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Influence of Audience Trust in Selected Nigerian Television Interviewers on Viewing Loyalty and Programme Engagement

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the influence of audience trust in television interviewers on viewing loyalty and programme engagement. The study was anchored on the Uses and Gratifications Theory, which explains that audiences actively select media content that satisfies their information, surveillance, and engagement needs. A quantitative approach employing a survey research design was adopted. Data were collected from 381 valid respondents selected through a multistage sampling technique across Lagos, Oyo, and Ogun States, Nigeria. Descriptive statistics and simple linear regression were used to analyse the data. The findings revealed that respondents generally expressed moderate to high levels of trust in television interviewers and that audience trust significantly influenced continued viewing of television interview programmes. The results further indicated that viewers were more likely to remain loyal to programmes and actively engage with their content when they perceived interviewers as credible, fair, objective, and professional. The hypothesis test showed that audience trust significantly predicted programme engagement ($F = 59.512$, $p < .001$), leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis. The study concludes that audience trust is a significant predictor of viewing loyalty and programme engagement and recommends that television interviewers adopt ethical, balanced, and evidence-based interviewing practices to strengthen audience confidence and sustain viewer engagement.

KEYWORDS: Audience trust • Television interviewers • Viewing loyalty • Programme engagement • Uses and Gratifications Theory • Television journalism

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Introduction

Television interview programmes constitute one of the most influential formats through which journalists communicate public affairs, hold leaders accountable, and facilitate democratic discourse. Through interviews, journalists provide citizens with direct access to social actors like political leaders, policymakers, experts, and other influential actors whose decisions affect society (Clayman & Heritage, 2002; Clayman, 2017). Unlike conventional news reporting, television news interviews provide opportunities for clarification, critical questioning, and public accountability. Rather than merely presenting information in a narrative format, the news interview enables journalists to interrogate public officials, experts, and other newsworthy actors, allowing audiences to witness the exchange directly. This interactional format enhances transparency by giving interviewers the opportunity to seek clarification, challenge inconsistencies, and hold public figures accountable, making the television interview a central genre in broadcast journalism (Clayman & Heritage, 2002; Clayman, 2015; Montgomery, 2025). However, the effectiveness of television interviews depends not only on the quality of information presented but also on the degree of trust audiences place in the interviewer.

Audience trust reflects viewers' confidence in journalists' competence, integrity, fairness, and credibility. Trust predicts whether audiences see television interviewers as reliable intermediaries who can present accurate, balanced, and objective information. Audience trust in broadcast journalism is largely influenced by perceptions of the journalist's credibility, fairness, expertise, and impartiality during the interview process. Interviewers who demonstrate professionalism through balanced questioning, factual accuracy, and ethical conduct are more likely to be regarded as trustworthy, thereby strengthening public confidence in television news (Kohring & Matthes, 2007; Meyer, 1988; Tsfaty & Cappella, 2003). As public confidence in news media continues to decline globally due to political polarisation, misinformation, commercialisation, and digital media competition, television journalists increasingly face the challenge of maintaining audience trust while fulfilling their watchdog responsibilities (Reuters Institute, 2024).

The news interview is an interactional arena in which journalists organize exchanges through questions and answers, with questioning practices reflecting journalistic norms such as neutrality, credibility, and adversarialness (Clayman, 2017). Audience evaluations of interviewers are therefore influenced by observable characteristics such as neutrality, fairness, evidence-based questioning styles, professionalism, ethical behaviour, and independence. These characteristics determine whether audiences perceive interviewers as trustworthy or biased, thereby influencing subsequent viewing behaviour.

Viewing loyalty or continuing viewership refers to audiences' willingness to continue watching particular television interview programmes over time despite the availability of alternative news sources. Loyal viewers are more likely to return to news programmes and other television content when they perceive the source as credible, informative, reliable, and professionally presented. Research on news audiences has found a significant relationship between trust in news and news consumption, with higher levels of trust associated with greater loyalty to news sources (Nelson & Kim, 2021). Similarly, studies of television audiences indicate that programme quality and reliability can contribute significantly to viewer satisfaction and loyalty (Azizah et al., 2024). Audience research has also shown that viewers who are loyal to particular news sources tend to rely on the same sources repeatedly and are more likely to perceive those sources as doing a good job of informing them (Mitchell et al., 2016). Thus, perceptions of credibility, informational value, reliability, and programme quality can contribute to the development and maintenance of television audience loyalty.

