as seen in Chapter 2, is hinged on the philosophy that a public service broadcaster is best at making broadcasting accessible to all, because it does not discriminate on the grounds of cost or profitability (Blumler, 1992).

The import of all these factors is that, the increased demand for revenue as a result of the competition from commercial stations has not only affected Radio Rivers advertisement revenue sources, but the station has also become more open to government and commercial interests and control. The result of this interference is that the quality and content of its
public service programmes are bound to be affected, thereby undermining its public service mandate. In the next section, I will look at programming and scheduling policies at Radio Rivers, and how these have been affected by the entry of commercial broadcasters.

5.7 Programming and scheduling policies
Programming is the instrument by which a broadcast media gives its daily programmes to the audience (Eko, 2000). Eko (2000) further argues that a broadcast media programming policy is influenced by the values of the organisation. For a public service broadcaster like Radio Rivers, the motive is how to serve the public interest. Hence, Radio Rivers’ programmes are planned to suit the interest of the public in a way that gives meaning to the station's mandate (interview with Director of Parastatal, Ministry of Information, Mike Oku, Port Harcourt, 9/12/2004).

Scheduling, Ellis (2000) argues, is dividing the total broadcast time into slots and fitting in all the programmes to achieve a flow. Therefore, scheduling delivers programmes to audiences in a way that makes the audience understand and follow the day's broadcast. To achieve this, Ellis (2000) further argues, the scheduler uses past programmes to shape future programmes and in so doing, changes the output of the future to be in harmony with the values of the broadcast station. This gives character to the broadcaster.

To achieve this, public service stations produce their programmes in a way that allows programmes to give meaning to their mandate. Thus, Radio Rivers, all respondents agree, attains its mandate through the programmes it broadcasts. The Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Information argues that, as a public service broadcaster Radio Rivers is expected to broadcast programmes that broaden the cultural space of the state. That is, the station should broadcast programmes that emphasise “the cultural richness, the languages and information in all the languages and cultures of the people of Rivers State” (interview with Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Information, Mike Elechi, Port Harcourt, 6/12/2004). The instruments for achieving these ideals, the Deputy Director of Programmes at Radio Rivers argues: “are well researched and properly packaged cultural, political, economic and sometimes religious programmes” (interview with Deputy Director of Programmes, Radio Rivers, Goddy Williams, Port Harcourt, 27/12/2004).
5.7.1 Programme production

Traditionally, public service broadcasters are known to produce most of their own programmes. Radio Rivers, as a public service station, therefore produces most of its programmes in-house. The Acting General Manager/Director of Programmes at Radio Rivers observes: “most of our programmes are produced in-house, especially our drama programmes. A few sponsored ones mostly commercial programmes come from outside packaged and they come in here for broadcast, and the owners pay for the time slot and we broadcast” (interview with Acting General Manager/Director of Programmes, Radio Rivers, Abiye Tariah, Port Harcourt, 20/12/2004). Supporting why the station produces most of its own programmes rather than depending on externally produced programmes, the Senior Programmes Officer/Announcer at Radio Rivers argues that: “we have to encourage our staff to become creative. A situation in which you bring in most of your programmes from outside does not encourage creativity and challenges to the staff. We all have ideas, and a message that we would want to give out” (interview with Senior Programmes Officer/Announcer, Radio Rivers, Iyaye Ekisseh, Port Harcourt, 27/12/2004). That Radio Rivers producers produce most of the programmes broadcast on the station in-house not only gives them the opportunity to be creative, but is also a major public service value (Bens et al., 1994). This view of programmes broadcast on the station enhancing the creativity of the staff is supported by Section 12, subsection (j) of the edict establishing the station, which provides that: “the Corporation [Radio Rivers] shall do anything for the purpose of advancing the skills of the persons employed in the broadcasting services”. Thus, the programming policy at Radio Rivers is to liberate programme makers and to ensure minimal external interference on the station's programmes, which is an ideal of public service programming model (Peacock, 1989).

5.7.2 Programme schedules

Having produced a programme, whether sponsored or an in-house, the next step is to put the programme on air and ensure it is sustained. This is where the scheduling policy earlier mentioned comes into play. In deciding on which programmes to schedule: “first of all, we have to ensure that the programme is not on the station already, and that, that area [the content of the programme] has not been covered by an existing programme” (interview with Acting General Manager/Director of Programmes, Radio Rivers, Abiye Tariah, Port Harcourt, 20/12/2004). From the preceding argument, before programme producers at Radio Rivers decide to put a programme on the schedule for broadcast they must ensure that the programme has an audience it addresses, that its content addresses new issues in the polity,
and that there is space on the schedule to accommodate it. Thus, since the coming of commercial broadcasters into its broadcast territory, meaning that the station no longer exercises exclusive use of the electromagnetic spectrum, Radio Rivers had to introduce changes to its programming schedule. One of these changes is the extended entertainment broadcast on weekends. As the Acting General Manager/Director of Programmes at Radio Rivers puts it:

We open the station at 5.30 a.m. and close a little after midnight, by the time we finish the closing formalities may be 5 – 10 minutes past midnight. But because we want to reach the public more and because of the challenges of the new stations we made our weekends to be lively by having a long stretch of musical entertainment show [western music] (interview with Acting General Manager/Director of Programmes, Radio Rivers, Abiye Tariah, Port Harcourt, 20/12/2004).

From the above view, the new timing introduced on the schedule was meant to position Radio Rivers to compete with the commercial broadcasters in their 'territory', which is entertainment. I will be investigating this view, by looking at the 2000 and 2004 programme schedules of the station, in the next section. Meanwhile, suffice it to say that, with the extension of its broadcast time after the entry of the commercial broadcasters into its broadcast territory, the commercial broadcasters have impacted on scheduling at Radio Rivers.

5.8 Past and present programme schedules

In this section, I will present the findings from comparing the programming schedules between the two periods covered by this study. I will discuss trends in programming and scheduling, time-space allocation, and how the entry of commercial broadcasters has impacted on the different categories of programmes at Radio Rivers.

Radio Rivers’ programming schedule could be divided into three main divisions, namely: News and Current Affairs, Advertisements, and Entertainment. As a public service broadcaster, Radio Rivers' key responsibility, the Acting General Manager/Director of Programmes at Radio Rivers argues, is to ensure a platform for information and education of the public. Hence News and Current Affairs occupies a very important place on the station's schedule. Moreover, because entertainment comes with a message [information], entertainment is also given a strong place on the station's schedule (interview with Acting General Manager/Director of Programmes, Radio Rivers, Abiye Tariah, Port Harcourt, 20/12/2004). Although respondents have earlier argued that the station was not built as a
commercial station, since the station needs to make money, it depends on its daily advertisement takings to survive. Entertainment programming, respondents agree, is like the engine that powers advertisements. Because different music programmes broadcast on the station are often aimed at attracting a wider audience, advertisers are equally attracted to using the station to reach a large proportion of the consumers of their products. Therefore, entertainment is seen as important in the daily operation of the station.

The Acting General Manager/Director of Programmes at Radio Rivers reveals that News and Current Affairs produces the main news bulletin; the commentary after the news the interview programme, Spotlight; and other special interview programmes which may be broadcast from time to time. The Programmes division, he says, produces all the other programmes including sports (except that taken alongside the news bulletin); news programmes in Special English and in the Languages; religious programmes; drama; talks; and general entertainment. The Commercial Division is in charge of advertisements and sponsored programmes and, in conjunction with Programmes Division, produces the intra-programme advertisements, which are a mixture of advertisement and entertainment. The place of each of these divisions, and the programmes they produce, will be the subject of subsequent discussion in this chapter.

5.8.1 Trends in programming and scheduling

As stated in Chapter 4, this study is an analysis of Radio Rivers’ programming schedules across two periods, before and after the entry of commercial broadcasters, corroborated from views from the station's policy makers, producers and journalists. I also investigate whether, in the process of competing, Radio Rivers has altered its programme schedule, and whether such programme changes have impacted on its public service values.

To locate Radio Rivers’ programming schedule within the study, I compared the station's various programmes under News and Current Affairs, Advertisement, Entertainment, and Others. In addition, in selecting the period of study, I was guided by the fact that based on the station's annual pattern of quarterly programming; schedules are planned every quarter of the year. I, therefore, examined the programming schedules of January – March 2000 and January – March 2004, which are periods before and after the establishment of the commercial stations in Rivers State, respectively. In using this approach, I drew from Jjuuko’s (2002) assessment based on the frequency and recurrence of programmes, and categorised the programmes under the different types: A: News and Current Affairs, B: Entertainment, C: Advertisements, and D: Others, as shown in Appendix F.
The category, 'News and Current Affairs' refers to those programmes which are informative and educational and which dwell on current issues within the state, national and global polity. This category does not necessarily include only those programmes produced by the News and Current Affairs division as some programmes like *News in the Languages, News and Commentary in Special English*, documentaries and sports (except those segments in the news) are produced by the Programmes division. 'Entertainment' includes all kinds of light-hearted programmes that seek to relax and at the same time inform and educate the listener about events in the environment, such as drama, sports, as well as different genres of musical programmes, both local and foreign. ‘Advertisements’ include all programmes that generate money, such as sponsored announcements on the schedule. The final programme category is the broad categorisation of ‘Others’. This includes the opening and closing formalities, continuity announcements, station promotion and musical interludes. Although this categorisation is by no means exhaustive, it is highly informative on how programmes on *Radio Rivers* schedules are planned.


In this section, I will look at the number of programmes on the schedule within each period of the study, that is, January - March 2000, and January - March 2004. Table 5.5 below shows the weekly programmes aired on the station and also the quarterly totals.

**Table 5.5: Total number of weekly and quarterly programmes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day of the week</th>
<th>January – March, 2000</th>
<th>January – March, 2004</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sunday</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monday</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturday</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total for 7 days</td>
<td>327</td>
<td>343</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total of programmes for the quarter under review</td>
<td>4251</td>
<td>4459</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A comparison of the number of weekly programmes aired shows that 327 programmes were aired per week within the period January - March 2000, when Radio Rivers was the only radio station in Rivers State, and 343 programmes were aired weekly during the period January - March 2004, when the commercial stations had been established and Radio Rivers had to compete with them. The difference between the two periods in the number of weekly programmes aired on the station is 16 programmes. Also, the number of programmes broadcast in the quarter, January - March 2000 is 4251, while that for the quarter, January - March 2004 is 4459. The difference in the number of programmes between the two periods is 208. The table shows an increase in the number of programmes broadcast on the station when the commercial stations had been established compared to when Radio Rivers was the sole broadcaster in Rivers State.

Several reasons could be attributed to the increase in the number of programmes on Radio Rivers’ programming schedule. Firstly, the increase shows that, because of the entry of the commercial broadcasters, Radio Rivers had to expand its programming schedule to include more programmes to enable it to compete with the commercial broadcasters. Secondly, the entry of the commercial broadcasters could have come with financial challenges which caused the station to broaden its broadcast with the addition of some new programmes in order to cope with the competition. According to the Acting General Manager/Director of Programmes at Radio Rivers: “When you have competition, there is a tendency for you to rise up to the occasion. So we [Radio Rivers] started reprogramming and reshaping our programmes to meet with the challenges of the time” (interview with Acting General Manager/Director of Programmes, Radio Rivers, Abiye Tariah, Port Harcourt, 20/12/2004). This statement is in line with Hellman and Sauri’s (1994) view that, because of the competition for audience, both public service broadcasters and commercial broadcasters in competition produce programmes aimed at satisfying general public tastes. Such reprogramming of the schedule has seen Radio Rivers introduce a number of drama, sport, and interactive programmes such as: “a programme called 'Story - Story' targeted at adolescence reproductive health, 'One thing at a time' which discusses HIV/AIDS, and other new programmes that have taken care of the circumstances and situations that we now find prevalent”. (interview with Acting General Manager/Director of Programmes Radio Rivers, Abiye Tariah, Port Harcourt, 20/12/2004). The statement also aligns with Hulten and Brants’ (1992) argument that public service broadcasters reacting to competition from commercial broadcasters often adjust their programming schedule. Thus, it is evident that the coming of the commercial stations has led to an expansion of Radio Rivers’ programming schedule.
However, just as the entry of commercial broadcasters has led to the addition of new programmes and expanded the schedule, equally some existing programmes, have been withdrawn. The withdrawal of these programmes, a respondent argues conflicts with Radio Rivers’ mission.

In the past there is a particular programme called 'Omnibus'. This was a programme in Special (pidgin) English. One thing it did was that it had composition in every group that lived in the State. Secondly, it was a programme that talked about the social problems of society, subtly attacking government and talked about government activities. I am sure that government officials tune in and listen to that programme, and after a while you find them correcting some of the things that were mentioned on the programme. But now that kind of programme is not there and there is no programme that you can subtly use to call government's attention to the ills of society (interview with Director of Parastatal, Ministry of Information, Mike Oku, Port Harcourt, 9/12/2004).

Oku’s comment portrays the view that Radio Rivers’ programmes, under the present competitive environment, does not give enough room for addressing the prevalent social problems confronting the society. He blames this programming trend on the station’s operators desire to satisfy government by avoiding contemporary issues in the polity; hence failing the station’s public service values. His argument is supported by the Assistant Director of News and Current Affairs at Radio Rivers who argues that as a public service station, Radio Rivers should be enlightening people on healthcare delivery, HIV/AIDS pandemic, malaria, heart trouble, youth restiveness, inflation in the economy, etc. However, because of commercialisation of programmes, the station does not interrogate these issues with the depth required and sometimes these issues are not even discussed (interview with Assistant Director of News and Current Affairs, Radio Rivers, Bon Woke, Port Harcourt, 14/1/2005). Therefore, by not giving enough airtime to the discussion of contemporary issues, and by removing those programmes which critique the society from the schedule, Radio Rivers is failing in its roles as a forum for briefing the people (the governed and the government) on their obligations as citizens, and as a plural voice on contemporary issues (Curran, 2000).

In summary, respondents agree that the proliferation of commercial broadcasting channels in Rivers State has impacted on programming at Radio Rivers. It has led either to the addition of new programmes on the schedule, thereby helping to expand the station's contribution to the public sphere, or to the removal of some programmes, causing the narrowing of the station's contribution to the public sphere. The diversity of views canvassed from respondents about the exact way Radio Rivers’ programmes, in the face of competition from commercial broadcasters, are structured is in agreement with current thinking among media studies.
scholars. As a result of competition from commercial broadcasters, there is a convergence in programming in the global radio environment, leading to public service broadcasters partially adopting commercial production styles and commercial models of scheduling (Duncan, 2001; Achille and Miege, 1994; Tomaselli, 1989). Whether or not *Radio Rivers*’ programme schedule has lost its public service space because of competition from commercial broadcasters, and the station now adopting commercial programme production styles I will look at in subsequent sections of this study.

### 5.9 Time–Space allocation on programme schedules

To identify the effect of the proliferation of commercial broadcasters on how *Radio Rivers* serves its public service mandate, I looked at the time-space allocated to the different programme genres on the schedule. In doing this, I compared the time and space allocated to the different programmes aired on the station between the two periods under review as shown in Table 5.6, below.

#### Table 5.6: Weekly space allocation of programmes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Programme</th>
<th>Time – Space allocation in minutes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>January – March 2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News and Current Affairs</td>
<td>1980</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advertisements</td>
<td>1102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programmes/Entertainment</td>
<td>3801</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>6883</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to the Acting General Manager/Director of Programmes at *Radio Rivers*, some of the criteria used to determine the allocation of programmes on the schedule are: target audience, programme content, and time of broadcast. He further argues that the time, and space allocated on the schedule to the various programmes broadcast by *Radio Rivers* reflects the area of emphasis of the station in meeting its mandate. To understand how the time-space allocation reflects *Radio Rivers*’ programming priority, I will discuss the implications of the above data on the operations of the station's three main programme sections: News and Current Affairs, Advertisement, and Entertainment.

### 5.9.1 News and Current Affairs programming

Separating and categorising what informative programmes belong to News, or Current Affairs at *Radio Rivers* is a difficult task, as there is a very thin line separating them. Moreover, the separation is made more problematic as both programmes most times are aired in the same...
bulletin. Furthermore, at Radio Rivers, the two sections are supervised by one person. Thus, at Radio Rivers news and current affairs programmes are not only informative and educational, but are produced by the same staff. Combining the two programmes ensures in-depth coverage of contemporary issues in society. In addition, for a public service broadcaster like Radio Rivers, this also ensures that people are properly informed and educated to exercise their rights as citizens and to expand the public sphere (Curran, 1997). Therefore, for purposes of this analysis, the two have been grouped together.

At Radio Rivers, the News and Current Affairs division is generally concerned with the production of the main news bulletins, news updates, news roundups of both local and foreign origin, interview programmes, and other informative programmes on the schedule. However, such informative programmes, like News in the Languages and News in Special English, are produced by the Programmes division. It is also worth noting that the News and Current Affairs division produces the interview programme, Spotlight, and the sports embedded in the news, while such educational programmes as Point-Counter-Point and all other sports programmes are handled by the Programmes division, which also prepares the schedule. Given this clarification, I will begin by looking at the place of news and current affairs on the schedules.

There are certain indicators that show that the prime-time news programme structure did not change between the periods under review. To measure this, I looked at the specific timing of various news programmes. From perusing the schedule, I noticed that Radio Rivers news time belt has been expanded to include genres hitherto not aired on the 2000 schedule. The station's 2004 news schedule features items like weather, traffic, aviation and business news that were not taken on in the 2000 schedule. Such comprehensive news treatment at the station draws support from media managers like Mckinsey (1996 cited in Duncan, 2001:129) who reporting on SABC, argues that “public service broadcasters facing competition tend to increase the time dedicated to international news and of content of the news and current affairs feeds...because they are genres consistent with public affairs”. Commenting on the new approach to news production and content at the station, the Acting Director of News and Current Affairs at Radio Rivers argues that the station adopted these changes in order to enrich and make its news meet all tastes.

It is further to be noted that, following the directive of the government that the station should be self-sustaining, Radio Rivers now charges sponsors for news. By charging for its news
broadcast, those organising events and wanting *Radio Rivers* to cover such events for broadcast are made to pay for them before they are broadcast on the station. Such news treatment is bound to limit accessibility and make *Radio Rivers* only available to the wealthy who use it to influence public opinion (Jjuuko, 2003). Moreover, that *Radio Rivers* now charges for news could be the result of government cut back on funding, following its directive that the station be self-sufficient. Such funding problem is bound to affect the quality and content of the station’s news broadcast. But, defending the culture of payment for news at the station, the Acting Director of News and Current Affairs at *Radio Rivers* argues that the station needs money as government funding has been inadequate, and that payment for news at the station has not affected its quality.

I think it is not in every news item that we [*Radio Rivers*] charge money, because news definition remains the same, like the Americans would say ‘the unusualness of an event’. So because somebody pays for news does not mean that you are bound to take the news as he/she wants it (interview with Acting Director News and Current Affairs, *Radio Rivers*, Silas Anyanwu, Port Harcourt, 5/1/2005).

However, other respondents disagree, saying that payments for news has affected the quality and content of news aired on the station. According to the Deputy Director of News and Current Affairs at *Radio Rivers*, “commercialisation has affected the quality of news, as information which might not be really news is aired as news on the excuse that the item has been paid for” interview with Deputy Director of News and Current Affairs, *Radio Rivers*, Abraham Oki, Port Harcourt, 7/1/2005). Also, retired Controller News and Current Affairs at *Radio Rivers* puts it this way:

Though the news would have to be written as news but more or less it would have some opinion and public relations content. So the people who pay for the news dictates the news content and if you don’t carry the news as they want they will feel that you did not fulfil your part of the bargain (interview with retired Controller of News and Current Affairs, *Radio Rivers*, Ogbonna Nwuke, Port Harcourt,10/1/2005).

The Assistant Director News and Current Affairs at *Radio Rivers* agrees with the view that payments for news at the station have affected the quality of news carried on *Radio Rivers*. However, he argues that, as professionals, they are aware of their role as partners with government to sustain the society and not always to look at the negative side of issues as this may incite the people against the government. He argues that, “commercialisation naturally affects the quality of information that you send out, because somebody tells you what he wants and how he wants it, but not every story is worthy to be carried as news” (interview with Assistant Director News and Current Affairs, *Radio Rivers*, Bon Woke, Port Harcourt,
14/1/2005). So, even if somebody pays for the news and, in view of the fact that government has directed the station to be self-sustaining, “if you bring a million naira [$7,407] with a story that runs down the government or incites the people against the government, or even creates negative social impact on society we [Radio Rivers] will not carry such stories no matter how much you are ready to pay” (interview with the Assistant Director News and Current Affairs, Radio Rivers, Bon Woke, Port Harcourt, 14/1/2005). On the strength of this argument, he further observes that the content of news broadcast on Radio Rivers is influenced by two external factors: “from those who pay for their stories and the government that own the station” (interview with the Assistant Director News and Current Affairs, Radio Rivers, Bon Woke, Port Harcourt, 14/1/2005). With such strong government and commercial influence on news content, Radio Rivers is bound to lose one of the major value of public service, which is political neutrality and impartiality, as its news could potentially be biased in favour of the government or those with the means to pay for the news, and not necessarily in the interest of the public. The result is that the directive that the station be self-sustaining, that was effected after the entry of the commercial broadcasters which has led to payments for news, has impaired Radio Rivers’ contribution to the public sphere.

For the specific area of current affairs, on the 2000 schedule, the station had one hour dedicated to a programme called Spotlight, an interview programme. This programme, although maintained on the 2004 schedule, has been reduced to 30 minutes. Justifying the reduction in allocated time, the Acting Director of News and Current Affairs at Radio Rivers argues that the old format was boring to listeners. However, another respondent, retired Controller News and Current Affairs at Radio Rivers, argues that “the mere fact that the station has not changed most of its current affairs programmes and sometimes runs programmes tagged 'special interview programme' shows that all is not well with the current affairs unit of the station” (interview with retired Controller News and Current Affairs, Radio Rivers, Ogbonna Nwuke, Port Harcourt, 10/1/2005). In addition, respondents criticised the space allocated to current affairs on the schedule for the interrogation of the many contemporary public affairs issues confronting the society. As the Assistant Director of News and Current Affairs at Radio Rivers argues:

As a public service station we [Radio Rivers] should be talking about agriculture, healthcare delivery, HIV/AIDS, malaria, heart trouble, youth restiveness, unemployment, inflation in the economy, etc. People should be informed and educated on a number of issues. But here [Radio Rivers] you are given five minutes to write a commentary on HIV/AIDS or the arms struggle in the Niger Delta. That is not enough (interview with the Assistant

83
To support the latter claim, even such current affairs programme as *Talking Point*, a five minute daily commentary on topical contemporary issues, which appeared four times a day on the 2000 schedule, has been reduced to twice daily on the 2004 schedule. Similarly, the current affairs programme *Spotlight*, a public discussion programme that was taken for one hour on the 2000 schedule, has been reduced to 30 minutes on the 2004 schedule. By cutting on the number of slots and duration for the broadcast of these current affairs programmes, *Radio Rivers* has limited its dialogue space, and therefore undermined its public service values and contribution to the public sphere.

