

Quality assessment of radio news in Liberia

Results of a content analysis

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Content

1. Sample and procedure	2
2. Results	4
2.1 Formal Aspects	4
2.2 Topics	9
2.3 Actors	10
2.4 Reporting style	11
2.5 Perspectives	12
2.6 Sources	13
2.7 Soundbites	17

Tables

Table 1: Sample of radio news reports	2
Table 2: Number of news coded by each coder	3
Table 3: Use of openers	4
Table 4: Form of news reports	4
Table 5: Length of news reports	5
Table 6: Geographic reference	6
Table 7: Regional reference	6
Table 8: International reference	7
Table 9: Number of soundbites	7
Table 10: Number of soundbite providers	8
Table 11: Re-groped topics	9
Table 12: Re-grouped actors	10
Table 13: Analysis of reporting style (depth levels)	11
Table 14: Number of depth levels	12
Table 15: Perspectives in radio news	13
Table 16: Average number of sources	14
Table 17: Diversity of sources	14
Table 18: Re-grouped sources	15
Table 19: Source transparency	16
Table 20: Source context	17
Table 21: Re-grouped soundbites	18
Table 22: New information in the soundbite	19

1. Sample and procedure

The sample consists of the main news broadcasts of the same period of time (February 2007) from four different Liberian radio broadcasters. These are:

- Star Radio
- Radio Truth FM
- Radio Veritas
- Radio ELBC

This selection reflects different working conditions and institutional settings: Radio ELBC is state-run and thus the typical 'government radio'. Star Radio is a non-for-profit corporation under the supervision of the Swiss Foundation "Hirondelle – Media for peace and human dignity". Radio Veritas is setup by the Catholic Church and Truth FM is a commercial radio station, by some people considered as 'pro government'. All four stations are based in Monrovia. ELBC and Truth FM only cover the greater Monrovia area, whereas Veritas and Star Radio broadcast additionally in shortwave, and Star radio covers the whole country. Star Radio has its own stringers and correspondents in different counties.

Period of broadcasting

The time range of the analysed contents was set from February 6, 2007 to February 22, 2007 i.e. the main news bulletins of five days within that period were included. Those were the dates for which at least three different bulletins of three different stations were available¹. From each news bulletin all news reports were incorporated into the sample.

Altogether the sample consists of 246 news reports amongst them 27 reports where the exact date is unknown. The following table shows the number of news pieces by date and station:

Table 1: Sample of radio news reports

Date	Medium				Total N
	Truth FM	Star	Veritas	ELBC	
February 06	19	13	10	13	55
February 08	0	18	7	9	34
February 14	0	14	15	15	44
February 16	14	16	15	0	45
February 22	0	16	10	15	41
Unknown 1	9	0	0	0	9
Unknown 2	10	0	0	0	10
Unknown 3	8	0	0	0	8
Total N	60	77	57	52	246

¹ In this sample there are three single news bulletins of Truth FM (labelled as 'Unknown 1' – 'Unknown 3'); which belong to this period but could later not any more be assigned definitely to a specific date, but it is either February 8, February 14 or February 22.

Procedures

Local staff organised and supported by the Center for Media Studies and Peacebuilding (CEMESP), Monrovia/Liberia, carried out recording, transcription and coding. The respective data were transmitted to the research team at the Institute of Applied Media Studies (IAM) in Winterthur/Switzerland who examined and analysed the coding sheets, the latter by means of statistical analysis.

Transcripts

After recording the news every second day during the period from January 29 to February 22 (excluding weed-ends), the news were transcribed verbatim. The transcripts were sent to the IAM where the different news pieces which belonged together were assembled into one news story. This has to be seen against the background that Liberian radio news stories have a specific three-piece composition: Parts of one news story are mentioned in the opener section, the main part then in the bulletin section and further elaborations are made in the magazine section of the news (see: 2.1 Formal aspects: Opener/ headlines).

Coders

A team of local coders carried out the coding of the revised transcripts. They all had participated in a four days training course on content analysis of radio news and application of the codebook. The course was run by IAM staff. The coders were selected and supervised by the Center for Media Studies and Peacebuilding (CEMESP). Every news piece was coded by two people; this procedure should allow the IAM's research team to compare the obtained data and to draw conclusions concerning their quality and accordingly their reliability. For the same purpose the research team also re-coded a part of the news bulletins.

The coding sheets were then directly sent to IAM, were the processing (completing and collating of all data into one file) and statistical analysis with SPSS took place.

Based on various reliability checks, resulting in a priority list of coders, the final sample was identified. In this sample some coders have a larger share than others as their coding results seem to be more trustworthy.

Table 2: Number of news coded by each coder

Coder	Medium				Total N
	Truth FM	Star	Veritas	ELBC	
Coder 1	0	18	0	10	28
Coder 2	9	14	9	13	45
Coder 3	19	29	16	15	79
Coder 4	22	0	17	9	48
Coder 5	10	16	15	0	41
Coder 6	0	0	0	5	5
Total N	60	77	57	52	246

2. