1 Programme formats

1.1 Radio

UBC operates six radio stations, namely, Red Channel, Blue Channel, Butebo, Star FM, Magic FM, and Mega FM. The formats of Red Channel, Blue Channel, and Butebo emphasise public interest programming that is supposed to cater to the country’s social and cultural diversity by targeting specific language/ethnic groups. Most of the programmes on these four stations aim at educating and informing the public, but with a significant dose of light/entertainment programming. For example, Red Channel runs programmes for the youth (Arado), on health (Lugbara Alata), on culture (Our Heritage), on employment opportunities (Job Scan), and on lifestyle (Ladies Corner).

- Red Channel primarily targets audiences that use the indigenous languages of northern Uganda as well as English. These audiences are resident either in the north of the country or in the central region particularly in and around the capital city Kampala. The station therefore broadcasts in English, Swahili, Alur, Kakwa, Kinubi (or Nubian), Lugbara, Madi, as well as Luo and transmits on different regional frequencies.

- Blue Channel focuses on audiences that use the indigenous languages of southwestern Uganda as well as English. These audiences live either in the southwest region of the country or in the cosmopolitan central region especially in and around Kampala. The station broadcasts in the following

126 http://ubconline.co.ug/radios.php/
languages: Runyoro-Rutooro, Luganda, Rwamba, Rukonzo, Urufumbira, and Ruruli. It transmits on ten different frequencies covering parts of central, south, western, and eastern Uganda.

- Butebo Radio targets audiences for the indigenous languages of eastern and northeastern Uganda in addition to English. The speakers of these languages are largely found in the northeast of the country and in the ethnically diverse central region. The station's languages are: Lusoga, Nyakarimojong, Ateso, Kumam, Lumasaba, Lunyole/Lusamia, Lugwe, Adhola, Kupsabiny, and Lugwere.

- Star FM broadcasts only in Luganda and its audience is concentrated in the central region.

- Magic FM is a purely sports station and broadcasts entirely in English. The station broadcasts primarily to the Acholi community of northern Uganda and was particularly influential in the peace settlement between the government and the Lord's Resistance Army rebel group.

Compared to private radio stations, UBC has more diverse programme formats ranging from news and current affairs, documentaries, drama/comedy/serials, music shows, chat shows, educational programmes, to children, religious, youth, and sports programmes. And it also offers programmes in a wider range of local languages. Capital FM, which was selected to represent private radio, is by and large a music station. Its other major formats include news and current affairs, talk shows, magazine shows, and educational programmes. The station broadcasts mainly in English, but also carries news and a few other programmes in Luganda or a mixture of both English and Luganda.

Yet, according to results of audience research conducted by the Steadman Group, now Synovate, in early 2009, it appears that UBC Radio does not enjoy its edge in diversity of programme formats in the eyes of many Ugandans. Asked about diversity of programmes, 71 per cent of respondents agreed that state/public radio broadcasters ‘offer a wide variety of programmes’. In contrast, 81 per cent said the same about private radio stations. This disparity could in part be a result of the higher awareness and popularity enjoyed by the private radio stations over UBC as more audience survey results discussed later will show. As Table 12 shows, private radio stations outscored the state/public broadcaster as well as community radio stations on all diversity indices.

Similarly, slightly more respondents (80 per cent) agreed with the proposition that

---

128 The Steadman Group survey was based on a random sample of 1,210 Ugandans from all over the country.
private radio stations ‘provide enough programmes in local languages understood by
the audience’. For UBC radio stations, 79 per cent agreed with the proposition. This
could also be in part because the proliferation of private radio stations in the countryside
in recent years has increased the number of local/regional broadcasters that offer
programming predominantly in the main local language of the community.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Diversity index</th>
<th>Percentage saying strongly or somewhat agree in relation to State/public radio broadcasters</th>
<th>Percentage saying strongly or somewhat agree in relation to private radio broadcasters</th>
<th>Percentage saying strongly or somewhat agree in relation to community radio broadcasters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Provide enough programmes in local languages understood by the audience</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offer entertainment for all kinds of people</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offer a wide variety of programmes</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide adequate programmes to cater for children</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide programmes not only for the general public but also for minority audiences</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Part of the justification for having public broadcasters that enjoy public or state
funding is that they are able to offer diverse programmes that cater to audiences that
are often ignored by the private broadcasters who are said to care more about profits.
In Uganda, however, UBC’s diverse formats and languages do not appear to have given
it a meaningful edge in the public mind.

1.2 Television

UBC TV targets the entire spectrum of Ugandan viewers with programmes distributed
among a wide cross-section of formats/genres. Major genres include news, current
affairs, documentaries, music shows, movies, drama/comedy/serials, talk shows,
chat shows, children’s programmes, sports, and religious programmes. English is
the dominant language of programming on UBC TV, although news and a few other
programmes are also carried in Luganda and Kiswahili.
Private television stations also tend to target a broad spectrum of viewers with programmes distributed among pretty much the same major formats/genres. English is also the predominant language on most private television stations, which also carry news and a few other programmes in Luganda and Kiswahili. But there are some differences. NTV, which was selected to represent private television stations, offers a wide selection of genres for the mass audience but it also specifically targets educated youth, particularly students in tertiary institutions and young professionals or young employed people. It tends to have more entertainment-based formats such as drama, comedies, serials, movies, music shows, and game shows.

Yet, as with private radio stations, the results of Synovate’s audience research reported in Table 13 suggest that significantly more people (77 per cent of the respondents) believe that private television stations offer a wide variety of programmes compared to UBC TV (66 per cent). But as the findings show, UBC TV was rated better or just about the same as private television stations on other measures of diversity such as local language programming, and programmes for minority audiences, including children. These findings suggest that the advantages that UBC is supposed to enjoy over private television stations have not necessarily translated into better perceptions of the national broadcaster among the audience.

**Table 13: Level of viewer agreement on diversity of television programmes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Diversity index</th>
<th>Percentage saying strongly or somewhat agree in relation to State/public broadcaster</th>
<th>Percentage saying strongly or somewhat agree in relation to private television broadcasters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Provide enough programmes in local languages understood by the audience</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offer entertainment for all kinds of people</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offer a wide variety of programmes</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide adequate programmes to cater for children</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide programmes not only for the general public but also for minority audiences</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2 Programme/editorial policies and guidelines

In general, UBC programming is guided by the UBC Act of 2005. Section 22 of the Act specifies seven provisions that form the foundation of UBC’s editorial policy. The policy aims to:

a) Establish effective machinery for a wide coverage of events all over the world and Uganda in particular.
b) Voice public opinion and criticism of a given public policy in a fair and objective manner.
c) Uphold the integrity of the Republic of Uganda and promote harmonious relationships among people, its neighbours and the world at large.
d) Collect, process, analyze and propagate news and comments truthfully, honestly and fairly without jeopardizing peace and harmony in the country.
e) Respect and uphold the sovereignty and unity of Uganda and to come out firmly on the side of Uganda on matters affecting such sovereignty and unity without affecting the truth, which must at all times be the guiding line and governing principle of television and radio broadcasts.
f) Ensure that the Corporation does not broadcast any material which is indecent, obscene or offensive to public morals, religious convictions or is likely to prejudice the safety of the state or public order between sections of the population.
g) Ensure that the Corporation’s broadcasting is in line with the code of conduct prescribed by the Broadcasting Council.

The language of the Act is in some cases couched in ambiguities that can be exploited by the authorities to whom the national broadcaster is answerable. For instance, what does it mean to ‘come out firmly on the side of Uganda on matters affecting [its] sovereignty and unity’? The country’s history is replete with many examples where ruling parties and military juntas have considered their own policies, pronouncements, and actions as being on ‘the side of Uganda’ while those of their critics and the opposition are considered unpatriotic and criminal.

UBC’s editorial policy is premised on eight editorial and professional principles, namely: objectivity, fairness, integrity, credibility, privacy, sensitivity, good taste and credibility of sources of information. It emerged during a round table discussion on public broadcasting that the policy was still in draft form and was yet to be ratified by either the UBC management or the board.129

---

In any case, the editorial guidelines generally resonate with some widely held principles of public broadcasting. One such principle is to ‘empower and inspire citizens, especially the poor and marginalised, in their quest to improve the quality of their lives’. Accordingly, UBC’s guidelines on education broadcasting state that, ‘All educational programmes should be informative, aim to promote a culture of learning and teaching and support the drive for life-long learning’; and that, ‘All educational programmes must aim at promoting the culture of learning and impart knowledge and skills that will help the audience achieve sustainable development’.

Another mandate of public broadcasting is to ‘promote and develop local content, among other means through adherence to minimum quotas’. In line with this principle, ‘UBC as a national broadcaster strives to have 70 per cent local programming on radio and television,’ according to the organisation’s editorial policy.

However, it is notable that the editorial policy is either silent or does not come out unequivocally on key principles of public broadcasting such as editorial independence (reporting on news and current affairs in a manner that is not influenced by political, commercial or other special interests), holding those in power accountable, reflecting as comprehensively as possible the range of opinions on matters of public interest, and promoting the principles of free speech and expression.

As far as credibility is concerned, the editorial guidelines direct that:

a) UBC as a national broadcaster must at all times ensure that all reports/programmes are credible.

b) UBC journalists should avoid situations that could cause reasonable apprehension that a journalist or the Corporation is biased or under the influence of a pressure group. On-air personnel, editors, presenters and reporters must avoid publicly identifying themselves in any way with partisan statements or actions on controversial matters.

The guideline on fairness states that:

UBC journalists must always present stories in a fair and balanced manner. When exceptional circumstances make it impossible to achieve fairness and balance, or when a damaging critique of an individual or institution is broadcast, those criticized should be given a right of reply.


131 Ibid.
However, in practice, as vindicated by the evidence already presented regarding the public broadcaster’s coverage of the 2006 elections, UBC hardly respects this guideline especially as far as the opposition is concerned. On numerous occasions, the president has criticised the opposition, describing their leaders in all manner of derogatory terms. Rarely do UBC stations give these leaders an opportunity to respond in the same stories.

The provisions related to how UBC journalists should handle sources of information are quite elaborate in detailing the factors or precautions that ought to be taken into account. These factors focus on: identifying and protecting sources; dealing with anonymous sources; covering grief, suffering, and children; reporting on violence, kidnapping, terrorism, hijacking, warnings, threats, hoaxes, and bomb alerts; reporting on HIV/AIDS, suicide, and victims of sexual offences; and use of embargoed information.

The UBC editorial policy entails a host of other specific guidelines for journalists. These relate to: stereotyping; the watershed (prime time); parliamentary, educational, and religious broadcasting; talk shows and phone-in programmes; covering campaigns and elections; reporting election results and opinion polls; using PR and library material; editing of material in general and interviews in particular; dealing with mistakes; covering designated national events; local content; screening programmes; promoting East African regional cooperation; and copyright issues.

UBC’s editorial guidelines on opinion poll reporting state that:

a) The name of the polling organisation must always be named when reporting opinion polls;

b) Great care must be taken when conducting online polling so as to avoid accusations of bias. Online polling where users are invited to register their opinion by clicking ‘yes’ and ‘no’ is vulnerable to manipulation.
Opinion polling is a relatively new phenomenon on the Ugandan political scene and poll results often cause jitters on all sides of the political divide. It could be argued that many journalists, politicians, and citizens are yet to develop a sophisticated appreciation of the methods, outcomes, purpose, and substance of opinion polls. It is common for reporters to report poll results out of context, while politicians tend to intuitively discount poll results when they do not favour their candidate or party. Citizens, on the other hand, tend to take poll results at face value.

According to UBC’s editorial guideline on religious broadcasting, ‘Contributors to religious programmes should not make claims of exceptional powers (for example healing) unless these can be substantiated.’ The guideline does not, however, say explicitly whose onus it is to authenticate the claims of such powers.

UBC has established standard operating procedures to deal with more predictable complaints. When a programme with graphic content is to be aired, viewers are warned at the outset and all through the programme with a scroll at the bottom of the screen. UBC’s editorial guidelines also require that programmes are edited as appropriate and screened to ensure that they do not cause controversy among the viewing public. However, such cautionary measures are applied in such a way as to maintain the flow and essence of the programme’s story. A music video with too much nudity would be blacklisted outright.132

In contrast, very few private broadcasters in Uganda have comprehensive editorial policy guidelines.133 NTV, which is bound by the editorial policy guidelines and objectives of its parent company NMG,134 is one of the notable exceptions. Some of the company’s ‘core’ editorial values include the following:

1) The Group’s news and information outlets must remain independent of vested interests or external influences. The Nation Media Group is publicly quoted, its structure and ownership known to all. Its news and information outlets are committed to being comprehensive and accurate in content and their commentaries fair and considered. Their constant objective is to ascertain and verify the truth of what they publish in so far as this can be established.

2) Veracity in reporting is an integral part of editorial policy and editors will only publish that which they believe to be true, fair and accurate. Every effort will be made to ascertain the factual accuracy of articles through, for instance, the mandatory use of tape-recorders or other recording devices.

3) All editorial content will be selected for its inherent news value and not to
appease or augment political, commercial or any other interests. In this respect, all advertisements and advertising-related material will be sign-posted as such.

The NMG editorial policy guidelines also specifically acknowledge the ‘responsibilities and influential power of a free press in a modern society’. Accordingly, NMG recognises that:

- Freedoms of Speech and of the Press are basic elements of a democracy. A free, independent Press is among the most important institutions in a democratic country.
- As a social institution, the Press discharges crucial duties by carrying information, debates and critical comments on society. The Press is, therefore, particularly responsible for allowing different views to be expressed.
- The Press protects the Freedom of Speech and of the Press and it cannot yield to any pressure from anybody or any institution that might want to prevent the free flow of information, free access to sources and open debate on any matter of importance to society.
- It is the duty of the Press to publish information on what goes on in society and to uncover and disclose matters that ought to be subjected to debate or criticism.
- It is the duty of the Press to protect individuals against injustices or neglect committed by public authorities and institutions, private concerns and others.

An official of Capital FM, which was chosen to represent private radio stations in this study, said they had a programme policy that catered for the editorial content of their programming. However, he declined to share any relevant documentation and could not commit to an interview either.

In their study of ten radio stations in northern Uganda, Peter Mwesige and others noted that ‘a majority of the stations studied do not have fully fledged editorial policies to guide newsroom operations and journalism practice. The few that do have flimsy documents that do not provide adequate detail on editorial principles and ethics.’

They cite the example of one private FM station whose editorial policy is a one-page document that contains the following:

---

135 Peter G. Mwesige and others ‘SWOT Analysis Report for 10 Radio Stations in the Acholi Sub Region’ prepared for the Northern Uganda Transition Initiative (NUTI), March 2009.
1) No article would go on air without the consent of the news editor.
2) All articles from fields should be submitted in time (an hour to new [sic] schedule time)
3) Reporters must not ask for money (Bribe) from the news sources to either run or kill the story.
4) All reporters must submit balanced articles.
5) No defamatory story will be run.
6) Continuous absenteeism from duty without notification is liable to punishment.
7) Staff should be in the work place by 8:00am.
NB: Please you should ensure that you abide by the above policy.

‘Although it is obviously better than nothing, such a policy arguably contributes very little to cultivating a professional culture in the newsroom,’ the study authors argue. ‘The principles outlined require a context that talks about the big picture. Similarly, ethical principles such as not taking bribes from news sources and “balance” require a rationale. Their value is not self-evident.’

Another station that they studied had the ‘News Guidelines’ below, which suffered from similar inadequacies:

- Search news from the internet and other reliable sources.
- Reporters should report news from the confirmed sources only.
- All the reporters must report news to the news editor for editing and airing.
- Most of the political stories must have sound bits [sic].
- All the news bulleting [sic] each time must be recorded for evidence.
- The news editor in case of no reporter at the station must respond for news searching [sic].
- News meeting done every day at 8:00 am to 8:30am.
- News bulleting [sic] should be on time.
- All the news readers must be in the news room 15 minutes before time for news.
- In case of any interruption, the news editor must be informed by programme manager.
- Review of the top stories for the whole week done once on Saturday evening at 9:00pm.

Mwesige and his colleagues argue thus:

For instance, why should reporters ‘report news from the confirmed sources
only? This presumably is about the importance that the radio station attaches to accuracy, but this is not self-evident. Similarly, why are political stories singled out to carry sound bites? This is probably a way of escaping the wrath of politicians and government officials in response to controversial stories. It could also be a way of minimizing partisan or skewed reporting. Whatever the case, the importance of using sound bites on political stories should be explained with sufficient context.  