Furthermore, on the 2000 schedule, educational programmes were allocated 70 minutes of the weekly broadcast time. The 2004 schedule has increased this to 315 minutes, made up of mostly programmes in the sports genre like *Sports Quarter Hour, Sports Update,* and *Sports Supreme*, hitherto not on the 2000 schedule, while the discussion programme, *Point-Counter-Point* remains unchanged on the two schedules. The same programming trend was seen in the area of interactive programmes, where, on the 2000 schedule, the weekly slot allotment was 65 minutes, but 390 minutes on the 2004 schedule, including newly introduced programmes like *Sunday Links, From Me to You,* and *Top of the Morning.*

However, as much as *Radio Rivers* has, in the face of competition from commercial broadcasters, increased its educational and interactive spaces on the schedule, the same cannot be said of the space for minority groups. For instance, on the 2000 schedule, the station had specific programmes for women, men, youth, children and mothers and thus ensured gender balance, a public service broadcasting value. However, the space for these groups has not only been reduced, but, in fact, some of the programmes, such as those aimed at members of the armed forces and the programme *English by Radio,* have been completely removed from the 2004 schedule. The reason for this action is to free more space on the schedule for programmes with mass appeal especially in the sports genre. As the Acting General Manager/Director of Programmes at *Radio Rivers* argues “we look at programmes that have not been in existence, in areas where the public is interested like sports, and because we do not have the outside broadcasting (OB) vans to give them live coverage we have created sports programmes like *Sports Quarter Hour, Sport Update,* and *Sports Supreme* to take care of sporting needs of our listeners” (interview with the Acting General Manager/Director of Programmes, *Radio Rivers*, Abiye Tariah, Port Harcourt, 20/12/2004). Thus, in order to
satisfy its tastes for popular audience, *Radio Rivers*, like any public service broadcaster in competition, sacrificed those minority programmes that make it a unique broadcaster (Negrine, 1985).

In summary, Fourie (2003) observes that, faced with competition, public service broadcasters broadcast fewer current affairs and educational programmes. Thus, as much as *Radio Rivers* has expanded its news slots from 2000 to 2004, the expansion was not spread across all the areas of public affairs. Therefore, under the current proliferation of commercial broadcasting outlets, *Radio Rivers* has reduced its current affairs space and number of minority programmes.

### 5.9.2 Advertisement programming

Advertisement programming at *Radio Rivers*, respondents argue, is influenced by the need to earn more money as the station depends on advertisement revenue for its daily operation. Therefore, in the days when *Radio Rivers* monopolised broadcasting, that is during the January – March 2000 of this study, its advertisement programming policy could be described as ‘vague’ (Blumler and Hoffmann-Riem, 1992). At that time, the station had no well-defined advertisement time slot on the schedule, as advertisements were taken in the programmes called *Hello There* on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and *Rhythm* every weekday. The exceptions were the sponsored advertisements which had a properly specified space on the schedule. However, with the entry of commercial broadcasters, shown in the period January – March 2004 in this study, the station evolved a well-segmented advertisement programming policy. This is probably to ensure that advertisers are aware of the time their advertisements would be aired, so that they can tune to the station. In that way, *Radio Rivers* can ensure constant patronage. As the Acting General Manager/Director of Programmes at *Radio Rivers* puts it, “when you tell them [advertisers] the time they should listen to their advertisements it goes down well with them, so that they can tune in and listen to their advertisements” (interview with the Acting General Manager/Director of Programmes, *Radio Rivers*, Abiye Tariah, Port Harcourt, 20/12/2004). Also, while the station carries advertisement insertions aired between programmes on the 2004 schedule, there are also two specified advertisements time called *Commercial Break* on weekdays. Thus, following the entry of commercial broadcasters, *Radio Rivers*’ advertisement programming has moved in the direction of proper designation and increased scheduling which positions the station to compete with the commercial broadcasters.
Comparing the advertisement time-space allocation on the schedules: whereas 565 minutes of personal paid announcements were aired in 2000, 600 minutes were broadcast in 2004, showing an increase of 35 minutes. However, 537 minutes of sponsored programmes were aired in the period under review in 2000 as against 345 minutes in 2004, which shows a fall of 192 minutes. The duration of the intra-programme advertisements which was 60 minutes on the 2000 schedule was increased to 1645 minutes on the 2004 schedule. These figures follow the decrease experienced by Radio Rivers in its broadcast of sponsored advertisements coming from major companies, most of which must have gone to the commercial broadcasters. The increased space allotted for the intra-programme advertisement, (which combines commercial advertisements with entertainment) is probably to allow Radio Rivers to remain economically viable in the face of competition from commercial broadcasters. As the Director of Commercials, Radio Rivers, puts it:

The emergence of these stations have impacted negatively because the volume of our sponsored advertisement that is coming from our commercial office in Lagos is not as high as it used to be, as these stations also have offices there. Thus, they can say to an advertiser in this region we are also there. So before it was Radio Rivers alone, but now it is being shared. So in that area it has really impacted on Radio Rivers (interview with the Director of Commercials, Radio Rivers, Felix Kpai, Port Harcourt, 24/12/2004).

Indeed, the effect of the fall in Radio Rivers’ taking of sponsored programmes poses problems for Radio Rivers, since most of the product-sponsored programmes run throughout the quarter and attract higher payment regimes than the personal paid advertisements, and come from major companies, (like Coca Cola, Pepsi, MTN, and Guinness, etc, which are based in Lagos where the commercial stations are also heavily represented) (interview with the Director of Commercials, Radio Rivers, Felix Kpai, Port Harcourt, 27/12/2004).

The increase in advertisement programming on the station could also be traced to policy changes, as the government has directed the station to be self-sustaining. The Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Information argues that:

There was a slight policy change, as the Ministry has just directed that the Corporation [Radio Rivers] be self-sustaining. If that be the case, government establishments should therefore pay for their commercial messages if they want to use Radio Rivers as a medium because if they go to other commercial stations they normally pay for it (interview with the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Information, Mike Elechi, Port Harcourt, 6/12/2004).

Simply put, by this directive, every programme aired on the station is expected to be paid for. Moreover, as noted earlier, since Radio Rivers does not receive licence fees, the above
government directive implies that the station has to increase its programming of advertisements. In doing this, as observed in the 2004 schedule, most of the advertisement programmes are packaged in magazine format and broadcast for longer hours on weekdays, during the peak morning hours between 6.00 a.m. and 9.00 a.m. in the programme *Top of the Morning*. This trend, as Jjuuko (2002) also found in the case of *Radio Uganda*, aims not only to attract and hold audiences' attention but also to keep them from tuning to other stations. Such programming format adopted at *Radio Rivers* in the face of competition from commercial broadcasters rob audiences of the choice of other programmes, and also prevents the station from running the variety of programmes necessary for all sections of the audience to be heard in line with its public service values (Jjuuko, 2003).

5.9.3 Entertainment programming

For *Radio Rivers*, entertainment seems to occupy a high place in its programming policy, as it serves as a means for the station to reach bigger audiences with the products of its advertisers. This is essential, as the station depends on its daily advertisement takings for survival. However, the Director of Parastatal in the Ministry of Information says that *Radio Rivers* was not set up as a commercial station, but that recent economic trends in the station's broadcast environment tend to help the promotion of entertainment programming. In addition, the government's directive that the station be self-sustaining seems to have promoted the station's current interest in entertainment programming in order to attract a bigger audience to bring back advertisers. As the Assistant Director News and Current Affairs at *Radio Rivers* puts it:

> The entertainment aspect of our broadcast appears to have been captured by the commercial stations. So when that happened we had to go back to what we [*Radio Rivers*] used to do at the A.M. station, and incorporate most of the A.M. programmes into the F.M. programmes, so that people can have the other side of broadcasting [offering a diversity of voices] since most of the stations were entertainment oriented. For instance, we have classical music for those above 40 who can pay for commercials. So the commercial paying audience have actually been bought over by *Radio Rivers* while the teenage group also have their programmes (interview with the Assistant Director News and Current Affairs, *Radio Rivers*, Bon Woke, Port Harcourt, 14/1/2005).

In order to understand how *Radio Rivers'* entertainment programming has changed to cope with the entry of commercial broadcasters, I compared the schedules of January – March 2000, (when *Radio Rivers* monopolised broadcasting in Rivers State), and January – March 2004, (when *Radio Rivers* had to compete with three other commercial stations for a share of the market).
I first categorised the entertainment programmes broadcasts on the station (see Appendix F). This classification was problematic, as certain programme genres were difficult to categorise. For instance, how to classify a programme like *Les Chansons Francais* (a French musical programme featuring top French artists or singers with French connections, in which the presenter also teaches elementary French in the programme), and *Sunday Fantasy* as entertainment or educational programmes was a problem.

However, for purposes of this study, entertainment consists of programme genres that are amusing, yet informative and educational, such as folktales and drama programmes. As the Acting General Manager/Director of Programmes at *Radio Rivers* puts it, “you can educate somebody through entertainment, as when you make him relax, you are passing on the message [information]” interview with Acting General Manager/Director of Programmes, *Radio Rivers*, Abiye Tariah, Port Harcourt, 20/12/2004). Such a view is supported by Curran (1991) who views public service radio entertainment as a means by which people engage in public dialogue about the direction of society.

Beside drama, entertainment programmes on *Radio Rivers'* schedule include musical programmes of various genres such as African music, Nigerian music, indigenous or traditional music of Rivers' people, popular, classical, reggae, country music, highlife music, unsponsored religious musical programmes and so on. With this classification as seen in *Appendix F*, I discussed the entertainment segment of the two schedules that this study is interested in.

As seen in Table 5.6 above, the 2000 schedule dedicated 3801 minutes of its weekly broadcast time to entertainment, compared to 3715 minutes on the 2004 schedule. These figures show that entertainment programming at *Radio Rivers*, in the face of the competition from commercial broadcasters, has been on the decline. This confirms what the Assistant Director of News and Current Affairs at *Radio Rivers* inferred when he said that “*Radio Rivers* used to be very strong in entertainment [western music], but that has been lost to the commercial stations” (interview with Assistant Director of News and Current Affairs, *Radio Rivers*, Bon Woke, Port Harcourt, 14/1/2005). In addition, from perusing the schedule, I observed that the space for popular or western music on *Radio Rivers* programming has been reduced with the advent of commercial stations, while the space for religious music broadcast had been increased. This is probably because the audience seems to appreciate the western music output of the commercial stations more than those of *Radio Rivers*. This is in line with
the above reasoning by the Assistant Director of News and Current Affairs’ reasoning that Radio Rivers had lost its entertainment space with the advent of the commercial broadcasters. However, as Radio Rivers seems to have reduced the space for western music, the station has added two new music programmes, Indigenous praise songs and Special English request programme that were not on the 2000 schedule on the 2004 schedule. Curran (1991; Chikhunkhuzeni, 1999) argue that Radio Rivers, having lost the popular music to commercial broadcasters, could promote indigenous music as a cultural product and a means to strengthen ties between different sections of society. This probably informs why Radio Rivers decided to go back to incorporate some of the musical programmes of its erstwhile A.M. station into its entertainment programming schedule (interview with Assistant Director News and Current Affairs, Radio Rivers, Bon Woke, Port Harcourt, 17/1/2005). These observations highlight a fundamental observation that Radio Rivers has not only increased its entertainment genre to enable it to compete with the commercial broadcasters, but that the inclusion of minority music programmes such as Indigenous religious songs, and Special English request programme have expanded its entertainment space rather than decreased it in line with what public broadcasters in competition in other parts of the world experiences as inferred in section 2.1.3, above.

In addition, public service broadcasters in competition have been known to have extended their broadcast time (Hulten and Brants, 1992). The 2000 schedule shows that Radio Rivers studios open at 5.55 a.m. and close at midnight on weekdays, and at 1.00 a.m. on weekends. However on the 2004 schedule, the studios open at 5.30 a.m. and close at midnight on weekdays, and at 2.00 a.m on weekends. The change in the station’s broadcast times, the Acting General Manager/Director of Programmes argues: “is because we want to reach the public more and because of the challenges of the new stations” (interview with the Acting General Manager/Director of Programmes, Radio Rivers, Abiye Tariah, Port Harcourt, 20/12/2004). From the foregoing argument of the Acting General Manager/Director of Programmes at Radio Rivers, and the changes observed in hours of broadcasting between the station’s 2000 and 2004 schedules manifest that the entry of commercial broadcasters into Rivers State had impacted on programming schedule at Radio Rivers.