Programme engagement extends beyond repeated viewing to include audience attention, emotional involvement, online interaction, programme recommendation, and participation in discussions generated by televised interviews. Contemporary media scholars argue that audience engagement is a multidimensional construct encompassing cognitive, emotional, and behavioural responses to media content. In television journalism, engagement is reflected not only in sustained viewing but also in audience interaction through social media, word-of-mouth recommendations, and active participation in public discussions about news programmes and interviews (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2009; Napoli, 2011;

Broersma & Graham, 2013). Both viewing loyalty and audience engagement are increasingly important indicators of programme success in contemporary media markets characterized by intense competition among traditional broadcasters, streaming platforms, and digital news providers.

Although Previous studies have extensively examined media credibility (Meyer, 1988), trust in news media (Kohring & Matthes, 2007; Strömbäck et al., 2020), media skepticism and news consumption (Tsfati & Cappella, 2003), audience engagement with media content (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2009; Napoli, 2011), and social media interaction with news programmes (Broersma & Graham, 2013). Most existing research focuses broadly on institutional trust in media organisations rather than interpersonal trust in journalists or interviewers who represent those organisations. This gap is particularly important because television interviewers often become the public face of news organisations, meaning that audience evaluations of their professionalism directly affect programme reputation and audience retention. This paper therefore explores the influence of audience trust in television interviewers on viewing loyalty and programme engagement.

Hypothesis of the study

H01: Audience trust in the interviewer does not significantly influence continued viewing and engagement with television interview programmes.

Literature review

Recent empirical studies have increasingly examined audience trust, journalistic credibility, professionalism, media consumption, and audience engagement. However, much of the existing literature conceptualises trust at the level of news organisations, media institutions, or news content rather than at the level of individual journalists and television interviewers. For the present study, the literature is thematically reviewed around four related areas: audience trust in journalism, trust in journalists and media personalities, audience engagement and news consumption, and viewing loyalty. The synthesis of these themes provides the basis for identifying the knowledge gap concerning the influence of trust in Nigerian television interviewers on viewing loyalty and programme engagement.

Audience Trust and Journalistic Credibility

A substantial body of research establishes audience trust as an important component of the relationship between news media and their audiences. Knudsen et al. (2022), using a probability-based online survey of 1,500 Norwegian respondents, examined how citizens conceptualise trust in news media. The findings identified truthfulness, professionalism, objectivity, and independence as major dimensions through which audiences evaluate whether news media are trustworthy. This suggests that audience trust extends beyond the accuracy of information to include perceptions of professional competence and ethical conduct.

Similarly, Strömbäck et al. (2020), through a comprehensive review of empirical research, identified media performance, journalistic professionalism, institutional confidence, political orientation, and media use as important antecedents of trust in news media. Their framework also shows that trust affects news consumption and democratic participation. These findings matter to the present study because they suggest that audiences' evaluations of journalistic performance can shape their subsequent relationship with media content. However, both studies primarily examine trust in news media as an institution rather than trust in individual journalists or television interviewers. Consequently, they provide limited insight into whether audiences develop trust in particular interviewers and whether such interpersonal or personality-based trust influences their continued relationship with specific television programmes.

Trust in Journalists and Television Interviewers

A related body of literature indicates that audiences do not interact only with media organisations; they also form perceptions of individual journalists and presenters. Journalists can become recognisable media personalities whose professional competence, credibility, communication style, perceived fairness, and consistency contribute to audience evaluations of the programmes they present. Clayman and Heritage (2002), for example, demonstrate that journalists' questioning practices and interaction with public figures constitute important dimensions of the news interview. Their work shows that journalists exercise considerable influence over the structure and direction of interviews through question design, follow-up questions, challenges, and other interactional practices. Similarly, Clayman (2017) explains that news interviews are interactional encounters in which journalists' questioning practices are shaped by professional norms and expectations. Such practices can influence how interviewees' positions are presented and how journalists themselves are perceived by audiences. These findings suggest that trust in a television interviewer may be influenced by how the interviewer performs the journalistic role.