But even where comprehensive editorial policies exist as in the case of UBC and NTV, adherence to them is another matter. Critics have argued for instance that UBC appears to have a selective reading of its own editorial policy when it comes to political news. John Bosco Mayiga, the National Coordinator of the Uganda Media Development Foundation, argues, for instance, that UBC ‘does not seem to be at liberty to represent the wide range of views on the political spectrum because of pressure from the government’. He adds that just like commercial broadcasters, UBC also appears to remain vulnerable to pressure from advertisers. In fact, the results of the Synovate audience research discussed in subsequent sections in this chapter show that less than half the respondents believed that UBC and private broadcasters were independent from advertisers.

3 Programme schedules

3.1 Radio

Red Channel radio was selected as a representative case of the national broadcaster for a programme content analysis based on one week’s sample. The results show that music shows were the single biggest consumer of air time, with a total of 44 hours and 15 minutes a week. Talk shows were the next most predominant programme genre, consuming ten hours a week. Issues discussed included current affairs, Christianity, politics and social affairs. News came in third with nine hours and 40 minutes. On average, Red Channel aired ten daily news bulletins of about 15 minutes each. Slightly more than half of the bulletins were in English while the other half were in local languages including Luo, Madi, and Kiswahili. This amounted to at least two-and-a-half hours of news per day, though this was especially so from Monday to Friday. On weekends the station tended to carry a far reduced menu of news that was restricted to

---

136 Ibid.
137 Personal Interview, Kampala.
138 The week of 1–7 June 2009 was sampled.
three bulletins spread out in the early morning, the mid-afternoon, and at night.

With seven hours and ten minutes a week, documentaries/features were the fourth most predominant genre on Red Channel. Women programmes came in fifth, consuming six hours and 45 minutes a week, followed by sports with six-and-a-half hours a week.

Current affairs followed with three hours and 45 minutes a week. The station’s flagship current affairs programme is News Hour, which airs from Monday to Friday from 20h15–21h00.

Red Channel’s schedule was also dotted with specialised one-hour programmes that were aired once a week on developmental/social topics and public affairs issues such as women/gender, children, health, education, the environment, and employment.

The fact that Red Channel broadcasts in eight languages on a typical day gives all local languages fair representation in terms of the programme count over an entire week. Although the tracking of the broadcasts did not capture all the different language programmes, there is a drawback to this multiplicity of languages. It leaves the station with an audience that is highly fragmented among so many language groups as it tries to offer something for everybody. The same problem applies to UBC’s other regionally-oriented stations – Blue Channel and Butebo.

Red Channel’s standard programme schedule that was in effect during the first week of June 2009 showed that, measured in terms of cumulative time allocation, English programmes had a greater share of air time. For example, the typical Monday schedule between 6h00 and 23h00 hours had about 38 individual programmes139 of which 22 programmes (57 per cent) were in English. The English programmes thus accounted for about nine hours or at least half of the regular transmission time between 6h00 and 23h00 (17 hours altogether). The average for the rest of the week was 19 English programmes or 50 per cent of all programmes. Although music shows tended to carry a mixture of foreign and Ugandan music in almost equal measure, Red Channel’s schedule consisted predominantly of local productions.

Private radio stations generally had fewer programme genres than the UBC stations. Capital FM is by and large a music station, but also airs arguably the longest running public affairs talk show, Capital Gang, which runs for two hours on Saturday from 10h00. The show deals with the topical issues of the week. Capital Doctor, a health education chat show, aired on Tuesday for an hour at 9h00 during the sampled week. Music is obviously Capital FM’s dominant format, followed by chat shows. The station’s flagship morning show, The Big Breakfast, takes a magazine format and runs Monday to Friday for four hours starting at 6h00. It offers a variety of banter, humour,

139 Based on a count of programme titles.
news, general information, gossip, sports updates, and occasional serious discussion of topical national and international issues.

Capital FM spends just about half the time (five hours a week) that Red Channel spends on news and slightly more than twice the time that UBC radio stations spend on music.

Red Channel clearly has more diversity in terms of programme genres and language of news. One would think that UBC Radio is, therefore, more likely to address the information and education needs of its audience across a broad spectrum of issues.

However, Steadman’s audience research revealed that private stations, including Capital FM, came out on top in terms of listenership. CBS 1 (FM 88.8) led the ratings with 19.8 per cent of the respondents saying they had listened to the station yesterday, followed by Capital FM with 17.4 per cent, CBS 2 (FM 88.2) with 16.6 per cent, and Radio West with 14 per cent. UBC (Red Channel, Blue Channel, and Butebo) came in fifth with 13 per cent. Community stations such as Radio Pacis (4 per cent), Radio Kagadi (2.4 per cent) and Mama FM (1.7 per cent) were at the bottom of the pack.

### Table 14: Level of listener agreement on different categories of radio content

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content index</th>
<th>Percentage saying strongly agree in relation to private radio broadcaster</th>
<th>Percentage saying strongly agree in relation to state/public radio broadcasters</th>
<th>Percentage saying strongly agree in relation to community radio broadcasters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Provide adequate local news that is relevant to my information needs</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide information that is educative</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promote local music</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide news from all parts of the country, including rural areas</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide adequate international news that is relevant to my information needs</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promote local drama</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflect local cultures and way of life</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of course these results should be interpreted with caution, given that local or regional stations and national broadcasters target different audiences. Local stations may have fewer listeners overall, but those who do tune in are highly dedicated listeners; which is not always the case with listeners of the stations that target national audiences such as UBC and Capital FM. It appears that radio listeners prefer to regularly listen both to a nationally oriented broadcaster and to a local station. This could apply especially to rural listeners who may wish to be informed about national stories and issues or events outside their localities.