5.10 Conclusion
In this chapter, I have presented and discussed the findings of this study as they relate to respondents' views on the mandate and programming and scheduling policies of Radio Rivers. I also looked at the influence of commercial broadcasting on Radio Rivers' sources
of funding and public service values and was able to show how the various funding sources influence public service broadcasting values at *Radio Rivers*.

This chapter also looked at how the establishment of commercial broadcasting stations in Rivers State influenced programming and scheduling at *Radio Rivers*. In it, I established that commercial broadcasters swayed *Radio Rivers*’ programme producers to expand the station’s news and spaces for its educational and interactive programmes which enhanced its public service values, although decreasing the space for current affairs. In addition, the study was able to establish that, as a result of the entry of commercial broadcasters into Rivers State, that government effected a policy change for *Radio Rivers*, which also affected its public service programming values.

In the next chapter, I will discuss the findings of this study in relation to the literature, and suggest ways in which *Radio Rivers*, faced with competition from commercial broadcasters, could be transformed into a true arena for Rivers people to express their opinions on issues of polity, and thus enhance *Radio Rivers* contribution to the public sphere.
Chapter Six
Discussions and Interpretations of findings

6.0 Introduction
This chapter presents the discussion of the findings of this study in relation to the literature. The chapter set out to interrogate the findings with the hypothesis that public service broadcasters, in competition with commercial broadcasters, often adjust their programmes and schedules to resemble those of commercial broadcasters. Based on the above position, the study further investigates the proposition that competition from commercial broadcasters make public service broadcasters lose their public service values, which include: programming for an informed citizenry, being a public watchdog, catering for diversity and representation, and providing entertainment that reflects all tastes.

6.1 Discussion of findings for public service merits
As seen in Chapter 2, beyond educating, informing, and entertaining its audience, the public service mandate also requires universal availability to all citizens within the territorial space (Reith, 1924). This requirement for Radio Rivers implies that all citizens within its broadcast territory must receive its signal and be able to use Radio Rivers to put across their views. The station is funded by the government to ensure accessibility to all. However, my findings show that this role is being undermined by government's unwillingness to allow the station to function as a full voice of the people, through interference in its administrative structure and programmes.

The public service ethos, as Reith (in Teer-Tomaselli et al., 1994) argues, also implies that Radio Rivers as a public service broadcaster should keep the people educated, enlightened, and informed by maintaining public awareness. Radio Rivers should also entertain by keeping the public amused (interview with Acting General Manager/Director of Programmes Radio Rivers Abiye Tariah, Port Harcourt, 20/12/2004). For Radio Rivers to perform its public service role effectively it needs public funding. As illustrated in Chapter 2, the main sources of public funding for public service broadcasters are licence fees and state grants (Blumler, 1992). However, for Radio Rivers, the collection of licence fees is not empowered by the edict establishing it. It instead depends on government, which also does not give it grants, but only procures its equipment, in the case of a breakdown, and pays salaries. The implication of this mode of funding is that the station cannot act as an open forum for the debate of issues, especially of those issues concerning the well functioning of government. Therefore, Radio Rivers’ current funding regime undermines its public service values.
Bolin (2004) sees the public service concept as a common utility that should be available to all. This means that, beyond the public being able to receive the signal, the programmes must be relevant and encompass all the issues and shades of opinion represented in the society. For Radio Rivers, it implies that people should be able to air their views on any issue and be properly educated and informed. Even the mandate of Radio Rivers provides for balanced programming on the schedule. However, the fact that government dictates who gets appointed to its staff (including the chief executive officer and members of the Board of Directors) and, as respondents alleged, the fact that government interference in the running of the station, shows that Radio Rivers does not offer balanced views on issues. Says the Senior Programmes Officer/Announcer at Radio Rivers: “I do not think we [Radio Rivers] have lived up to the maximum expectation as a voice representing the voice of the people, since the station is owned by the government it is highly influenced by government policies and decisions” (interview with Senior Programmes Officer/Announcer, Radio Rivers, Iyaye Ekisseh, Port Harcourt, 27/12/2004). Government's frequent interference in Radio Rivers, which impairs its impartiality, also brings into question its public service value as an arena for facilitating the circulation of information for empowerment of the citizens (Kupe, 2001).

However, despite government interference in its management structure and the coming of the commercial broadcasters, Radio Rivers was found to have been playing and to continue to play the public service role of informing and educating the people through its broadcast of programmes, not only in English, but also in the local languages and Special English. Thus, by offering programmes in the different languages and dialects, Radio Rivers, in the face of competition from commercial broadcasters, helps to bind the different segments of the Rivers society together. Radio Rivers has upheld this role by broadcasting programmes which promote the tradition and cultural richness of the state in the languages (interview with Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Information, Mike Elechi, Port Harcourt, 6/12/2004). In addition, the station, by retaining some specialised educative programmes dedicated to minority groups, and expanding the 2004 entertainment programme schedule to include genres hitherto not on the 2000 schedule such as Indigenous praise songs, has tried to maintain a distinct public service character in its programmes. Thus, through its diverse language programmes, Radio Rivers has created a new space in the expansion of relationships in and understanding of the different communities in the state, the nation and the entire world, and thereby fulfils its public service mandate.
Public service broadcasting, Curran (2000) argues, gives prominence to public affairs, hence people are properly educated to exercise their rights and obligations as citizens and contribute to a healthy debate on issues. However, for Radio Rivers, under conditions of competition from the commercial broadcasters, current affairs space on the programme, Spotlight, was reduced from one hour on the 2000 schedule to 30 minutes on the 2004 schedule, and airtime for the daily commentary programme, Talking Point, was reduced from four slots on the 2000 schedule to two slots on the 2004 schedule (interview with Acting Director News and Current Affairs, Radio Rivers, Silas Anyanwu, Port Harcourt, 5/1/2005). These scheduling policies have led to the shrinking of Radio River’s role as an arena of public debate, and undermined the station's public service values. Furthermore, the public arena created for debate is further shrunk by Radio Rivers stopping the use of freelance correspondents in the rural parts of the state. The Director of Parastatal in the Ministry of Information blames this on the entry of commercial broadcasters as the station, because of funding problems, could no longer afford to keep this category of its staff on its payroll (interview with Director of Parastatal, Ministry of Information, Mike Oku, Port Harcourt, 9/12/2004). Achille and Miege (1994) argue that limiting the use of short-term contract staff and freelancers is one step often taken by public service broadcasters in competition when facing financial problems. However, stopping the use of freelance correspondents could lead to the shutting out of the voices of ordinary people in the rural areas (Blumler and Hoffman-Riem, 1992). Therefore, by terminating the use of correspondents in the local government areas, Radio Rivers has undermined one of its channels of bringing information about what is happening in the rural areas to the urban centres of the state. Hence, the entry of commercial broadcasters has impacted on its public service values of acting as a multiplicity of voices, although Radio Rivers still maintains the circulation of information as a resource for the empowerment of all citizens (Kupe, 2001).

To ensure proper empowerment of the citizens, public service broadcasting's emphasises news and public affairs programmes which are scheduled at prime-time, while entertainment and cultural programmes are pushed to off-peak hours (Hellman and Sauri, 1994; Achille and Miege, 1994). As the Acting General Manager/Director of Programmes at Radio Rivers puts it, “because of the challenges of the commercial broadcasters, we made our weekends to be more lively by having long stretch of musical entertainment on Fridays and Saturdays, thereby giving our listeners who are nocturnal some reason to stay tuned to the station” (interview with Acting General Manager/Director Programmes, Radio Rivers, Abiye Tariah, Port Harcourt, 20/12/2004). Radio Rivers still adopts this public service programming format as it has increased the space for news and decreased the space for entertainment on the 2004
schedule when compared to the 2000 schedule. Furthermore, *Radio Rivers* still broadcasts its news during peak-time and musical entertainment programmes during off-peak times - sometimes as late as past midnight. The implementation of this programming policy is a public service value which the competition from commercial broadcasters has enabled the station to rediscover.

One of the strengths of public service broadcasting is that it ensures that its programmes are produced in-house (Bens et al., 1992). *Radio Rivers* continues to adhere to this aspect of public service programme production despite losing most of its sponsored programmes to the commercial broadcasters. That *Radio Rivers* is able to continue to produce its own drama and documentary programmes in-house, is in line with its mandate and public service ethos.

Public service broadcasting is expected to be independent and impartial, and the management of the public broadcaster should be made up of professionals, totally non-partisan to government and corporate interests (Reith, 1924). Thus, as a public service broadcaster, *Radio Rivers* is supposed to be shielded from overt politicking by the government. However, respondents complained that in *Radio Rivers* those that the governments had always appointed to run the station are mostly politicians. This anti-public service approach to appointments in *Radio Rivers* is supported by the mandate of the station, which does not request public screening of the appointees. Such a mode of appointments no doubt weakens *Radio Rivers* in the fulfilment of its public service values.

Blumler and Hoffman-Riem (1992) argue that programmes broadcast by public service broadcasters should interrogate controversial issues, thus giving programmers enough strength to awaken in them new experiences. However, although *Radio Rivers'* programmes allows programmers to experiment with their skills, the stations programming policy leaves programmers no room to interrogate controversial issues, because of the overbearing government interests in the station. Such a programming policy could impair the creativity of *Radio Rivers'* programmers and its role as a public service broadcaster.

Faced with the difficulty of raising revenue and the problem of over staffing, *Radio Rivers*, like other public service broadcasters in a similar position, adopted internal job streamlining. Before now we [News and Current Affairs] used to have a director who was solely in charge of the news operations and packaging, but with the introduction of the innovations we decided to split what was hitherto manned by one person into three places, by decentralising our functions and responsibilities in the newsroom
The search for multi-functionality, both of resources as well as production teams and organisation units, stems from the desire to increase the efficiency of what had been an uncompetitive organisation (Achille and Miege, 1994). Thus, the splitting of functions in the newsroom at Radio Rivers, which is one of the measures adopted at the station, is not only to ease the flow of news, but also to ensure a more efficient use of the News and Current Affairs workforce. This type of re-organisation in Radio Rivers is a private sector-driven form of management ideal which reinforces the earlier claim that Radio Rivers is now becoming more commercial (Achille and Miege, 1994). Hence, the entry of commercial broadcasters has impacted on its public service values.

In summary, the findings of this study show that, given the proliferation of commercial broadcasters, Radio Rivers is constrained in its public service role, both by the edict establishing it and by its programming and scheduling policies. I will examine, in the next section, how the station has fared in its contribution to the public sphere.

### 6.2 Radio Rivers' contribution to the public sphere

The public sphere, (as seen in Chapter 2), is defined as a space where private citizens come together to speak their minds and form opinion on how the state should be governed (Habermas, 1989; Curran, 1991; Dahlgren, 1991; Bennett et al., 2004). As a public space, the radio station should provide equal access to everybody who has something to say or wants to hear anything to do so. The 1999 Nigerian Constitution empowers all individuals domiciled in Nigeria, who have anything to say or an opinion to form, to do so freely. In this section of the study, I will explore Radio Rivers' ability to contribute freely to the formation of opinions, as advocated by media commentators like Habermas (1989), (in his concept of the public sphere). This role will be examined under the themes public watchdog, agent of representation and diversity, informed citizenry and entertainment ideals.