Audience Engagement and News Consumption

Audience engagement represents another important dimension of the relationship between media and their audiences. Engagement extends beyond exposure to media content and may include attention, participation, interaction, emotional involvement, and continued interest in a programme or media source. Strömbäck et al. (2020) show that trust in news is associated with patterns of news consumption, suggesting that perceptions of credibility can shape how audiences relate to news media. Altay et al. (2025), examining social media news consumption through experimental and survey evidence, found that exposure to credible news sources increased political knowledge, factual accuracy, and trust in news. Although the study focused on social media rather than television, it demonstrates the broader relationship between source credibility and audience responses to news. Newman et al. (2024), through the Reuters Institute Digital News Report, similarly documented changing patterns of news consumption and the continuing importance of trust and perceived credibility in audiences' relationships with news sources.

Viewing Loyalty and Continued Audience Behaviour

Viewing loyalty concerns the tendency of audiences to repeatedly select, follow, and maintain a relationship with a particular programme or media source over time. Loyalty may be reflected in regular viewing, preference for a particular programme, continued patronage, and willingness to return to the same source for information or entertainment. Research on news consumption suggests that audiences who develop confidence in particular news sources are more likely to repeatedly rely on those sources. Mitchell et al. (2016), for example, found that many news consumers regularly returned to the same news sources and that highly loyal news consumers were more likely to express trust in the sources they used. Similarly, Nelson and Kim (2021) examined the relationship between news credibility and consumption and found that trust in news was associated with patterns of news consumption and loyalty. Their findings suggest that credibility is not merely an attitudinal outcome but may have behavioural consequences for how audiences select and repeatedly consume news. Nevertheless, most of this literature considers loyalty to news organisations, news sources, or media brands. Less attention has been paid to whether audiences can develop loyalty to a television programme because of their trust in the individual interviewer who anchors or presents it. This distinction is important because television interview programmes are simultaneously associated with the institutional identity of the broadcaster and the personal identity and professional reputation of the interviewer.

The reviewed studies collectively establish that trust is an important factor in the relationship between audiences and news media. Audiences evaluate credibility through attributes such as truthfulness, professionalism, objectivity, independence, transparency, and perceived competence (Karlsson et al., 2017; Knudsen et al., 2022; Ojala, 2021; Strömbäck et al., 2020). The literature further suggests that trust and credibility can influence news consumption and audience responses to media

content (Altay et al., 2025; Mitchell et al., 2016; Nelson & Kim, 2021). However, an important distinction emerges from the literature. Existing studies predominantly conceptualise trust as trust in news organisations, media institutions, news content, or general journalistic performance. Comparatively less empirical attention has been devoted to audience trust in individual television interviewers as a distinct source of credibility. Furthermore, the relationship between such interviewer-specific trust and two important behavioural outcomes: viewing loyalty and programme engagement which remains insufficiently explored.

Theoretical review

This study is anchored on the principles and assumptions of the uses and gratification theory

Uses and Gratifications Theory

The Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) was developed by Elihu Katz, Jay G. Blumler, and Michael Gurevitch in the early 1970s to explain why audiences actively choose particular media to satisfy their needs. Unlike earlier media effects theories that viewed audiences as passive recipients of media messages, the theory argues that media users are active participants who deliberately select media content based on their interests, motivations, and expected gratifications (Katz et al., 1973; 1974). According to the theory, audiences use media to satisfy cognitive needs, such as acquiring information and knowledge; affective needs, including emotional satisfaction; personal integrative needs, such as enhancing credibility and confidence; social integrative needs, which promote interaction with others; and entertainment or tension-release needs.