Otherwise, listeners also rated private radio broadcasters better than UBC stations in covering various types of content, including entertainment, education, health and wellbeing, local politics, international politics, local sports, national politics, human rights and development. They also rated private radio broadcasters better on provision of local and diverse news, educative information, international news, and the promotion of local music and drama. As Table 14 shows, the only category where UBC radio had the edge over private broadcasters was on reflecting local culture and way of life.

3.2 Television

In general, UBC TV’s programmes were distributed among a wide cross-section of genres. Beyond news and current affairs, the station carried at least one programme every week in each of the other major genres: talk shows (e.g. Policy Matters), faith (Islamic Hour), culture/media/arts (The Art and Culture of Uganda), drama/comedy series (The Gardner’s Daughter), women (Gender Agenda), sports (African Soccer), and music shows (Da Beat).

Content analysis of UBC TV programmes in the first week of June 2009 revealed that news consumed the largest amount of time (25 hours and 20 minutes a week).

In the week sampled, UBC TV aired four major daily news bulletins in the early morning (English), in the mid-afternoon (English), in the evening (Swahili/Luganda), and at night (English). This was about one-and-a-half hours of news every day and was the trend for the station. The time between 00h30–6h00 was usually filled with BBC and Deutsche Welle news and current affairs programmes. Talk shows (on topical political and social issues) followed with 14 hours a week. Music shows and children’s programmes came in third on UBC TV, each taking up ten hours a week.

Current affairs followed with nine hours and 50 minutes a week. Documentaries/features took up nine hours and 20 minutes a week. The station’s current affairs programming devotes a substantial amount of time to live broadcasts of parliamentary proceedings from Tuesday to Thursday, taking up about two hours each day when the legislature is in session.
Movies took up seven hours and 45 minutes each week, chat shows (mainly on human interest and lifestyle issues) six hours and 50 minutes, faith-based programmes six hours and 25 minutes, and drama/comedy/serials four hours and 45 minutes.

Measured by the number of individual programmes UBC carried over the sampled week, the majority of programmes were either locally produced or were a mix of local and foreign productions. However, foreign productions accounted for a lot more time than did locally produced programmes. For instance, in a 24-hour cycle, BBC programmes alone consumed a quarter of UBC’s time although they run during the six-hour slot after mid-night. Also, nearly all the documentaries/features featured on UBC were foreign. UBC managing director Mugasa Musinguzi has in the past conceded that ‘in terms of local programming, there is still room for improvement’.¹⁴⁰ UBC managers blamed the disproportionate reliance on foreign productions on lack of equipment, insufficient editorial staff, and financial resources.

UBC managers claim that the station could not produce local documentaries when the few cameras available were required for the studio and news teams. As a result, these researchers concluded, the bulk of UBC TV’s local productions were news, music and talk shows, with hardly any productions on developmental issues.¹⁴¹

English, Luganda, and Swahili were UBC TV’s principal languages, in that order. The station aired more than twice as many programmes in English as it did in Luganda and Swahili combined.

Private television stations are not faring any better as English remains the predominant language of programming while foreign productions also outnumber locally produced programmes. In the week sampled at the end of May 2009, NTV’s programming was predominantly entertainment-based, with most of the content consisting of foreign productions including long hours of foreign news. Very little of this content qualifies as public interest programmes, though NTV’s prime time news show stands out for its breadth, depth, and focus on genuinely Ugandan public and social affairs.

From Monday through Sunday during the sampled week, the 00h10–10h00 slot was used for Al Jazeera news. The morning hours starting at 10h00 were filled with entertainment fare such as soap operas (e.g. *Ugly Betty*, *Two Sides of Ana*, and *El Cuerpo Del Deseo*) until 13h00 when the news, *NTV At One*, came on. Afternoons and evenings were usually a mix of sitcoms (e.g. *That’s So Raven*), game shows (*Zain Africa Challenge*), dramas (*Criminal Minds*), reality shows (*Amazing Race*), and music shows (*The Beat* and *Koona Ne NTV*). The flagship prime time news programmes, *NTV*

¹⁴¹ Ibid., p.3.
Tonight and NTV Weekend, were aired at 21h00. The station aired its Luganda news bulletin, NTV Akawungzezi, at 19h00.

NTV’s Thursday talk show, On the Spot, was their main current affairs programme on which public figures and other personalities as well as representatives of institutions in the news were hosted to debate topical public issues.

Overall, news took up the biggest amount of time on NTV (53 hours a week: with local news just 13 hours and 25 minutes and the rest foreign news, mainly from Al-Jazeera), followed by drama/comedy/serials (24 hours a week) and music shows (seven hours).

The results of the Steadman audience research suggest that UBC TV competed more favourably with the private stations. WBS TV had the highest percentage of respondents (20.8 per cent) saying they had watched yesterday, followed by UBC TV (19.1 per cent) and NTV (16.5 per cent). GTV was fourth with 9.1 per cent followed by DSTV (7.9 per cent) and NBS (5.1 per cent). Part of UBC’s competitiveness arises from the fact that it still has the widest reach of all TV stations in the country. In fact, earlier ratings by the Steadman Group had showed that outside Kampala and Greater Kampala, where WBS was the leader, UBC TV led in all other regions of the country.

Analysis of the demographic profiles of the audiences (see Table 15) shows that WBS and UBC TV had the widest reach across the key demographic dimensions of locale, gender, and age. WBS TV, in particular, was the viewers’ favourite channel across all the demographics.