#### 6.2.1 Public watchdog

The public watchdog role of the media, which I discussed in Chapter 2, positions the media as agents of revealing abuses in the exercise of state and corporate authority and a facilitator of debates on the functioning of government (Curran, 1991). These roles imply that the media reports anything that is contrary to the established norms of society.
At Radio Rivers, the programmes that frequently interrogate the ills of the society are mostly carried as Commentary/Talking Point, taken alongside the two major news bulletins, and in a 30-minutes programme called Point-Counter-Point. These programmes, which sometimes take critical views on contemporary issues in the society, had existed on Radio Rivers’ schedule before the coming of the commercial broadcasters. As the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Information puts it, the Ministry and the Government do not interfere in the programmes broadcast on the station (interview with Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Information, Mike Elechi, Port Harcourt, 6/12/2004). This view implies that Radio Rivers operates freely, and that journalists and producers at the station freely practice their profession and write and air any programme as long as it does not offend the law of decency established in the station's mandate, which provides that:

Nothing is included in the programmes to [that is] likely to offend good taste or decency or is likely to encourage or incite to crime or lead to disorder or to be offensive to public feeling or to contain an offensive representation of, or representation to a living person; (b) that the programmes maintain a proper balance in their subject matter and a general high standard of quality (Section 13 (a) RSG Edict, 1973).

This provision is further buttressed by the Acting General Manager/Director of Programmes of Radio Rivers, who observes that “the station does not get involved in controversies, because it was not set up to incite. So what we do is that we keep people within limits, as people are informed and educated concerning situations” (interview with Acting General Manager/Director Programmes, Radio Rivers, Abiye Tariah, Port Harcourt, 20/12/2004). However, the question remains as to what constitutes the limits, and why Radio Rivers, as a public service broadcaster, does not interrogate controversial issues which would ensure proper enlightenment of the public. As Blumler and Hoffman-Riem (1992) argue, public criticisms through the media enhance a society’s ability to define itself. Therefore, since Radio Rivers does not discuss controversial issues, calls into question the station's cherished values of political neutrality. In the face of this, some respondents point out that all is not well at the station in terms of its contribution to the public sphere. According to the Director of Parastatal in the Ministry of Information, “government does exercise subtle control over the station” (interview with Director of Parastatal, Ministry of Information, Mike Oku, Port Harcourt, 9/12/2004). He argues that, although it is not explicitly stated anywhere that government controls the station, on occasion the General Manager has been called and asked why he/she should allow or not allow certain programmes. This shows that government does have control over the station. A similar opinion was expressed by the Assistant Director News and Current Affairs Radio Rivers, who argues that:
Though we [Rivers State, Nigeria] have a government that has allowed us to be a little bit free from the clutches of government interference, however from time to time we have government interference, where some stories have been withdrawn and some people have even been suspended for going out of their way to practice the profession the way it ought to be practiced. We have had a situation where government has ordered the withdrawal of certain pieces of information and replaced it with their own information. That has been the problem with government-owned broadcasters (interview with Assistant Director News and Current Affairs, *Radio Rivers*, Bon Woke, Port Harcourt, 14/1/2005).

This position is shared by the Deputy Director of News and Current Affairs at *Radio Rivers*, who argues that such government interference in the content of the programmes broadcast on the station has been particularly serious during election times. During these times, all views to the political debate are supposed to be aired to enable the people make the right choice. However, it is only the views of the government in power that is heard, while those considered to be in opposition are left out (interview with Deputy Director News and Current Affairs, *Radio Rivers*, Abraham Oki, Port Harcourt, 7/1/2005). As a result, *Radio Rivers*, as it currently operates, cannot be a channel through which people can ask questions and get the right answers on how they are governed. In addition, *Radio Rivers*, the Acting General Manager/Director of Programmes at *Radio Rivers* argues, operates a deregulated advertisement space, in which advertisers can freely choose voices which are used and at what time their advertisement should run, as seen in Chapter 5 (interview with Acting General Manager/Director Programmes, *Radio Rivers*, Abiye Tariah, Port Harcourt, 20/12/2004). Although adopting this format of advertisement programming has allowed *Radio Rivers* to compete with the commercial broadcasters for the existing advertisements and thereby enhanced its commercially generated revenue, this amounts to advertisers’ interference in the broadcast content and programming at the station. Hence, the fact that advertisers can determine who voices their advertisement, and when their advertisement should be broadcast, reveals that *Radio Rivers*’ contribution to the public sphere is being encroached upon, not only by the government but also by corporate bodies.

Therefore, under the prevailing conditions, as only the voices of government and corporate bodies are heard, while those considered critical are shut out, *Radio Rivers* is not fulfilling its public watchdog mandate.
6.2.2 Agent of diversity and representation

As an arena by which public opinion is articulated, the Habermasian conception of the media as a place to determine the people's views, sees the media as an organ of representation and presentation of the people's will (Curran, 1991). Thus, radio, as an agent of public representation, that is essential because it encourages wider participation in the society's public discourse and forms a forum which allows the public to be heard and to receive information essential to how they are being governed. Through such means, public service broadcasters like Radio Rivers are set up to contribute to the processes of national development.

The principle of serving the diverse interests of the public means that Radio Rivers tries to cater for everybody as the station, besides presenting the news in the four major languages of the state, also provides space for other enlightenment and entertainment programmes in most of the dialects of the state. The space provided for diversity and representation of the public at Radio Rivers is further expanded to include news, current affairs, and entertainment programmes in Special or Pidgin English. According to the Assistant Director of News and Current Affairs at Radio Rivers, “by these programmes in the languages the culture and tradition of the people are reflected in our [Radio Rivers] broadcast” (interview with Assistant Director News and Current Affairs, Radio Rivers, Bon Woke, Port Harcourt, 14/1/2005). Radio Rivers’ programmes also cater for the diverse interests of the population - the young as well as the elderly and other members of the society. By providing space for news in the four main languages and other programmes appealing to the dialects, interests groups and both sexes on the programme schedules, Radio Rivers ensures adequate ethnographic representation on its programme menu.

In addition, Radio Rivers’ programmes provide a fair representation of the diversity of the state. This is further provided in the mandate that: “without prejudice to the generality of section 13 of this Edict, the Corporation [Radio Rivers] shall provide such facilities as may appear to the Corporation to be desirable in the public interest for the broadcasting of, matters of any kind (including religious services or ceremonies)” (Section 14b, RSG Edict, No. 8, 1973). The edict thus permits the station to canvass for a representation of diversity of views. It could, therefore, be argued that it is in furtherance of this provision that the station has a number of religious programmes, (some sponsored, and others unsponsored), on its schedule. In addition, the studios’ opening and closing formalities begin and end with christain prayer.
However, despite these attempts to ensure the representation of the diverse voices in the state, some respondents see the station’s programming as inadequate to fulfill this role. According to a retired Controller of News and Current Affairs at Radio Rivers, Radio Rivers has not served well this role (interview with retired Controller of News and Current Affairs, Radio Rivers, Ogbonna Nwuke, Port Harcourt, 10/1/2005). He blames this on the managers of the station for not allowing any comment that is perceived to be contrary to the government to be broadcast. Another respondent puts the problem on government ownership and control. This thinking is taken to new level, as the broadcast space offered by Radio Rivers for programmes deemed to speak about problems in the polity has been reduced on the 2004 schedule.

Therefore, while Radio Rivers may not be broadcasting in all the dialects of the state and ensuring free access to all the diverse interests groups to be represented on the schedule, it can be argued that, by broadcasting in the four main languages of the state, the entry of commercial broadcasters has further resulted in an expansion in the station's contribution to the public sphere domain.

6.2.3 Informed citizenry
The role of radio as an agent of information and debate, providing space for the public to make informed choices, is essential to the public sphere concept. The theoretical perspectives examined in Chapter 2 of this study argued that, for citizens of a given society to exercise their rights to informed choices so as to make meaningful contributions to development of society, they must have access to the broadest possible range of information. As a public service station, Radio Rivers is obliged to foster and maintain citizenship rights to knowledge and information for the wellbeing of society (interview with Deputy Director Programmes, Radio Rivers, Goddy Williams, Port Harcourt, 27/12/2004). However, whether Radio Rivers in its present programming and scheduling policies has served this important public service role remains tenuous. As a retired Controller of News and Current Affairs at Radio Rivers puts it:

Compared to the commercial stations, Radio Rivers cannot be said to be doing as well, because when you ride in a taxi you find that people are always hooked on to Rhythm, Treasure FM or AIT. Not many people today are hooked up to Radio Rivers. That itself tells you that Radio Rivers has a handicap in terms of image at the moment (interview with retired Controller of News and Current Affairs, Radio Rivers, Ogbonna Nwuke, Port Harcourt, 10/1/2005).
Thus, while Radio Rivers, in the 29 years before the coming of the commercial stations, may have done well as an organ of informing the people of their rights, its current position, evidenced by some respondents’ views that not many tune to its programmes, shows that all is not well with the station in serving this public service function.

However, the Director of Parastatal in the Ministry of Information argues that Radio Rivers, has since inception, carried programmes which educate the people about the dominant social problems facing the society. The Acting General Manager/Director of Programmes at Radio Rivers also argues that a programme like Point-Counter-Point, (where people come and two opposing views are expressed concerning topical issues), the commentaries carried twice daily, the drama, documentaries, and the many interactive programmes are all efforts by the station to ensure a well-informed citizenry (interview with Acting General Manager/Director of Programmes, Radio Rivers, Abiye Tariah, Port Harcourt, 20/12/2004). In addition, the station’s opening and closing formalities, which include twice daily broadcasts of the national anthem and national pledge, twice daily links with Radio Nigeria to relay the national news, the broadcast of the Independence Day speech by the President on 1 October, the address by the state Governor on 27 May, the anniversary of the creation of the state, among other special events, and live transmission of football matches involving the national team, all help to bind the people together, and cement the bond of nationalism.

Therefore, Radio Rivers’ offer of a good space for the elevation of the citizens’ right to adequate information does not seem affected by the entry of commercial broadcasters. However, this does not mean that the station, in fulfilling this public service function, was unaffected by the entry of commercial broadcasters. Moreover, the removal of the education programme, English by Radio, and the decrease in the space for educational and current affairs programmes on the 2004 schedule has limited the rights of citizens to forms of expression.

In all, it could be argued that Radio Rivers, in its 29 years existence before the coming of the commercial broadcasters had helped the advancement of people’s rights to public information through its programmes, and thus, had contributed to the public sphere. The ability of the station to play this role following the entry of the commercial broadcasters is being enhanced through the introduction of a number of interactive and language programmes, and the sustaining and diversifying of the religious programmes. However, this does not mean that all the diverse voices within its broadcast territory have been heard. Indeed, a lot more voices
that need to be heard are still unheard, and may possibly remain unheard as long as Radio Rivers continues to function under the present broadcast paradigm of government control and state broadcaster rather than a true public service broadcaster.

6.2.4 Entertainment

Curran (1991) argues that public service broadcasting views entertainment as a commentary on the nature of social relations, providing a means of obtaining another view of understanding different sections of society, and thus strengthening bonds of social association. Therefore, media entertainment is not merely the media provision of pleasure through popular music; it is also a way in which society communes with itself through music, songs and poetry. Hence, it is an aspect of the media public sphere role. As the Acting General Manager/Director of Programmes at Radio Rivers puts it, “part of the way of educating somebody is through entertainment, when you make him relax, you are passing on the message [information]” (interview with Acting General Manager/Director of Programmes Radio Rivers, Abiye Tariah, Port Harcourt, 20/12/2004). Thus, drama or musical programmes on radio are not merely entertainment but, in the sense of a public service broadcaster, integral parts of the media's contribution to public dialogue.

Radio Rivers' entertainment contribution to the public sphere can be seen in terms of the patterns of scheduling and selection of the music from the different music genres (Hendy, 2000). By giving space to music genres like indigenous/traditional music, and expanding its music space to include others that were hitherto not on the schedule, Radio Rivers has helped to support and stimulate the development and expression of culture and entertainment and contributed to the public sphere. Therefore, Radio Rivers, by maintaining space on the schedule for drama, documentaries, and the different music genres, and even religious music is helping the process of cross-fertilization between the different categories of tastes, and thus promoting entertainment's contribution to the public sphere.
Chapter Seven

Concluding Reflections and Recommendations

7.0 Introduction

This chapter of the study presents a summary of the study and possible recommendations. In it, I give the concluding reflections on how the proliferation of commercial broadcasting outfits in Rivers State of Nigeria has impacted on Radio Rivers' commitment to the public service mandate. Issues arising from Radio Rivers’ shift from broadcaster in monopoly to one in competition are discussed under 'Radio Rivers in identity crisis'. I conclude the study by suggesting reform possibilities for Radio Rivers to enhance its public service values.