Uses and Gratifications Theory is relevant to this study because viewers actively choose which television interview programmes to watch based on how well they satisfy their information and public affairs needs. Audience trust in television interviewers constitutes an important gratification that encourages continued programme consumption. Interviewers who demonstrate professionalism, fairness, objectivity, and credibility are more likely to satisfy viewers' expectations, thereby increasing viewing loyalty and programme engagement. Conversely, interviewers perceived as biased or unprofessional may discourage continued viewership and reduce audience participation. The findings support the theory's assumptions by showing that audience trust significantly predicts continued viewing and engagement with television interview programmes. Therefore, the Uses and Gratifications Theory provides an appropriate framework for explaining how audience trust motivates media selection, sustained viewing behaviour, and audience engagement in television journalism.

Methods

This study adopted a quantitative research approach and a survey research design to examine the relationship between audience trust in selected television interviewers, viewing loyalty, and programme engagement. The target population comprised viewers of *Channels Television* and *Arise News* in Southwest Nigeria, with particular reference to audiences exposed to *Politics Today* and *The Morning Show*. The study focused on Lagos, Oyo, and Ogun States, which constitute part of the Southwest geopolitical zone of Nigeria. The exact number of viewers who watch *Politics Today* and *The Morning Show* is not publicly available from official sources. Consequently, the study estimated the accessible population using available television news audience-reach data. According to the 2024 *Digital News Report* of the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, *Channels Television* recorded a 46% weekly news reach in Nigeria, while *Arise News* recorded a 32% weekly news reach (Newman et al., 2024). These figures were used as proxies for estimating the potential audience reach of the two television news organisations within the study area. The estimated population was therefore not treated as a direct count of viewers of the two specific programmes but as an approximation of the combined potential audience from which respondents could be drawn.

According to CitiPopulation (2026), the combined population of Lagos, Oyo, and Ogun States was estimated at 27,847,400. Applying the reported audience-reach percentages to this population produced the following estimates:

Channels Television:

$$0.46 \times 27,847,400 = 12,809,804$$

Arise News:

$$0.32 \times 27,847,400 = 8,911,168$$

The combined estimated audience reach was therefore calculated as:

$$12,809,804 + 8,911,168 = 21,720,972$$

Thus, the estimated accessible population for the study was 21,720,972. This figure represents an inferred combined audience reach of *Channels Television* and *Arise News* based on available audience-reach data and the population of the three selected states. It should therefore be understood as an estimated audience-reach figure rather than an official enumeration of unique viewers of *Politics Today* and *The Morning Show*. Because audience reach figures may overlap across media brands and may not represent unique individuals, the estimate was used solely as a basis for determining the target sample size.

The sample size was determined using the SurveyMonkey (2026) online sample-size calculator. Based on the estimated population of 21,720,972, a 95% confidence level, and a 5% margin of error, the calculator generated a minimum target sample size of 385 respondents. The figure was adopted as the target number of questionnaires to be administered. In accordance with the sampling plan, the target sample was proportionately distributed across the three selected states, resulting in 187 respondents for Lagos State, 110 for Oyo State, and 88 for Ogun State, giving a total of 385 respondents.

A multistage purposive sampling technique was employed for the selection of respondents. At the first stage, Lagos, Oyo, and Ogun States were purposively selected because of their substantial population sizes, high levels of media activity, concentration of media organisations, and relevance to broadcast journalism in Southwest Nigeria. At the second stage, the state capitals Lagos/Ikeja, Ibadan, and Abeokuta were purposively selected as the principal locations for data collection because of their concentration of media audiences and relatively high levels of socioeconomic activity. At the final stage, respondents were purposively selected based on their exposure to television interview programmes, particularly *Politics Today* and *The Morning Show*, and their ability to provide informed responses concerning audience trust, viewing loyalty, and programme engagement.

A total of 385 questionnaires were administered. Of these, 381 were correctly completed and considered valid for analysis, while four questionnaires were excluded because of incomplete responses. The study therefore achieved a 99.0% usable response rate (381/385). Consequently, the analysis was based on 381 valid responses. Given that the study employed a non-probability sampling procedure, the findings are interpreted within the context of the respondents included in the study. The purposive selection of the states, locations, and individual respondents means that the findings cannot be statistically generalised to the entire population of television viewers in Lagos, Oyo, and Ogun States with the same level of confidence that would be possible with a probability-based sampling design. The inferential findings are therefore interpreted as evidence of relationships and patterns among the respondents studied rather than as definitive population estimates.

