

**RADIO AND INTERNET AUDIENCES PERSPECTIVES ON KNOWLEDGE GAP THEORY: A  
SURVEY FROM SABON TASHA AREA OF KADUNA STATE**

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**Abstract**

The Knowledge Gap Theory (KGT) posits that the flow of information increases the knowledge divide between high and low socioeconomic status (SES) groups. This study re-evaluates KGT within the context of media convergence, specifically analyzing the co-existence of traditional radio and the modern Internet among audiences in the Sabon Tasha Area of Kaduna State. Employing a mixed-methods approach utilizing survey and in-depth interview. The study aimed to determine the relative influence of Internet access, radio dependence, and digital literacy on public affairs knowledge acquisition. Findings indicate a complex relationship: The Internet's unparalleled information richness accelerates learning for high-SES, digitally literate audiences. Simultaneously, high access costs and skills barriers create a significant second-level digital divide. Conversely, radio maintains a crucial gap-mitigating function, providing low-cost, readily accessible local knowledge that supports the information needs of lower-SES groups. Ultimately, while the Internet introduces new disparity, radio's sustained relevance is critical for promoting information equity in the community. Considering the far reaching implications of these findings, it is recommended that targeted subsidies or zero-rated data plans for public affairs and educational websites while radio stations should proactively integrate digital literacy promotion into programming to significantly enhance knowledge acquisition.

**Keyword:** Audience Perspective, Knowledge Gap Theory, Media Literacy, Public Affairs Information, Socio-Economic Status

**Background to the Study**

The Knowledge Gap Theory (KGT), first proposed by Tichenor, Donohue, and Olien (1970), asserts that as mass media information increases, high-SES groups acquire knowledge faster than low-SES groups, widening the knowledge gap. Modern media convergence, combining traditional (radio, television) and digital media (Internet, social media), complicates

this dynamic by emphasizing access, digital literacy, and content use. In developing contexts, radio remains a low-cost, trusted medium that effectively mitigates knowledge gaps (Akintunde & Ganiyu, 2020; Emmanuel, 2017). Studies across Europe, Asia, and Africa show that while Internet access grows, disparities persist due to digital literacy, SES, and sophisticated content use (Connect Europe, 2025; Li, Chen, & Zhao,

2021; Usman, Ojo, & Musa, 2024). In Nigeria, particularly in Sabon Tasha, radio is widely accessible and literacy-independent, whereas Internet use is constrained by high costs, infrastructure, and skills gaps (Adebayo, Olatunji, & Okoro, 2021; Mukama & Kafuko, 2020; Umukoro, 2019). This dual-media environment provides an ideal context to assess whether the Internet narrows or exacerbates traditional knowledge gaps .

### **Statement of the Problem**

Despite increased Internet penetration, knowledge disparities persist due to SES, infrastructure, and digital literacy (Freeman, Park, & Middleton, 2020; Robinson, Cotten, Quan-Haase, Mesch, Chen, & Stern, 2015; Chikwe, Dagunduro, Ajuwon, & Ediae, 2024). It remains unclear whether radio offsets inequalities introduced by the Internet or whether high-information-density digital media deepens the gap. Local empirical evidence examining the interaction of SES, dual media use, and knowledge acquisition in Nigerian communities like Sabon Tasha is limited (Oni, 2018; Kim & Chen 2023).

### **Research Questions**

This study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the dominant primary source of public affairs information (Radio or Internet) among different socio-economic status segments in Sabon Tasha?
2. Is there a significant relationship between the level of education/income and the frequency of exposure to public affairs information through Radio and Internet platforms?
3. What are the differences in knowledge levels regarding local and complex public affairs issues between high-SES and low-SES segments exposed to Radio compared to those exposed to the Internet?

4. To what extent does media literacy moderate the relationship between media exposure and knowledge acquisition among the audience segments?

5. What are the implications of the Knowledge Gap phenomenon for development communication and policy-making in Kaduna State?

### **Scope of the Study**

This study examines adult residents' perspectives on radio and Internet use in relation to KGT in Sabon Tasha, Kaduna State, focusing on how dual media consumption affects knowledge acquisition across socioeconomic groups.

### **Review of Literature**

**Knowledge Gap Theory in the Digital Age**  
KGT, first proposed by Tichenor, Donohue, & Olien (1970), posits that as mass media information increases in a social system, higher socioeconomic status (SES) groups tend to acquire knowledge faster than lower-SES groups, thereby widening knowledge disparities. Originally developed in the context of traditional media, KGT has evolved in the digital age, where the Internet and social media complement rather than replace conventional channels (Adelakun, Ademuyiwa, & Oyebo 2021). High-SES users tend to benefit disproportionately due to greater education, superior information processing, and communication skills (Shehata, 2020).