Overall, the study consisted of seven chapters. Chapter 1, titled ‘Introduction’ presented the general concerns of the study. Chapter 2, termed ‘Theoretical Perspective and Literature Review’, surveyed scholarly contributions to the arguments concerning the influence of proliferation of commercial broadcasters on public service programming values, and the contributions of radio to the public sphere. This was followed by Chapter 3, titled ‘Historical Perspective of Radio Rivers’ where I discussed the history of radio broadcasting in Nigeria, analysed the events leading to the setting up of Radio Rivers, and also reviewed the station’s mandate and programming and scheduling policies.

In Chapter 4 of the study, titled ‘Research Methods’ I focussed on the methods, procedures and techniques used in data collection and the reasons for using these approaches. Chapter 5, titled ‘Findings on Radio Rivers mandate and programmes schedule’, I reviewed Radio Rivers’ mandate and, through a comparison of the station’s programme schedule before and after the establishment of commercial broadcasters, corroborated with the views expressed by respondents from a series of in-depth interviews. This was followed by Chapter 6, titled ‘Discussions and Interpretations of findings’, in which I discussed the findings of the study in line with the public service and Habermas’ public sphere theoretical frameworks discussed in chapter 2. In this chapter I discussed further the findings of the study, locating them within the research issues and theoretical assumptions mentioned in Chapter 1.

7.1 Radio Rivers in crisis of identity

This study has confirmed the hypothesis that the proliferation of commercial broadcasting has strongly impacted on Radio Rivers' public service programming values, resulting in the
station's lost of some values. But that in order to maintain its space on Nigeria’s broadcast map Radio Rivers has refocused on its public service mandate.

Following the competition from commercial broadcasters, Radio Rivers has reorganised the delivery of its broadcast mandate, expanding its contribution to the public sphere by increasing the news slots on its programming schedule to include a diversity of voices including broadcasting news in the languages. These steps may have been taken to reposition the station’s public service ethos and to dispel the notion that, faced with competition, public service broadcasters present news that lacks depth and diversity of opinion (Fourie, 2003).

The study also found that Radio Rivers has expanded its broadcast space for interactive programmes. The various phone-in programmes on the schedule may have been added to the station's programme menu to reposition it as a medium for public dialogue, providing citizens with more information and space that allows them to participate in and fully interrogate contemporary issues in the society. As the Senior Programmes Officer/Announcer at Radio Rivers puts it: “our [Radio Rivers] interactive programmes like Top of the morning, From me to you, and Sunday Links have segments where audience phone-in, or write in to make contributions on what they feel should be done” (interview with Senior Programmes Officer/Announcer, Radio Rivers, Iyaye Ekisseh, Port Harcourt, 27/12/2004). These programmes, she further argues, were packaged to serve as an avenue for people to express their minds on issues, send greetings and as a kind of meeting point, which are in line with the station's public service mission. Therefore, these programmes may have been introduced to strengthen Radio Rivers in its public service domain in order to attract listeners to counter the competition posed by the entry of the commercial broadcasters into Rivers State.

However, the increase in interactive and educational programme space on the 2004 schedule does not in any way contradict the earlier position that, with the entry of commercial broadcasters, Current Affairs on the schedule has been grossly undermined at Radio Rivers. Since, the programme schedule is planned and produced by the Programmes Division who may have intended these programmes to help to expand the public dialogue space at the station, thereby promoting Radio Rivers’ public service mandate. However, because these programmes are handled by announcers and not journalists, they were conceptualised instead as talk shows, the broadcast genre of commercial broadcasters. Therefore, as talk shows, they are structured as humanistic discussions instead of critiquing the existing power relations and
taking a more serious approach to contemporary issues. For, as De Bens et al. (2002) observe, the media cannot be separated from the existing social and political context and, as important agents of power, cannot be neutral. Therefore, the fact that Radio Rivers’ interactive programmes do not set the agenda for debate is a failure of the station’s public service role and of its contribution to the public sphere.

Nevertheless, the increase in interactive space at Radio Rivers could be in answer to the competition from commercial broadcasters, as the station has been forced to redefine its public service values by providing citizens with more broadcasting space. This allows them to participate in the social, economic and political dialogue of the State that has opened up following the introduction of democracy after more than 15 years of military rule in Nigeria (Fourie, 2003). As the Assistant Director News and Current Affairs at Radio Rivers argues, “our [Radio Rivers] phone-in programmes are very interactive and people actually phone-in to say what they want the government to do, sometimes if the roads are bad they phone in to say so” (interview with Assistant Director News and Current Affairs, Radio Rivers, Bon Woke, Port Harcourt, 14/1/2005), which is line with Radio Rivers’ public service mandate. However, confirming how many people actually phoned in to participate in the station’s new interactive programmes was difficult as there were no audience research data to back this claim. This argument is confirmed by the retired Controller of News and Current Affairs at Radio Rivers who observes that: “For the many years I worked in Radio Rivers, we [Radio Rivers] never carried out audience research, as our audience research department was not effective. Hence, we [Radio Rivers] never get feedback from the public about what they were thinking of the station” (interview with retired Controller News and Current Affairs, Radio Rivers, Ogbonna Nwuke, Port Harcourt, 10/1/2005). Therefore, as a broadcaster in competition, Radio Rivers faces a major dilemma of how to serve the public good and effectively empower the people to participate in the everyday discourses of society.

In addition, the reduction in the duration of the men’s and women’s programmes, Total Man, from 45 minutes to 15 minutes, and Every Woman from 45 minutes to 30 minutes shows an imbalance in favour of women. Therefore, the fact that Radio Rivers has given more space to women than men shows the station's sensitivity to the plight of minority groups, which is one of the values of public service broadcasting (interview with Acting General Manager/Director of Programmes, Radio Rivers, Abiye Tariah, Port Harcourt, 20/12/2004). However, that Radio Rivers, in the face of competition from commercial broadcasters, has completely removed from the 2004 schedule such special interest programmes as Youth View, Forces
*Calling,* and *Mother and Children* that were on the 2000 schedule undermines its public service ideals of ensuring that no interests (minority or majority) are left out of its programming schedule (Peacock, 1989). Moreover, the complete removal from the 2004 schedule of the programme *English by Radio,* and other educational programmes that were on the 2000 schedule contravenes Section 12 (f) of the 1973 edict setting up the station which provides that the station should: “organise, provide and subsidize, for the purpose of broadcasting, educational activities and public entertainments”. Furthermore, such programming policy amounts to a failure on the part of *Radio Rivers* to maintain an enlightened and educated citizenry which is one of the ideals of public service broadcasting (Reith, 1924). Thus, given the competition from commercial broadcasters, the space for minority programmes has shrunk, in a programming policy which could undermine *Radio Rivers’* public service values and contribution to the public sphere.

However, faced with competition from commercial broadcasters for commercial revenue resources, *Radio Rivers* has expanded the hours of broadcast of intra-programme advertisements, which are broadcast during the peak-morning programming time. Such reprogramming is in line with Hulten and Brants’ (1992) observation on the impact of commercialisation on public service broadcasting, that public broadcasters in competition often schedule their advertisements during peak time. The reason for this approach may be to satisfy advertisers that their advertisement is being run at a time when the audience is available to listen to them, thereby making *Radio Rivers* a public service broadcaster with a strong commercial input (Hulten and Brants, 1992).

In addition, the increment of commercial programming can also be traced to policy change, as the station has been directed by the government to be self-sustaining. The Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Information argues that “there was a slight policy change as the Ministry has directed that the Corporation [*Radio Rivers*] be self-sustaining” (interview with Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Information, Mike Elechi, Port Harcourt, 6/12/2004).

Since the station, as noted earlier, does not collect or receive licence fees, the above government directive implies that it has to increase its programming of advertisements. In doing this, as observed from the 2004 schedule, most of the advertisement programming are packaged in magazine format and broadcast for longer hours during peak time especially in the morning broadcasting segment, between 6.00 a.m. and 9.00 a.m. This trend, in the case of *Radio Uganda* aims not only at attracting and holding audiences attention to keep them from
tuning to other stations, thereby robbing audiences of a choice of programmes, but also prevents the station from being able to run the variety of programmes necessary for all sections of the audience to be heard in consonance with its public service values (Ijuuko, 2003).

However, while competition from commercial broadcasters has led to the promotion of commercial programming, the prime-time broadcast of the news at Radio Rivers was not affected, as news continues to be aired during the prime morning and evening times. The news bulletins have been lengthened and their contents widened. Further changes to the news broadcast on the channel, include Radio Rivers' news reporting more on government activities at the state and national levels than happenings in the rural parts of the state. The station leads its news with stories involving top government officials and politicians, while news about ordinary people are presented towards the end of the bulletin if at all. This approach to news delivery makes the station a state broadcaster, and not truly a public service broadcaster. Ordinary people, too, are not only citizens of the state, but also part of the nation, and must be represented in its national cultural products and dialogue under the public service mandate (Van den Bulck, 2001). Therefore, not giving them prominence in the bulletin or relegating issues about them to the end of the bulletin undermines the station's contribution to the public sphere which it is expected to promote.

The study further interrogated the issue of Radio Rivers' not collecting or receiving licence fees, a trend against what is globally known about sources of funding for public service broadcasters. This could have been the compelling reason why Radio Rivers always look to government for funding. As the station increasingly seeks government funding, government is able to dictate and control its operation, from news content and programming schedules to policy issues. The result is that Radio Rivers has been found to have compromised on some of its public service ethos.

Achille and Miege (1994) observe that, in the case of European broadcasters, economic pressures force public service broadcasters to schedule educational, cultural and religious programmes in the late evenings. Economic pressure has not, however, brought the same changes to Radio Rivers' programming schedule. In fact, most religious programmes are well sponsored by religious organisations and are broadcast, along with most of the cultural entertainment programmes, during peak time (including 8.00 – 9.00 a.m.).
Thus, the impact of the proliferation of commercial broadcasters on programming at Radio Rivers is that the public dialogue space available on Radio Rivers could have been encroached upon, as the station, in a bid to make more money from advertisement has programmed most of its intra-advertisement programmes like Top of the Morning, (a music presentation interspersed with hints, tit bits and commercial advertisements), during the peak morning hours from 5.30 a.m. to 9.00 a.m. on weekdays on the 2004 schedule. In contrast, its equivalent on the 2000 schedule called Breakfast Show, (a musical broadcast with researches into archives to give useful hints and tit-bits on past and current happenings) scheduled from 6.10 a.m. to 8.30 a.m. From this, it is clear that the proliferation of commercial stations has affected programming at Radio Rivers.

As noted in section 2.1.3, most public service broadcasters in competition tend to schedule programmes that are popular, including entertainment, at peak time. However, my findings show that this hypothesis is not true in all cases. Instead of programmers at Radio Rivers scheduling popular music during peak time, most popular music programmes are scheduled in the night, during the off-peak times. This approach the Acting General Manager/Director of Programmes at Radio Rivers argues:

was adopted as a result of the challenges of the new stations, so to enable us [Radio Rivers] reach the public more, we introduced a long stretch of musical entertainment show, involving the extension of the station's closing time beyond the 12 midnight to 2.00 a.m. on weekends, thus, giving our listeners who are nocturnal some reason to stay on to the station (interview with Acting General Manager/Director of Programmes, Radio Rivers, Abiye Tariah, Port Harcourt, 20/12/2004).