For the purpose of the study, Seun Okinbaloye and Rufai Oseni were selected as prominent television interviewers whose programmes provide relevant contexts for examining audience trust, viewing loyalty, and programme engagement. Their selection was based on the visibility and relevance of their respective interview programmes to the subject of the study. The trust ratings reported in the study represent respondents' perceptions of the interviewers at the time of the survey and should not be

interpreted as objective assessments of their professional competence, integrity, or personal character. Rather, the findings reflect how the sampled audience perceived and evaluated the interviewers in their roles as television interviewers and media personalities.

Findings

Socio-demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Table 1: *Socio-demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 381)*

Variable	Category	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	37.3
Gender	Female	62.7
Gender	Total	100.0
Age (Years)	18–25	36.7
Age (Years)	26–35	29.4
Age (Years)	36–45	14.7
Age (Years)	46 and above	19.2
Age (Years)	Total	100.0
Educational Qualification	No formal education	1.0
Educational Qualification	Secondary/High School	23.1
Educational Qualification	Diploma/OND	36.7
Educational Qualification	Bachelor's degree	15.7
Educational Qualification	Postgraduate degree	23.4
Educational Qualification	Total	100.0

Source: Authors' Field Survey (2026).

A total of 381 valid questionnaires were analysed for the study. Table 1 presents the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents. The findings show that 239 respondents (62.7%) were female, while 142 respondents (37.3%) were male, indicating a higher participation of female respondents. Regarding age, the majority of respondents (36.7%) were between 18 and 25 years, followed by those aged 26–35 years (29.4%). Respondents aged 46 years and above constituted 19.2%, while those between 36 and 45 years accounted for 14.7%. This suggests that the study was dominated by young adults who are likely to be active consumers of television interview programmes.

In terms of educational qualification, 36.7% possessed a Diploma/OND, while 23.4% had postgraduate qualifications. Respondents with secondary education made up 23.1%, while 15.7% had bachelor's degrees. Only 1.0% had no formal education. Overall, respondents were relatively well educated, suggesting they could make informed evaluations of television interview programmes.

Audience Trust in Television Interviewers

Table 2: *Audience Trust in Television Interviewers*

Interviewer	Response	Frequency	Valid Percentage (%)
Seun Okinbaloye	Very much	172	48.2
	Somewhat	116	32.5
	Not much	57	16.0
	Not at all	12	3.4
	Not sure (Missing)	24	6.3
Rufai Oseni	Very much	152	41.6
	Somewhat	92	25.2
	Not much	93	25.5
	Not at all	28	7.7
	Not sure (Missing)	16	4.2

Source: Authors' Field Survey (2026).

Findings from the table above indicate the extent to which they trusted Seun Okinbaloye and Rufai Oseni as television interviewers. As presented in Table 2, 48.2% of the valid respondents trusted Seun Okinbaloye very much, while 32.5% trusted him somewhat. Only 19.4% expressed low trust ("not much" and "not at all"), whereas 6.3% were unsure. These findings indicate that Seun Okinbaloye enjoys relatively high audience trust.

Similarly, 41.6% of respondents trusted Rufai Oseni very much, while 25.2% trusted him somewhat. However, 33.2% indicated low trust, and 4.2% were unsure. Comparatively, Seun Okinbaloye attracted a higher level of audience trust than Rufai Oseni.

Audience Trust, Viewing Loyalty and Programme Engagement

Table 3: Audience Trust, Viewing Loyalty and Engagement (N = 381)

SD = Strongly Disagree; D = Disagree; N = Neutral; A = Agree; SA = Strongly Agree.

Statement	SD (%)	D (%)	N (%)	A (%)	SA (%)
I am more likely to watch a programme regularly when I trust the interviewer.	1.0	7.3	11.5	41.2	38.8
The interviewing style influences whether I continue engaging with the programme.	1.0	10.5	12.6	39.9	36.0
I often discuss or share clips from political interviews I find engaging.	4.2	8.4	22.0	34.9	30.4

Source: Authors' Field Survey (2026).