Digital platforms introduce new mechanisms for inequality, such as algorithmic curation, filter bubbles, and information overload, which can polarize exposure based on prior knowledge and interests (Hong, 2023; Papp, 2024; Metzler, & Garcia, 2024). While theoretically the Internet provides unlimited access to information (Odukamaiya, 2021), effective knowledge acquisition depends on users' skills, including digital literacy and algorithmic literacy, rather than mere access.

This aligns with the notion of the second-level digital divide, where disparities emerge from differential use of technology, not simply its availability (Hadjar & Naumann, 2025).

### **Radio and Knowledge Acquisition in a Dual-Media System**

Despite rapid digital adoption, radio remains a critical medium in developing contexts, maintaining a gap-mitigating role (Nugroho, 2024; Adebayo, Olatunji, & Okoro, 2021). Radio is widely accessible, low-cost, and minimally literacy-dependent, allowing low-SES groups to obtain essential information on local and public affairs (Odukamaiya, 2021). Its content is localized, trustworthy, and universally distributed, contrasting with the skill-dependent, personalized nature of the Internet. In many Sub-Saharan African contexts, radio is a primary source for life-saving, politically relevant, or socially important information, reinforcing its role as a stabilizing force in reducing knowledge gaps (Akintunde & Ganiyu, 2020).

The coexistence of radio and the Internet forms a dual-media system, where radio offsets the inequalities introduced by Internet-based platforms. While high-SES users leverage both traditional and digital media to maximize knowledge acquisition, low-SES users rely on radio for accessible, actionable content. This dynamic underscores the continued relevance of traditional media in bridging gaps created by digital information flows.

### **The Internet and the Second-Level Digital Divide**

The Internet's role in knowledge acquisition is complex. Beyond first-level access, the second-level digital divide highlights inequalities in usage, skills, and benefits derived from online platforms (Umukoro, 2019; van Deursen & Helsper, 2022). Social media may enhance knowledge for high-SES

users but may not close the gap for low-SES users, who often engage passively or lack digital literacy (Adelakun, Ademuyiwa, & Oyebo, 2021; Ren, Zhu, & Yang, 2022). Therefore, the knowledge gap in the digital age is less about exposure and more about differential cognitive and technical capacities to exploit digital media opportunities.

### **Empirical Review**

Empirical evidence reinforces KGT across contexts. Bighash and Qamarzadeh (2021) confirm that knowledge growth disproportionately favors high-SES groups, reinforcing inequalities. Shehata (2020) demonstrated in Sweden that social media enhance political knowledge mainly for high-SES users, while low-SES users relying solely on social media fail to close the gap. Adelabu and Ayo-Obiremi (2020) highlight limited audience participation in Nigerian online news, due to traditional media ownership structures, showing that structural constraints compound digital inequalities. Akpotu (2019) emphasizes the iterative nature of knowledge gaps, where identifying gaps in existing knowledge supports new theory building and continued knowledge stratification. In Nigeria, radio continues to play a vital role in bridging knowledge disparities. Musa and Hassan (2025) report that residents in Kaduna State perceive radio as accessible for urban renewal information. Eze and Haruna (2024) found that women adopt agricultural innovations more readily through radio due to higher listenership. Ojo (2024) demonstrates radio's effectiveness in public campaigns against corruption, highlighting its role as an agent of social change. These studies collectively indicate that, where digital access and literacy are uneven, radio provides a reliable, low-cost channel for knowledge acquisition, particularly for low-SES populations. The literature confirms that KGT remains relevant in the digital era, with the Internet

introducing new forms of knowledge inequality through skill- and usage-based divides. Simultaneously, radio retains its gap-mitigating role, ensuring access to essential information for low-SES groups. In dual-media environments like Nigeria, understanding the interplay between traditional and digital media is essential for designing equitable communication strategies and closing knowledge gaps.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is anchored on KGT and the Digital Divide Theory, which together explain how socioeconomic status and media use shape patterns of knowledge acquisition in a converged media environment.

The Knowledge Gap Theory was propounded by Tichenor, Donohue, and Olien (1970). The central thesis of the theory is that as information flow through mass media increases, individuals with higher socioeconomic status (SES)—particularly those with higher education and income—acquire information more rapidly than lower-SES groups, resulting in widening knowledge disparities. The relevance of KGT to this study lies in its capacity to explain differential knowledge outcomes among radio and Internet users in Sabon Tasha, where both media coexist as major sources of public affairs information. The study applies KGT to examine whether the Internet narrows or intensifies existing knowledge gaps when compared with radio. Previous studies have successfully applied KGT in digital contexts, including Shehata (2020) and Li, Chen, and Zhao (2021), who found that new media often amplify knowledge advantages among high-SES users. A key strength of KGT is its enduring explanatory power across media systems; however, its weakness lies in its limited consideration of digital skills and technological barriers.