However, if we take entertainment programming on Radio Rivers as a cultural product which aims to inform and educate the audience, then the observation by Hellman and Sauri (1994) that the current programming trend in most broadcast stations is to divert cultural, informative and educational programmes towards the off-peak hours on the schedule is also true of Radio Rivers’ late night musical broadcast. Furthermore, as Radio Rivers has lost the popular music genre to the commercial broadcasters, it tries to expand its musical programming to include other genres that were hitherto not on the schedule, like Indigenous Praise Songs, and the Special English Request Programme, in an attempt to enlarge the choice of entertainment programmes available to listeners (Peacock, 1989). By including these music genres, Radio Rivers, as a public service broadcaster, is offering an entertainment programming that is diverse and balanced. In addition, by offering musical and entertainment programmes that are indigenous, national and global, Radio Rivers has helped to expand the fora of cultural debate.
and cross-fertilization between different categories of musical tastes, which is the genre of public service broadcasting (Blumler and Heffman-Riem, 1992; Hendy, 2000).

Also, with the coming of the commercial broadcasters, Radio Rivers introduced changes to its programme schedule, like the expansion of the broadcast time and the extended entertainment broadcast on weekends. As the Acting General Manager/Director of Programmes at Radio Rivers puts it, “we [Radio Rivers] open the station at 5.30 a.m. and close a little after midnight and because of the challenges of the new stations we made our weekends to be lively, extending our time beyond the 12 midnight, to 2.00 a.m. every Friday and Saturday night” (interview with Acting General Manager/Director of Programmes, Radio Rivers, Abiye Tariah, Port Harcourt, 20/12/2004). This new schedule was probably adopted to position the station to compete with the commercial broadcasters in their territory, which is entertainment. The effect is that, as a result of the competition from commercial broadcasters, Radio Rivers has been transformed into a public service broadcaster with a strong commercial interest. That is, Radio Rivers operates today as a dual broadcaster, combining both public service and commercial broadcasting programming schedules.

In summary, this study has shown that Radio Rivers’ programming schedule is not stable along the lines of public service. This role is further undermined by the strong hand of government in its policies, and dwindling finances, resulting in Radio Rivers’ programming ethos moving towards commercial broadcasting, especially as the station hosts more hours of entertainment on weekends, decreases its space for current affairs, and increases the space for its intra-programme advertisement takings - all aimed at making its programmes more attractive to its audience. However, despite these challenges, the station still maintains its public service values and its contribution to the public sphere. It does this by increasing its news and interactive spaces, and by diversifying its news to include news in the languages and special English, while retaining some minority interests’ programmes. Thus, despite the proliferation of commercial broadcasters in Rivers State, Radio Rivers is still meeting its public service programming values.

7.2 Suggested reforms to enhance Radio Rivers’ public service values

Having looked at the problems facing Radio Rivers in its contribution to the public sphere, I can now suggest how Radio Rivers could be transformed to meet its public service values more closely.
My first recommendation is the introduction of licence fees as the main source of funding for Radio Rivers, retaining government grants as an alternate funding source. The logic behind the payment of licence fees is that it will make the station less dependent on government for all its funding needs, more responsive to meeting the public tastes and needs and allow the public to take a more-than-passing interest in the way the station is managed. As licence fees, Blumler (1992) argues, ensure good programming that is diverse in content and includes both minority and majority interests. Therefore, if licence fees are introduced, Radio Rivers’ managers will not only have more money to produce programmes, but will also know that they need to succeed in upholding the social contract if they are to retain their jobs. However, taking into account the argument by the Director of Finance at Radio Rivers that asking radio listeners, who are taxpayers, to pay licence fees amounts to double taxation, licence fees as a form of public levy for enjoying a social service (as is done for other social services) can also work for Radio Rivers’ listeners. What now needs to be done is that a law authorising its collection should be put in place.

The issue of licence fee funding is closely related to the current mode of government's financial support for Radio Rivers which comes in the form of capital expenditure and payment of salaries. Because government pays the salaries of Radio Rivers employees, discipline and efficient management of resources are secondary, since the workers know that at the end of the month, whether they work hard or not, their salaries will be paid. Also, because a capital budget is not given to the station at the beginning of the year, faulty equipment cannot be repaired or replaced immediately, but must be run until it can no longer function. The Acting General Manager/Director of Programmes at Radio Rivers blames this situation at Radio Rivers on the station's operating standards in which requisition for capital projects has to go to the Ministry of Information and from there to the Governor for approval and, as time elapses, the equipment in question continues to deteriorate until it can no longer function (interview with Acting General Manager/Director of Programmes, Radio Rivers, Abiye Tariah, Port Harcourt, 20/12/2004). Faced with the above predicament, I would recommend that government should not only make an annual grant to the station, but also the grant’s prompt release as the budget is being implemented, so that the managers of the station can budget for equipment replacement.

Another source of revenue available to public service broadcasters, one which is highlighted in Section 30 of Radio Rivers' mandate, is donations. As a common utility for the public
good, something that is available to everyone, and where everyone’s opinion can be promoted, the public service broadcaster must be assured of financial independence. Such assurance, Curran (2000) argues, allows public service broadcasters to play the role of a public watchdog, facilitating debate about the functioning of government. However, public service broadcasters' reliance on government for statutory allocations and licence fees and on corporate bodies for advertisement, as earlier observed, undermines their independence. This reliance makes them continuously look to government and be too close to politicians and corporate executives. Such pre-disposition to political and corporate powers could lead to their being too weak to question wrongdoing, and sometimes even 'turn-off their microphones to wrongdoings' in the exercise of state and corporate powers (Curran, 2000). It is for these reasons that grants and donations become a way of not only funding public service broadcasters, but also making them independent of the state and corporate bodies, allowing them to play their public service and public sphere roles more effectively.

However, in the case of Radio Rivers, although section 30 of the edict provides that it may get funding from these sources, it has not yet done so. This, despite the fact that an avenue such as this could have a positive impact on its public service values, especially at a time when the station is facing stiff competition for revenue from commercial broadcasters. At this stage, it remains merely a potential source of revenue that is yet to make any meaningful impact on the station's funding regime (interview with Assistant General/Director of Programmes, Radio Rivers, George Pepple, Port Harcourt, 20/12/2004). As he puts it:

If people really come out to say I like this programme, what have they done about the programme they like? Do they realise that time, energy and money goes into producing that programme. How do they help the producer to ensure that the programme stays on air? Being a public service station, we need more people to assist. We [Radio Rivers] cannot always run to government to give us money for everything that we need. It is the public that enjoy the station and actually they pay nothing for listening to radio. So if people start to associate and identify with programmes they really like and help in production and not necessarily sponsorship, we can go along way to make the radio a better thing to listen to (interview with Acting General Manager/Director of Programmes, Radio Rivers, Abiye Tariah, Port Harcourt, 20/12/2004).

Public sponsorship of public service broadcasting is not a new phenomenon in media practice. In her study of Radio Uganda, Jjuuko (2002) discovered that, because of a need to strengthen their financial resources, public service broadcasters rely on grants and sponsorship for the production of programmes. Although this system leads to various compromises (Jjuuko, 2002), it could still be adopted in Radio Rivers, with modifications restricting grants and
donations to programme production to ensure the freedom for producers. More importantly, its application would cushion the effect of funding problems faced by Radio Rivers and reduce the station's continuous dependence on government and corporate bodies, which undermine Radio Rivers’ role as a public service broadcaster and contribution to the public sphere.

Closely connected with the issue of the mode of funding is the question of the independence and autonomy of Radio Rivers. The current system in which government appoints the chief executive and the members of the Board of Directors, and the Ministry of Information oversees its day-to-day operation does not enhance the performance of Radio Rivers as a public service broadcaster (Curran, 2000). Instead, as the Deputy Director of News and Current Affairs at Radio Rivers puts it, “it makes for high politics, intrigue, kills professionalism, and hampers the goal of attracting the best hands to the station” (interview with Deputy Director News and Current Affairs, Radio Rivers, Abraham Oki, Port Harcourt, 7/1/2005). This situation, laments the Director of Finance at Radio Rivers, has impacted on staff morale, “as the staff structure, having existed for so long, has now begun to show high levels of dormancy, and staff are no longer as productive as they once were” (interview with Director of Finance, Radio Rivers, George Pepple, Port Harcourt, 24/12/2004). Therefore, in addition to a need for a re-engineering of the workforce, there is a need to tackle the current lack of neutrality and independence at Radio Rivers. As a public service broadcaster, Radio Rivers should not only be free from extraneous influences, allowing it be a true arena for interrogating all sides of the public dialogue, but it also means that government should stop direct control of the station. This will make the station more credible and also enhance the credibility of the government.

As a public service broadcaster, advertisement and entertainment on Radio Rivers should not compete for space with news and current affairs. Because the station is not well-funded by government, and government has asked the station to be self-sustaining, Radio Rivers is forced to generate more funds through advertisement. The result is that, in order to attract advertisers to the station the little space left for current affairs on the schedule is been taken over by entertainment. This programming format undermines the need for Radio Rivers to emphasise development issues in its programmes. If government is really interested in seeing Radio Rivers perform as a vehicle of mobilisation and, at the same time be self-sustaining, then the operation should be decentralised into distinct public and commercial services. This system has already been adopted by the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria, where its
Abuja station operates as a public service broadcaster while 32 commercial stations have been established throughout the country including one in Rivers State, (Treasure F.M which is in competition with Radio Rivers) (Betiang, 2004). Radio Rivers can borrow from this experiment which has also been perfected in South Africa, where the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) runs three channels, SABC 1 devoted to public service broadcasting, while SABC 2 and 3 are the commercial arms of the corporation.

The 32-year-old, unamended law establishing Radio Rivers needs review. Indeed, while broadcasting has changed from what it used to be at the time Radio Rivers was established, the fundamental basis of Radio Rivers’ existence, (Rivers State of Nigeria Broadcasting Corporation Edict No. 8, 1973) has not changed. Little wonder that the station seems not to have made progress commensurate with its age. Therefore, as a way of repositioning Radio Rivers to compete with the present challenge of the commercial broadcasters, a new media policy which will set the goals for Radio Rivers, define a strategy to achieve the set goals, and decentralise the final decision making process should be enacted. Those to be appointed to serve as managers and on the Board of the Corporation must be sound professionals, who are experienced radio broadcasters. The present system of appointing political supporters and those with neither knowledge of broadcasting nor latent interest in broadcasting, and sending them to Radio Rivers ends up crippling the organisation rather than revamping it.

As the government rethinks how to better Radio Rivers, it is also imperative that Radio Rivers’ management, staff and operational structure must be retooled. Radio Rivers must be freed from its present civil service management structure, as this has led to current overstaffing, especially at the top levels where many people with little or no challenges, since the station does not generate its own funds, continue to draw from its lean resources while those who have something to offer are not attracted to Radio Rivers. The restructuring should also involve the retraining of the staff in new ways of broadcasting rather than having personnel with no skills trying new broadcast technologies, only to end up copying a system of broadcast production which they know nothing about. To this end, Radio Rivers’ news, advertisement and entertainment programming policies should be remodelled in line with a strict public service ethos and not tilted to emulate what the other commercial stations are doing, as the station was not originally established as a commercial broadcaster.