Respondents were asked whether they were more likely to watch a television interview programme regularly when they trusted the interviewer. As shown in Table 3, 41.2% agreed and 38.8% strongly agreed, representing a combined 80.0% of respondents. Only 8.3% disagreed, while 11.5% remained neutral. This finding suggests that audience trust plays an important role in promoting continued viewing of television interview programmes.

Similarly, 75.9% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the interviewing style adopted by television interviewers influences whether they continue engaging with a programme. Furthermore, 65.3% indicated that they often discuss or share clips from political interviews they find engaging, suggesting that audience engagement extends beyond programme consumption to interpersonal communication and online interaction.

Test of Hypothesis

H01: Audience trust in the interviewer does not significantly influence continued viewing and engagement with television interview programmes.

Table 4: ANOVA Result for the Influence of Audience Trust on Programme Engagement

Source	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	31.413	1	31.413	59.512	.000
Residual	200.054	379	0.528		
Total	231.467	380			

Dependent Variable: Engagement Index.

Predictor: Trust Index.

Source: Authors' Field Survey (2026).

The regression results show that audience trust significantly predicts continued viewing and engagement with television interview programmes ($F(1, 379) = 59.512, p < .001$). Since the significance value is less than the 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis is rejected. This finding shows that audience trust

significantly predicts programme engagement, suggesting that viewers who perceive television interviewers as trustworthy are more likely to continue watching interview programmes, remain engaged with programme content, and participate in related activities such as discussing or sharing interview clips. These findings underscore the importance of interviewer credibility in fostering audience loyalty and sustaining engagement with television interview programmes.

Table 4.1: Model Summary for Audience Trust as a Predictor of Programme Engagement

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.368	.136	.133	.727

Source: Authors' Field Survey (2026).

The model summary in Table 4.1 shows that audience trust yields a correlation of $R = .368$ with programme engagement and a coefficient of determination of $R^2 = .136$ (adjusted $R^2 = .133$, standard error of the estimate = .727). This indicates that audience trust accounts for approximately 13.6% of the variance in programme engagement, while the remaining 86.4% is attributable to other factors not captured in the model. The effect is therefore statistically significant but modest in magnitude, and audience trust should be understood as one of several factors that predict programme engagement rather than its sole determinant.

Table 4.2: Regression Coefficients for Audience Trust as a Predictor of Programme Engagement

Coefficientsa	Coefficientsa	Coefficientsa	Coefficientsa	Coefficientsa	Coefficientsa	Coefficientsa
Model	Model	Unstandardized Coefficients	Unstandardized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
Model	Model	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	1.987	.258		7.690	.000
1	Trust_Index1	.483	.063	.368	7.714	.000
a. Dependent Variable: Engagement index	a. Dependent Variable: Engagement index	a. Dependent Variable: Engagement index	a. Dependent Variable: Engagement index	a. Dependent Variable: Engagement index	a. Dependent Variable: Engagement index	a. Dependent Variable: Engagement index

Source: Authors' Field Survey (2026).

The coefficients in Table 4.2 show that audience trust is a positive and statistically significant predictor of programme engagement. The unstandardised coefficient ($B = .483$, $SE = .063$) indicates that a one-unit increase in the audience trust index is associated with an estimated 0.483-unit increase in the programme engagement index.

The standardised coefficient ($\beta = .368$) indicates a positive relationship of moderate magnitude between audience trust and programme engagement. The predictor is statistically significant, $t(379) = 7.714$, $p < .001$. The constant of 1.987 represents the estimated engagement score when the trust index is zero.