Table 15: Dominant characteristics of regular TV viewers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Station</th>
<th>Locale</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>UBC</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>35–50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WBS</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>31–50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DSTV</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>18–35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NTV</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Male/female</td>
<td>18–25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


142 These percentages are based on the total sample of 1,210. Although the percentages increase, the order of the ratings remains the same when the percentages are based on those who have ever watched TV (774). WBS (32.6 per cent), UBC (29.9 per cent), NTV (25.7 per cent), GTV (14.3 per cent), DSTV (12.4 per cent) and NBS (8 per cent).

143 GTV has since shut down.

144 See Peter G. Mwesige & David Ouma Balikowa, ‘A Long Way to Go’: A Study of the Uganda Broadcasting Corporation Evaluated Against the Public Broadcasting Model, November 2007, p.3.
Slightly more than a quarter of TV viewers (27 per cent) selected WBS as their favourite channel followed by DSTV (18 per cent), UBC (17 per cent), and NTV (8 per cent). All the smaller networks, which had very low viewer numbers, were mentioned as ‘favourite’ stations by just about 1 per cent of viewers. Eleven per cent of respondents did not mention a favourite channel.

Respondents indicated their level of satisfaction with TV broadcasters based on a scale of 1 (very dissatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied). NTV got the highest mean score of 3.6. WBS and DSTV followed closely with a mean score of 3.4. UBC TV scored a low 2.9.

Local programming seemed to be attracting viewers and broadcasters appeared to be responding, albeit slowly, with more local content. Slightly over one-fifth of viewers (21 per cent) said local news was their favourite programme, making it the most important type of TV programme for the majority of viewers. Moreover, when viewers were asked which types of programmes they wanted to see more of on television, local news (47 per cent) carried the day followed by social talk shows (32 per cent), African sports (27 per cent), and game shows (23 per cent).

The survey results also suggest that viewers rated UBC TV better than private broadcasters on the provision of local news. As Table 16 shows, the national broadcaster was about level with the private broadcasters on most of the other content categories.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content index</th>
<th>Percentage saying strongly agree in relation to private TV broadcasters</th>
<th>Percentage saying strongly agree in relation to state/public TV broadcasters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Provide adequate local news that is relevant to my information needs</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide information that is educative</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promote local music</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide news from all parts of the country, including rural areas</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide adequate international news that is relevant to my information needs</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promote local drama</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflect local cultures and way of life</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


145 At the time of the survey, 14 per cent of viewers nominated GTV as their favourite channel.
4 News and current affairs programmes

UBC TV dedicates about three hours per day to locally produced news on weekdays: 6h00–7h00 Breakfast News; 13h00–13h30 UBC Today; 18h45–19h00 News in Kiswahili 19h00–19h30 News in Luganda; and 21h00–21h50 UBC Tonight. On weekends the station broadcasts about one and a half hours of locally produced news per day. In total UBC TV dedicates about 18 hours minutes per week to locally produced news.

News bulletins aired on UBC Radio and UBC TV over one week\textsuperscript{146} were analysed to determine whether there was a discernible pattern in the selection and presentation of news items. Data was taken from the first and second weeks of June 2009 following the president’s state of the nation address and reading of the national budget by the finance minister – stories that would facilitate comparison as they were covered extensively by the media across the board.

The president is a central actor in stories of national significance such as the national budget. This was reflected in the prominence such stories received. Notably, stories in which the president was involved were invariably used as the lead items in UBC’s news bulletins.

The analysis of UBC news bulletins shows that overall, UBC’s stories during the period reviewed dealt with a diverse range of subjects and featured a variety of sources. The coverage of one particular national event – Heroes’ Day (10 June) – suggested that UBC was capable of dispensing with hierarchy as an automatic criterion for judging the worth of a story. Heroes’ Day carries special symbolism for the country as it is the day when the president traditionally awards medals to newly decorated national heroes – individuals selected for their contributions to the guerrilla struggle that brought the government to power in 1986 and for other national political accomplishments. Atypically, this story was third on UBC TV’s prime time news line-up for the day.

In the weeks sampled, the lead stories on various days dealt with stories that were newsworthy in their own right. There were lead items on conflict over land, on a dispute about the crowning of a king, and on an anti-gay Christian crusade.

On the face of it UBC TV has not shied away from reporting controversial subjects. However, qualitative content analysis also suggests that compared to private broadcasters, both UBC TV and UBC Radio were more likely to carry straight event-based news that lacked depth, analysis and context. Stories on the national broadcaster rarely interrogated pronouncements by public officials. They also showed little attempt at enterprise and investigative reporting.

During the sampled week, NTV devoted a total of about 120 minutes to local news\textsuperscript{146}

\textsuperscript{146} From 4 to 10 June 2009.
per day from Monday to Friday: 20 minutes of NTV at One (13h00); 30 minutes of NTV Akawungeezi (19h00); 45 minutes of NTV Tonight (21h00); and 20 minutes of NTV Late Night (23h00). Factoring in the time given over to commercials, actual time spent on news content boiled down to an average of 90 minutes per day. On Saturday and Sunday of the sampled week, there were 25 minutes of NTV at One (13h00); 30 minutes of NTV Akawungeezi (19h00); and 30 minutes of NTV Weekend Edition (21h00).

Capital FM, on the other hand, runs short news bulletins at the top of the hour, which last five minutes on average.

News programmes on both stations were wide-ranging, typically segmented as national, international, business, and sports news. Government officials, MPs, and representatives of the corporate/business sector were the most commonly used sources on NTV and Capital FM (Capital News Beat).

But both UBC and private broadcasters generally carried little locally produced current affairs programming. News Hour on UBC Radio was one of the exceptions. Private radio stations did not have such programmes beyond news bulletins and talk shows. But private television stations have tried to introduce some local current affairs programming.