To address this limitation, the study integrates the Digital Divide Theory, which explains inequalities in access to and effective use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). The theory has evolved to include the second-level digital divide, focusing on skills and usage (Van Dijk, 2013). Its strength lies in explaining how cost, infrastructure, and digital literacy influence Internet use, though it pays less attention to traditional media roles. Together, these theories provide a comprehensive framework for analysing knowledge inequality in Sabon Tasha.

### **Research Methodology**

The study employed a descriptive survey design, suitable for collecting data from a large sample to examine the distribution, relationships, and prevalence of variables—socioeconomic status (SES), media exposure, and knowledge acquisition—within the natural context of Sabon Tasha, Kaduna State. The population consisted of all adult residents (18+) who consume either radio or Internet news, estimated at approximately 150,000 based on the 2006 census and projected growth.

A simple random sampling technique was applied, and the Taro Yamane formula determined a sample size of 399 respondents, ensuring adequate statistical power and generalizability. Data were collected using structured questionnaires and in-depth interviews. Questionnaire responses were analyzed using frequency counts, percentages, means, and standard deviations to assess adoption levels and challenges, while interview data were transcribed verbatim and analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns and insights.

**Data Presentation and Analysis**

**Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Frequency (n)</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
<b>Gender</b>	Male	215	54.0
	Female	184	46.0
<b>Age (Years)</b>	18-25	70	17.5
	26-35	130	32.6
	36-45	105	26.3
	46 and above	94	23.6
<b>Highest Educational Qualification</b>	Tertiary Education	140	35.1
	Secondary School	161	40.4
	Primary School	65	16.3
	No formal education	33	8.3
<b>Monthly Income (Naira)</b>	Above N200,000	100	25.0
	N101,000 - N200,000	150	37.6
	N50,000 - N100,000	90	22.5
	Below N50,000	59	14.8
		<b>399</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Source: field survey 2025**

Table 1 shows that respondents are fairly gender-balanced (54% male, 46% female) and predominantly young adults aged 26–45 years. Most have at least secondary (40.4%) or tertiary education (35.1%). Income varies, with 37.6% earning ₦101,000–₦200,000 and 14.8% below ₦50,000, reflecting a socioeconomically diverse sample.

**Table 2: Scores on Dominant Primary Source (n=399)**

Access Status	Frequency (N=399)	Percentage (%)
<b>Internet Access</b>		
Daily Access	309	77.44%
Weekly Access	45	11.28%
Monthly Access	20	5.01%
No Access/Rarely	25	6.27%
<b>Total</b>	<b>399</b>	<b>100.00%</b>
<b>Radio Access</b>		
Daily Access	364	91.23%
Weekly Access	25	6.27%
Monthly Access	5	1.25%
No Access/Rarely	5	1.25%
<b>Total</b>	<b>399</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

Source: field survey 2025

Table 2 shows that both the Internet (77.44%) and radio (91.23%) are widely accessed, with radio having a higher penetration. Most respondents access radio daily, while fewer use the Internet daily. Despite substantial Internet use, radio remains the most consistently accessed medium, highlighting its ongoing relevance in information dissemination.

**Table 3: Ranking of Frequency to Public Affairs for Education/Income Level (n=399)**

Information-Seeking Behaviour	Mean ( $\bar{x}$ )	Standard Deviation (SD)	Decision
Use search engines to verify news.	4.15	0.88	High
Visit official government/NGO websites.	3.62	1.05	High
Follow news on social media platforms.	4.49	0.67	Very High
Cross-reference internet news with radio reports.	2.85	1.12	Low
Participate in online discussions/forums about news.	3.31	1.21	Moderate

Source: field survey 2025

Table 3 shows that digitally oriented information-seeking behaviors are prevalent, with the highest engagement in following news on social media ( $\bar{x} = 4.49$ ). Other behaviors like using search engines ( $\bar{x} = 4.15$ ) and visiting official websites ( $\bar{x} = 3.62$ ) also show high adoption. However, cross-referencing Internet news with radio reports ( $\bar{x} = 2.85$ ) is less common, indicating limited integration of both media.