Discussion of Findings

The findings provide empirical evidence that trust significantly predicts continued viewing and engagement with television interview programmes. Consistent with the assumptions of the Uses and Gratifications Theory, viewers actively evaluate television interviewers based on perceived credibility, professionalism, fairness, and objectivity before deciding whether to continue consuming programme content. The results also demonstrate that trust extends beyond confidence in the information presented to influence programme loyalty, interpersonal discussion, and audience participation. The socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents indicate that the study largely comprised young and relatively educated television viewers. The predominance of respondents aged 18–35 years suggests that the findings reflect the perceptions of an audience segment that actively consumes political news across both traditional television and digital media platforms. The relatively high educational attainment of respondents further strengthens the credibility of the findings, as educated audiences are generally better

positioned to evaluate journalistic professionalism, objectivity, and interviewer performance. This demographic profile aligns with the Reuters Institute Digital News Report (Newman et al., 2024), which found that younger and educated audiences make up a significant share of political news and television interview consumers.

The study found that Seun Okinbaloye enjoyed higher audience trust than Rufai Oseni. While both interviewers received favourable trust ratings, Seun Okinbaloye attracted considerably fewer respondents who expressed low trust. This finding suggests that audiences differentiate between television interviewers based on their perceived professionalism, neutrality, questioning style, and overall credibility rather than simply the media organisations they represent. The result supports Knudsen et al. (2022), who found that audiences associate media trust with truthfulness, professionalism, objectivity, and independence. Similarly, Ojala (2021) reported that perceptions of neutrality are associated with audience trust, while perceived bias diminishes confidence in journalists. The higher trust recorded for Seun Okinbaloye may therefore reflect audience perceptions of greater impartiality, balanced questioning, or professional conduct during televised interviews.

The findings further reveal that audience trust is positively associated with continued viewing of television interview programmes. Eight out of every ten respondents agreed that they were more likely to watch a programme regularly when they trusted the interviewer. This shows that interviewer credibility is an important predictor of audience loyalty. The finding is consistent with Strömbäck et al. (2020), who argued that trust significantly predicts news consumption and media use. Although their study focused on institutional trust, the present findings extend this conclusion by demonstrating that trust in individual television interviewers also influences programme consumption. This extension matters because television interview programmes are often strongly identified with individual presenters, whose personalities and interviewing styles become integral to audience evaluations of programme quality.

The study also established that interviewing style significantly influences audience engagement. More than three-quarters of the respondents agreed that an interviewer's questioning style affects whether they continue engaging with a programme. This finding reinforces the proposition that interviewing style is not merely a professional technique but an audience retention strategy capable of sustaining viewer interest and programme loyalty. While Karlsson et al. (2017) emphasised that transparency enhances perceptions of journalistic credibility and objectivity, the present study suggests that audiences equally evaluate the manner in which interviewers conduct interviews. Professionalism, fairness, balanced questioning, and respectful interaction appear to enhance viewers' willingness to remain engaged with television interview programmes.

Another important finding is that audience engagement extends beyond regular programme viewing. Approximately two-thirds of the respondents indicated that they discuss or share clips from political interviews they find engaging. This demonstrates that audience engagement encompasses interpersonal communication and online interaction in addition to programme consumption. The finding aligns with Altay et al. (2025), who found that audiences who follow credible news sources become more engaged with political information and develop greater trust in journalism. Although Altay et al. examined social media news rather than television interviews, both studies indicate that trust enhances audience participation beyond passive media exposure. Similarly, Newman et al. (2024) observed that younger audiences increasingly engage with news through digital platforms by sharing, commenting on, and discussing political content.

Perhaps the most significant finding of this study is the statistical confirmation that audience trust significantly predicts programme engagement. The regression analysis revealed a highly significant relationship between trust and engagement ($F(1, 379) = 59.512, p < .001$), leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis. This finding provides empirical support for the proposition that viewers who perceive television interviewers as trustworthy are more likely to remain loyal to interview programmes, continue viewing regularly, and actively participate in discussions generated by programme content. Unlike previous studies that concentrated primarily on institutional trust (Strömbäck et al., 2020; Pew Research

Center, 2025) or trust in digital news environments (Gondwe, 2025; Altay et al., 2025), the present study demonstrates that trust in individual television interviewers independently influences audience behaviour.