An exploratory analysis of news sources and sound bites on UBC TV showed that public officials and figures were the most frequently cited sources. Other studies confirm this and have shown that UBC TV still privileges the president and his cabinet over many other potential news makers.147 In a content analysis of UBC TV news in September 2007, for instance, it was found that President Museveni was the main news maker in the lead stories for six days in the first week of the month. The researchers also found that the president appeared in 12 of the top 21 ‘top stories’ that week. ‘Stories involving the President were also generally significantly longer than other stories on UBC Tonight,’ they wrote. ‘In several cases, press releases from State House were hardly changed, except for minor editing for style.’148

Moreover, although there is evidence that UBC TV is more likely to have opposition figures as sources compared to its predecessor, UTV, critics argue that the national broadcaster remains glaringly biased in favour of the ruling party during election campaign periods. As cited earlier, in the survey of election coverage between January and 10 February, 2006, the Democracy Monitoring Group found that UBC TV dedicated 62 per cent of its election coverage to incumbent Museveni, 12 per cent to major challenger Kiiza Besigye of the FDC, while the other three candidates shared the remaining 26 per cent of coverage.149 It was noted in the final report that both

147 See Peter G. Mwesige & David Ouma Balikowa, A Long Way to Go: A Study of the Uganda Broadcasting Corporation Evaluated Against the Public Broadcasting Model, November 2007.
148 Ibid., p. 5.
UBC TV and UBC Radio had contravened sections of the Presidential Elections Act, 2005 and the Electronic Media Act, which enjoined public media to provide equal access, treatment and coverage for all presidential candidates.

Synovate’s audience research findings reported in Table 17 indicate that radio listeners tended to rate private stations more highly than they rated UBC Radio on questions of independence, impartiality, accuracy and holding those in power accountable.

Table 17: Listener perceptions on independence, impartiality and accuracy of radio broadcasters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Index</th>
<th>Percentage saying strongly or somewhat agree in relation to private radio broadcasters</th>
<th>Percentage saying strongly or somewhat agree in relation to state/public radio broadcasters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Provide a platform for information and debate on contending viewpoints on public issues</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are independent from the government</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are independent of advertisers</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide programming that holds those in power accountable to the public</td>
<td>45</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide accurate information that I believe and trust</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are impartial in news and current affairs</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflect local cultures and way of life</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Similarly, the results reported in Table 18 show that television viewers tended to rate private television stations more highly than they rated UBC TV on questions of independence, impartiality, accuracy and holding those in power accountable. There was only one notable exception where UBC was rated more highly – ‘providing a platform for information and debate on contending viewpoints on public issues’.
Table 18: Viewer perceptions on independence, impartiality and accuracy of television broadcasters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Index</th>
<th>Percentage saying strongly or somewhat agree in relation to private TV broadcasters</th>
<th>Percentage saying strongly or somewhat agree in relation to state/public TV broadcasters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Provide a platform for information and debate on contending viewpoints on public issues</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are independent from the government</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are independent from advertisers</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide programming that holds those in power accountable to the public</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide accurate information that I believe and trust</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are impartial in news and current affairs</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


5 The talk show phenomenon

Public affairs talk shows that discuss controversial issues from politics to health and sex education have become a major feature of broadcast, especially radio, programming in Uganda. Some of the most popular talk shows over the years include Capital Radio’s Capital Gang, CBS’s Palimenti Yaffe (Our Parliament), Radio One’s Spectrum, KFM’s Andrew Mwenda Live, (now the Hot Seat, after Mwenda left the station) and Radio Simba’s Olutindo. A host of indigenous language shows in the countryside, such as Voice of Tooro’s Nokireb’ota, Radio West’s Katuhurane, and Mega FM’s Mega Forum have made political talk shows a nationwide phenomenon. Some of these shows have regular panellists while others have studio guests. Both formats take call-ins from the public.

Quite unique to Uganda are open-air talk shows popularly known as ebimeeza150 (round tables). Diverse groups of people (usually self-selected) gather at public venues every weekend and debate major issues of the day live on air. In the beginning most of the ebimeeza were conducted in bars. They are presided over by a host/moderator who is referred to as ‘chairman’. Those who are interested in contributing to the day’s

150 Ebimeeza is the Luganda plural for ekimeeza.
discussion register before the programme starts. The shows sometimes have special guests who are invited to make the opening contribution(s), and are allowed more time than the rest of the participants. These guests often include ‘authoritative’ figures from government, the opposition, and civil society.

The ebimeeza were spurred by the success of the Ekimeeza, an informal discussion group at Club Obliggato in Kampala that caught the eye of the managing director of Radio One. The idea was copied by CBS, which started Gakyali Mabaga at Mambo Bado, a popular bar in the city outskirts, and later on by Simba FM, which started Simbawo Akati, both broadcast in Luganda. As with the call-in shows, the advent of local language open-air talk shows increased the popularity of this format. Radio Two, the Luganda language sister station of Radio One, came up with Saba Saba. UBC Television and UBC’s Star FM then also started their own ekimeeza which was conducted in a subway pub every Saturday afternoon.

Rural radio stations also quickly jumped onto the ebimeeza bandwagon. In the war-ravaged Gulu district, Mega FM started Kabake (Meeting Point), while Buddu FM in the central district of Masaka came up with Muteseza Mmeeme (From the Heart). Unlike other ebimeeza that were broadcast from the same venue every weekend, Muteseza Mmeeme’s producers took the programme to different parts of the rural district every weekend. They also allowed the community to identify in advance the issues to talk about.