**Table 4: The Differences in Knowledge Levels Regarding Local and Complex Public Affairs Issues (n=399)**

SES Group	Frequent Internet Use	Moderate Internet Use	Rare Internet Use	Total
<b>High SES (N=199)</b>	134 (67.34%)	40 (20.10%)	25 (12.56%)	199
<b>Low SES (N=200)</b>	85 (42.50%)	60 (30.00%)	55 (27.50%)	200
<b>Total</b>	<b>219</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>399</b>

Source: field survey 2025

Table 4 highlights significant socioeconomic differences in Internet use for public affairs. A higher proportion of high SES respondents (67.34%) use the Internet frequently, compared to 42.50% of low SES respondents. Rare Internet use is more common among low SES groups (27.50%), indicating that SES influences the intensity of Internet access.

**Table 5: Extent of Moderation of the Relationship Between Media Exposure and Knowledge Acquisition (n=399)**

SES Group	High Knowledge Perception	Moderate Knowledge Perception	Low Knowledge Perception	Total
<b>High SES (N=199)</b>	104 (52.26%)	75 (37.69%)	20 (10.05%)	199
<b>Low SES (N=200)</b>	60 (30.00%)	90 (45.00%)	50 (25.00%)	200
<b>Total</b>	<b>164</b>	<b>165</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>399</b>

Source: field survey 2025

Table 5 shows a clear link between socioeconomic status and perceived knowledge acquisition. Over half of high SES respondents (52.26%) report high knowledge perception, while only 30.00% of low SES respondents do. Low knowledge perception is more common in low SES groups (25.00%), supporting the Knowledge Gap Theory.

**Table 6: The Implications of the Knowledge Gap Phenomenon for Development Communication and Policy-Making(n=399)**

Digital Literacy Level	High Knowledge Perception	Moderate Knowledge Perception	Low Knowledge Perception	Total
<b>High Digital Literacy (N=199)</b>	119 (59.80%)	60 (30.15%)	20 (10.05%)	199
<b>Low Digital Literacy (N=200)</b>	45 (22.50%)	105 (52.50%)	50 (25.00%)	200
<b>Total</b>	<b>164</b>	<b>165</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>399</b>

**Source: field survey 2025**

Table 6 highlights the importance of digital literacy in knowledge acquisition. Respondents with high digital literacy report higher knowledge perception (59.80%) compared to those with low digital literacy (22.50%). Low digital literacy correlates with moderate or low knowledge perception, emphasizing the need for policies to address digital skill disparities for equitable knowledge dissemination.

### Interview Analysis

**Table 7: Analysis of the Interview Data**

Interview Question Theme	Key Barriers Identified by Respondents	Implication / Core Constraint
Internet Utility and Barrier	The audience perceives Internet Information Richness and Diversity as very high ( $\bar{x} = 4.68$ )	The internet has a high potential for knowledge, but acts as a 'gap intensifier' when barriers are considered.
Socio-economic Constraints	There is a crucial tension between the volume of information and the high cost and skills barrier to sustained access ( $\bar{x} = 4.45$ , very high negative impact)	The Low Socio-Economic Status (SES) demographic is systematically excluded from high-utility knowledge due to cost and skills barriers
Radio's Enduring Role	Radio retains critical social utility; it is highly accessible and inexpensive. It remains the primary source for local, actionable news for the majority.	Radio acts as a 'gap mitigator' for the Low SES population, offsetting some of the inequalities introduced by the Internet.
Digital Literacy	Digital literacy is strongly associated with perceived knowledge acquisition. High Digital Literacy individuals reported a significantly higher perception of knowledge (59.80%) compared to Low Digital Literacy individuals (22.50%).	Digital literacy is a critical component in understanding and utilizing information in the modern knowledge gap. This influence exacerbates existing inequalities based on education.

**Source: field survey 2025**

The data reveals a Digital Media Paradox, where the Internet, despite its wealth of information, exacerbates inequalities due to cost and skill barriers, supporting the KGT in a dual-media context. Meanwhile, radio remains an accessible, cost-effective, and reliable information source for the low SES group, helping mitigate the knowledge gap driven by both traditional SES and the second-level digital divide related to digital skills.

### **Discussion of Findings**

This section presents a discussion of the major findings from the quantitative survey and interviews conducted among adult residents in Sabon Tasha, Kaduna State. The discussion is organised according to the research questions and draws upon the literature reviewed in Chapter Two, guided by KGT and Digital Divide Theory.