From the way the station operates, it is doubtful whether Radio Rivers in recent times has carried out any audience research, as a way of testing the acceptability of its programmes in
this era of competition. As the retired Controller of News and Current Affairs at Radio Rivers puts it: “for the many years I worked in Radio Rivers, we never carry out audience research, as our audience research department was not as effective. Hence, we never get feedback from the public about what they were thinking of the station” (interview with retired Controller News and Current Affairs, Radio Rivers, Ogbonna Nwuke, Port Harcourt, 10/1/2005). Such self-examination through audience research, by both internal and external experts, would enable the station to be more purposeful and to align its programmes with public expectations. In this way, Radio Rivers will emerge as a broadcaster with a specific character. As the Director of Parastatal at the Ministry of Information puts it, “in the bid to copy what is current, Radio Rivers has lost its mark” (interview with Acting General Manager/Director of Parastatal, Ministry of Information, Mike Oku, Port Harcourt, 9/12/2004). To re-establish that lost public mark, Radio Rivers needs a completely new line of equipment. The present attempt by the government to upgrade some of its first line of equipment, like the transmitter and studio links, although good, will make little difference to the station’s performance considering the age of the present equipment. According to the Acting Director of News and Current Affairs at Radio Rivers:

> These things [equipment] were installed since 1981, and if you buy a radio set then I am sure you would have changed it several times. But here we are [in Radio Rivers] the same microphones, transmitters and studio equipment, the same everything are still being used right from 1981 [till date]. The world has gone digital, but we are still using analogue in this place [Radio Rivers] (interview with Acting Director of News and Current Affairs, Radio Rivers, Silas Anyanwu, Port Harcourt, 5/1/2005).

The verdict by the Acting Director News and Current Affairs at Radio Rivers sums the lot of Radio Rivers as a public service broadcaster. The story of a public service station whose past has become history by the entry of the commercial broadcasters into a broadcast space it occupied for 29 years. The story of a broadcaster whose values, like its counterparts in other parts of the world, have been corrupted by commercial broadcasters. The story of a public service broadcaster whose future, although challenged by the proliferation of commercial broadcasters, could, through revisiting its original public service mandate combined with the implementation of these recommendations, bring back the lost public confidence in its contribution to the public sphere.

### 7.3 Limitations of study

This study is limited to giving only a broad view of the effect of the proliferation of commercial broadcasters on Radio Rivers’ public service mandate. The study interrogated
the effect of the entry of commercial broadcasters on *Radio Rivers*’ public service programming schedule. Since competition between public service broadcasting and commercial broadcasting is a very wide research terrain, an in-depth look at the totality of the role of commercial broadcasters on the content of news, current affairs, advertisements, entertainment, minority, special interests, educational, the poor, children, and other genres in public service radio programming will warrant future study. Such research might entail a study of government, advertisers and audience responses towards the new broadcasting model of public service existing side by side with commercial broadcasters.

Therefore, for a more in-depth understanding of the role of commercial broadcasters in public service broadcasting in a liberalised formerly regulated broadcast ecology, there is a need for further research on all aspects of public service broadcasting. Such research choice would entail interrogating all the elements involved, from programme-planning and identification to the regulatory framework and commercial issues and financing options, including the content and delivery of news and current affairs programmes on the station. These will be appropriate areas for future study of *Radio Rivers*.

### 7.4 Summary

The study set out to examine the extent to which the proliferation of commercial broadcasting outlets has influenced public service programming at Nigeria's *Radio Rivers*. This study has demonstrated that, although the commercial broadcasters have impacted on *Radio Rivers* public service programming, *Radio Rivers* still maintains some public service values. Thus, despite the decrease in the space allocated to current affairs and educational programmes, (the genre of public service broadcasting), and the increase in advertisement and entertainment programmes, (the genre of commercial broadcasting), *Radio Rivers*, in the face of competition from commercial broadcasters, adopted new programming format that involves the extension of its broadcast time, introduction of new music genres and more interactive programmes during the peak broadcast hours. These newly introduced programmes, like the interactive programmes, and traditional religious music have helped to expand *Radio Rivers* public dialogue space and public service values. Thus, rather than the entry of the commercial stations, leading to *Radio Rivers* not serving its public service mandate, it has actually enhanced the station’s public service programming. This contradicts the case of *Radio Uganda*, where Jjuuko (2002) discovered that increased commercialisation of broadcasting in Uganda undermined the station’s public service values.
On the second theoretical perspective, the public sphere, (propounded in Chapter 2), the study found that, by decreasing the current affairs space on the schedule, the station's contribution to the public sphere was actually shrinking. However, despite the fact that the station has expanded the news space on the schedule, which seems to be an expansion of the contribution to the public sphere, *Radio Rivers* now charges for news. This combined with the fact that *Radio Rivers'* mandate empowers government to hire-and-fire the chief executive and members of the Board of Directors as a way of ensuring control over the station, and that advertisers can determine the voicing and timing of their advertisements on the schedule, while government has asked the station to be self-sustaining, is evidence that *Radio Rivers'* public service values and its contribution to the public sphere are being undermined by the same institution that set it up.

Therefore, the findings of this study confirm its hypothesis that, faced with competition from commercial broadcasters, and exacerbated by dwindling revenue, high operational cost, and government and commercial interferences, *Radio Rivers*, although has adjusted its programming pattern towards commercial programming, but it still maintains its public service mandate. This shows that the effects of the proliferation of commercial broadcasters may have affected public service programming and scheduling at *Radio Rivers* in more positive ways than negative.
Bibliography and References


Curran, J. (1991) Rethinking the media as a public sphere. in Dahlgren, P. and Sparks, C. (ed) Communication and Citizenship: Journalism and the Public Sphere in the New Media Age. London, New York: ROUTLEDGE.


National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) (Amendment) Decree No. 55 of 1999


Rivers State Broadcasting Corporation Diary, 1982.


Appendix A (i)

Interview Guide for Policy Makers

Confidentiality Declaration: I hereby declare that the information generated from these interviews will be treated with the utmost confidentiality, and will be used for academic purposes only.

Question 1 What was Radio Rivers established to do?
Question 2 What do you understand by public service broadcaster?
Question 3 Is Radio Rivers doing these things?
Question 4 What do you understand by commercial broadcaster?
Question 5 How has the entry of private radio stations in Rivers State impacted on Radio Rivers?
Question 6 How do you rate the programmes produced on Radio Rivers before January 2002 and after January 2004?
Question 7 Between January 2002 and January 2004, what new policies have been introduced in Radio Rivers?
Question 8 Why were they introduced?
Question 9 How is Radio Rivers financed?
Question 10 Does Radio Rivers get funding from government, and are these funds sufficient?
Question 11 As at January 2002, and January 2004, how much of the station’s income came from the government?
Question 12 Does Radio Rivers broadcast in the languages?
Question 13 Are you satisfied with Radio Rivers current performance?
Question 14 How would you have preferred Radio Rivers to operate and to be operated?
Question 15 What in your opinion can be done to transform Radio Rivers into a viable public service broadcaster?
Question 16 What in your opinion is the way forward for Radio Rivers?
Question 17 Any additional information and comments?

Many thanks for your co-operation.

Biobele Da-Wariboko
Appendix A (ii)

Interview Guide for Decision makers and Managers

Confidentiality Declaration: I hereby declare that the information generated from these interviews will be treated with the uttermost confidentiality, and will be used for academic purposes only.

Question 1 What was Radio Rivers established to do?

Question 2 What do you understand by public service broadcaster?

Question 3 Is Radio Rivers doing these things?

Question 4 What do you understand by commercial broadcasters?

Question 5 How has the entry of private radio stations in Rivers State made Radio Rivers a better performer?

Question 6 Has there been changes in programming schedules between January 2002 and January 2004?

Question 7 What new programmes have you added to Radio Rivers Schedules?

Question 8 Why were they introduced?

Question 9 What has been the effect of Radio Rivers programmes on the public before January 2002 and after January 2004?

Question 10 When does the station's studios open, and when does it close?

Question 11 How many hours of news, current affairs, educational, social, economic, political, development, and cultural programmes and advertisements were aired before January 2002, and after January 2004?

Question 12 How are advertisements taken, in between programmes or in block, and why?

Question 13 How is Radio Rivers financed?

Question 14 Does Radio Rivers get funding from government, and are these funds sufficient?

Question 15 In January-March 2002, and January-March 2004, how much of the station’s income came from the government?

Question 16 Does Radio Rivers charge for news items carried on the station?

Question 17 Has Radio Rivers between January 2002 and January 2004 had any change in News and Current Affairs programming due to funding problems?
Question 18 How many sponsored news and commercial programmes do you have?

Question 19 Do your sponsors have a say in the content, presentation, time of broadcast and choice of presenters?

Question 20 Does Radio Rivers run programmes that promote particular product?

Question 21 What criteria do you use to allocate airtime to programmes broadcast on the Schedules?

Question 22 What kind of entertainment programmes does Radio Rivers air?

Question 23 What kind of educative programmes does Radio Rivers air?

Question 24 What kind of current affairs programmes does Radio Rivers air?

Question 25 With more radio stations now available in Rivers State, what in your opinion attracts advertisers to Radio Rivers?

Question 26 Does the station encourage free interaction and participation on its programmes?

Question 27 Does Radio Rivers broadcast in the languages?

Question 28 If yes, for how many hours, and what programmes in the languages is broadcast on the station?

Question 29 If no, why don't the station broadcast in the languages?

Question 30 Does the station produce any programme in-house?

Question 31 When new programmes are to be introduced on the schedule what major policy decisions do you need to take?

Question 32 Are you satisfied with Radio Rivers current performance?

Question 33 How would you have preferred Radio Rivers to operate and to be operated?

Question 34 What in your opinion is the way forward for Radio Rivers?

Question 35 Any additional information and comments?

Many thanks for your co-operation.

Biobele Da-Wariboko
Appendix A (iii)

Interview Guide for Producers and Journalists

Confidentiality Declaration: I hereby declare that the information generated from these interviews will be treated with the uttermost confidentiality, and will be used for academic purposes only.

Question 1 What was Radio Rivers established to do?

Question 2 Is Radio Rivers doing these things?

Question 3 How has the entry of private radio stations in Rivers State affected Radio Rivers?

Question 4 Has there been changes in programming schedules between January 2002 and January 2004?

Question 5 Why were they introduced?

Question 6 How many hours of news, current affairs, educational, social, economic, political, development, and cultural programmes and advertisements were aired before January 2002, and after January 2004?

Question 7 Who are Radio Rivers's major news sources and do they have any say in the way news items are presented on the station?

Question 8 Are you sponsored to news events?

Question 9 Do people pay for news aired on the station?

Question 10 If yes, do these payments affect news presentation, and in what ways?

Question 11 With more radio stations now available in the state, what in your opinion attracts advertisers to Radio Rivers?

Question 12 Do the sponsors of news and commercials on the station have a say in the content, presentation, time of broadcast and choice of presenters?

Question 13 Does the station encourages free interaction and participation on its programmes?

Question 14 What kind of entertainment programmes does Radio Rivers air?

Question 15 What kind of educative programmes does Radio Rivers air?

Question 16 What kind of current affairs programmes does Radio Rivers air?

Question 17 Does Radio Rivers broadcast in the languages?
Question 18 If yes. For how many hours, and what programmes in the languages do you have on the station?

Question 19 Does the station produce any programme in-house?

Question 20 Are you satisfied with Radio Rivers current performance?

Question 21 How would you have preferred Radio Rivers to operate and to be operated?

Question 22 What in your opinion is the way forward for Radio Rivers?

Question 23 Any additional information and comments?

Many thanks for your co-operation.

Biobele Da-Wariboko
## Appendix F: Description of programme category.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Programme category</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>A. News and Current Affairs</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News bulletins in English</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talking Point/Commentary in English</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Information Desk</td>
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<tr>
<td>Educatie and Interactive programmes</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Spotlight, and other special interview programmes</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>News and commentary in Special English</td>
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<tr>
<td>News in the languages</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>B. Entertainment</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Request programmes in Special English</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Request programmes in the languages</td>
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<tr>
<td>Religious programmes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Traditional/cultural music</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sports</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Drama</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Documentary</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Children, Youth, Men's and Women's programmes</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>General entertainment (pop, reggae, country, calypso, highlife, etc)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Musical programmes from outside the State (Nigerian music)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programmes in foreign languages (French)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sponsored programmes</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>C. Advertisement</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Advertisements (spots and personal paid announcements)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sponsored announcements</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Intra-programme advertisement</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>D. Others</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Opening and closing formalities (opening and closing prayers, national anthem and the national pledge)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Continuity announcements</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Station's promotion and musical interlude</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>