Their supporters argue that the ebimeeza afford more ordinary people opportunities to participate in public discourse. But the government soon became uncomfortable with the format and in December 2002 it banned them. Mr Basoga Nsadhu, then the minister of information, said radio station licences did not provide for outdoor broadcasting and, therefore, it was illegal for the talk shows to be conducted outside the studios. However, the opposition and critics argued that the government was trying to stifle dissent. Opposition activists who appeared regularly on the ebimeeza drew up a petition signed by 6,000 people opposing the ban while the Uganda Law Society also wrote to the minister saying the ban was illegal and unconstitutional. The government backed down, ‘clarifying’ that it had not banned the ebimeeza, but only streamlined their operations so that they are conducted in the studios.

In the wake of the riots in September 2009 following the standoff between the Buganda Kingdom and the central government, the Broadcasting Council announced that it had indefinitely suspended the broadcast of the ebimeeza saying the radio stations that aired them were violating the Electronic Media Act, which requires

152 Ibid.
an applicant for a radio station licence to show, among others, evidence of ‘proof of existence of adequate technical facilities’ and ‘location of station and geographical area to which the broadcast is made’. According to the regulator, the law did not grant the radio stations permission for outdoor broadcasting.

The Broadcasting Council chairman Godfrey Mutabazi said: ‘It is clearly emerging that ebimeeza programmes are increasingly becoming difficult to manage due to the inability of radio stations to manage these programmes adequately.’ He added:

These ebimeeza programmes are usually live broadcasts made in a hall and not in a studio. The facilities where the broadcast for these programmes are made are therefore inadequate. The presenters and producers are unable to control the crowd as it would be the case in a studio environment.

The Broadcasting Council therefore instructed all radio stations to suspend the broadcast of ebimeeza programmes ‘until an adequate legal and technical framework has been provided for them. Therefore, any radio heard airing them will be dealt with’.153

Their defenders accused the Broadcasting Council and the government of stifling freedom of expression and denying ordinary people an opportunity to express themselves. They accused the government of creating ‘a culture of fear and self censorship’.

6 Feedback and complaints procedures at UBC

According to the then acting TV manager at UBC, Mr Mark Walungama,155 the Corporation has procedures in place to encourage, facilitate, and deal with complaints or suggestions from the audience. Feedback is received via SMS, through various studio phone lines, via the official UBC website, and by postal mail.

Many of the complaints that UBC receives were programme-based; therefore the programme producer usually gives the immediate response. If a complaint affects UBC as a whole, it would be discussed in detail during the weekly departmental meeting. The sources of the complaints that UBC TV, in particular, receives are varied. Some complaints came from government itself, such as about graphic pictures, nudity, sexually explicit images, and the airing of too few government programmes.

154 Ibid.
155 Personal interview, 29 July 2009.
Much of the feedback UBC TV received was in form of suggestions, for example, on the best time to air certain programmes like those with adult content. Viewer inquiries about various programmes also gave UBC feedback about audience needs. The nature and volume of complaints varied from year to year. The complaints were documented too, though the record would not be released to the researcher for review.

UBC reportedly did invest in audience research to determine viewers’ content preferences through outsourced and in-house surveys. Details, however, were not available to the researchers for examination.

7 Conclusions and recommendations

In attempting to reach the widest possible audience nationally, UBC has ended up with radio stations serving audiences that are highly fragmented by language. Red Channel, Blue Channel and Butebo target audiences with at least half a dozen primary languages. This, for instance, necessitates broadcasting the same news several times over in short bulletins to satisfy the different language speakers; yet such production and transmission time could have been devoted to longer and in-depth current affairs shows. The challenge is that limiting the number of languages would violate UBC’s universal access mandate.

Although UBC TV covers more of the country than any of its competitors, the information needs of the country are too diverse to be satisfied through one channel. Besides, the station is far too centralised to be able to respond to the diverse interests of this audience.

Both UBC and private broadcasters still fall short on local productions, current affairs and public interest programmes. Foreign productions (in English) remain dominant across most genres.

Although UBC and some private broadcasters have fairly comprehensive editorial policies or guidelines, their programming does not always reflect the professional and ethical responsibilities and standards to which they have committed themselves. In particular, UBC still remains vulnerable to political pressure and old habits carried over from its legacy as a state broadcaster, which make it difficult for the national broadcaster to offer a platform for information and public debate on contending viewpoints, to remain impartial, and to hold those in power accountable. The public broadcaster also continues to face both political and commercial pressures that compromise the integrity of its journalism and programming.
Recommendations

Need for localisation

- UBC should adopt a policy that on top of reaching national and regional audiences also focuses on serving the needs of local audiences. This could be through a network of smaller FM stations that are less encumbered by the need to serve the needs of multiple language audiences at the same time.
- UBC should be decentralised through a network of regional stations targeting the major geopolitical divisions of the country.

Editorial policy

- The draft UBC editorial policy and guidelines should be strengthened so that they come out unequivocally on key principles of public broadcasting and good journalism.
- Parliament should amend the UBC Act to guarantee the editorial independence of the national broadcaster, which should follow its editorial policy and not the dictates of the ruling party or government of the day.

Funding for local and public interest programming

- The government should increase the funding of UBC to enable the broadcaster to produce more local programmes that can satisfy the information needs of its diverse audiences.
- The government should establish a public interest programming fund to be managed by an independent board that reports to Parliament for purposes of financing good public interest programming.

Monitoring performance

- The broadcasting regulator should consider introducing quota requirements for local content.
- Media scholars and civil society, especially media advocacy organisations, should establish mechanisms of regularly monitoring the programming of both UBC and private broadcasters so that information about important benchmarks such as local production is available for regulators and Parliament to exert pressure on the broadcasters to improve their offerings.