#### **Research Question One: What is the dominant primary source of public affairs information among different SES segments in Sabon Tasha?**

Table 2 shows that radio remains the most consistently accessed medium, with 91.23% of respondents reporting daily use, while daily Internet access was slightly lower at 77.44%. High-SES respondents tended to use the Internet more frequently than low-SES respondents, whereas low-SES respondents relied more heavily on radio. These findings indicate a clear pattern of media preference based on SES, consistent with KGT's prediction that high-SES individuals leverage multiple media sources to maximize knowledge acquisition (Chikezie,2024; Shehata, 2020; Hong, 2023).

Radio's continued dominance among low-SES groups aligns with prior studies emphasizing its accessibility, low cost, and minimal literacy requirements (Sarmah &

Bama, 2017;Adebayo, Olatunji, & Okoro,2021). In contrast, Internet use, while widespread, is moderated by skill and infrastructure barriers, reflecting the second-level digital divide (van Deursen & Helsper, 2022). This demonstrates that media exposure alone does not guarantee knowledge acquisition; the capacity to use digital tools effectively is critical.

#### **Research Question Two: What is the relationship between SES, media exposure, and knowledge levels regarding public affairs issues?**

Tables 4 and 5 reveal that high-SES respondents report higher levels of knowledge acquisition from Internet use, with 67.34% of high-SES participants using the Internet frequently compared to 42.50% of low-SES participants. Similarly, perceived knowledge levels were higher among high-SES respondents, with 52.26% reporting high knowledge perception versus 30.00% of low-SES respondents.

These findings confirm KGT's assertion that knowledge growth disproportionately benefits high-SES individuals (Tichenor, Donohue, and Olien,1970; Bighash & Qamarzadeh, 2021). Low-SES respondents continue to rely on radio, which provides essential, localized information but may not fully bridge the gap for more complex public affairs topics. The results also highlight the importance of digital literacy: high digital literacy respondents reported 59.80% high knowledge perception, compared to 22.50% among low digital literacy respondents (Table 6). This indicates that knowledge disparities are now shaped by both traditional SES differences and digital skill gaps, supporting the concept of the second-level digital divide (Martin, Ceviker, & Gezer,2024).

### **Research Question Three: What are the barriers and moderating factors affecting knowledge acquisition from media exposure?**

Interview data (Table 7) highlight several barriers. Internet access, while information-rich, acts as a “gap intensifier” due to high costs and skill requirements. Low-SES respondents face structural and cognitive constraints that limit their ability to exploit digital content, whereas radio remains highly accessible, reliable, and effective in delivering actionable information. Digital literacy emerged as a key moderating factor: individuals with higher skills were able to translate media exposure into perceived knowledge more effectively.

These findings are consistent with prior studies emphasizing that digital inequality is not solely a function of access but of the capacity to navigate, filter, and interpret online information (Hargittai, 2018; Nguyen & Hargittai, 2023). Moreover, the coexistence of radio and Internet in Sabon Tasha creates a dual-media environment, where traditional media mitigate the inequalities introduced by digital platforms, reinforcing radio’s role as a gap-reducing tool.

Overall, the study demonstrates the persistence of KGT in the digital age: while the Internet amplifies knowledge acquisition for high-SES, digitally literate users, low-SES populations continue to depend on traditional media. Bridging knowledge gaps requires not only improving Internet access but also promoting digital literacy and integrating radio-based education and awareness programmes to enhance information equity.

### **Conclusion**

This study concludes that the Knowledge Gap Theory remains a valid and powerful framework for understanding knowledge

inequalities in the Sabon Tasha area. The coexistence of radio and the Internet does not lead to a simple narrowing or widening of the gap; rather, it creates a hybrid knowledge ecology. The Internet actively accelerates the knowledge acquisition rate for the digitally literate and economically privileged, thereby confirming KGT’s core premise of widening gaps. Simultaneously, traditional radio provides a vital informational safety net, serving as a gap-mitigating factor that ensures essential public affairs knowledge remains accessible to low-SES populations. The central mechanism of the knowledge gap has transitioned, making Digital Literacy and the cost of sustained engagement the most significant predictors of knowledge inequality in the converged media landscape.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance knowledge equity among audiences in Sabon Tasha:

1. Government and regulatory bodies should implement targeted subsidies or zero-rated data plans for public affairs and educational websites to reduce economic barriers and promote sustained Internet engagement among low-SES groups.
2. Radio stations should incorporate digital literacy education into programming, teaching listeners how to verify online news, identify misinformation, and use essential digital services safely, while leveraging radio’s broad, low-cost reach.
3. Educational institutions should introduce mandatory modules on source evaluation, fact-checking, and ethical online media consumption from secondary school onwards to equip learners with the skills needed to navigate the information-rich Internet and reduce knowledge gaps.

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