Overall, the findings contribute significantly to television journalism scholarship by addressing an important gap identified in previous empirical studies. Existing research has largely examined trust in media institutions, news organisations, or journalism generally, while giving limited attention to trust in individual television interviewers. This study demonstrates that interviewer credibility is a significant predictor of programme engagement, continued viewing, and audience participation. The findings therefore extend existing knowledge by establishing that audience trust operates not only at the institutional level but also at the interpersonal level between viewers and television interviewers. This reinforces the central argument that interviewer professionalism, neutrality, objectivity, and credibility are indispensable for sustaining audience trust and enhancing engagement with television interview programmes.

Conclusion

This study examined how audience trust in television interviewers influences viewing loyalty and programme engagement. The findings show that audience trust predicts viewers' willingness to continue watching television interview programmes and actively engage with their content. The study established that respondents generally exhibited moderate to high levels of trust in the selected television interviewers, although trust varied between the interviewers, indicating that audience perceptions are influenced by individual interviewer characteristics, including professionalism, credibility, fairness, and interviewing style.

The descriptive findings further revealed strong self-reported viewing loyalty, as the majority of respondents indicated that they were more likely to watch a television interview programme regularly when they trusted the interviewer. Similarly, the study found that interviewing style plays an important role in shaping audience engagement, with respondents acknowledging that balanced, professional, and evidence-based interviewing encourages continued interest in television interview programmes. The findings also indicate that audience engagement extends beyond programme viewership to include discussing political interviews and sharing interview clips with others, suggesting that trusted interviewers contribute to broader public discourse and civic participation.

Most importantly, the hypothesis testing confirmed that audience trust significantly predicts continued viewing and engagement with television interview programmes. This finding reinforces the proposition of Source Credibility Theory that communicator credibility influences audience attitudes and behavioural intentions, while also supporting the assumptions of Social Responsibility Theory that ethical, objective, and responsible journalism strengthens public confidence in the media. The study therefore concludes that audience trust is an indispensable asset in contemporary television journalism and that interviewers who consistently demonstrate professionalism, fairness, neutrality, factual accuracy, and ethical conduct are more likely to retain viewers, enhance programme engagement, and strengthen the credibility of television journalism. Consequently, fostering audience trust should remain a strategic priority for television interviewers and media organisations seeking to sustain audience loyalty in an increasingly competitive and digitally driven media environment.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that television interviewers consistently uphold the highest standards of professionalism by conducting interviews that are fair, balanced, objective, and evidence-based. Such practices will enhance audience confidence in interviewers and encourage sustained programme viewership. Media organisations should also invest in regular professional development programmes that equip television interviewers with advanced interviewing skills, ethical decision-making competencies, and audience-centred communication strategies. Continuous

training will enable interviewers to adapt to changing audience expectations while maintaining the credibility of television journalism.

Furthermore, editorial policies should emphasise objectivity and consistency in how interview guests are treated, regardless of their political affiliations or ideological positions. Applying uniform questioning standards will reduce perceptions of bias and strengthen public trust in television interview programmes. Media organisations should also establish mechanisms for periodically evaluating audience perceptions of interviewer credibility, professionalism, and programme quality through audience surveys and feedback systems. Such evaluations will provide valuable information for improving programme content and interviewing practices.

In addition, television interviewers should adopt well-researched, factual, and respectful questioning techniques while remaining sufficiently probing to promote accountability. Avoiding unnecessary confrontation and sensationalism will enable interviewers to maintain professional integrity without compromising their watchdog role. Television stations should equally strengthen audience engagement by creating opportunities for viewers to interact with programme content through social media platforms, audience feedback sessions, and other participatory communication channels. These initiatives will foster stronger relationships between interviewers and their audiences while promoting informed public discussion.

Finally, journalism educators, professional associations, and media regulators should continue to emphasise the importance of audience trust, ethical journalism, and interviewer credibility in journalism education and professional practice. Future research should extend the present study by examining audience trust in television interviewers across different regions of Nigeria and comparing traditional television interview programmes with emerging digital and online interview platforms. Such studies would provide broader insights into the evolving relationship between audience trust, viewing behaviour, and engagement in contemporary journalism.

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Declarations

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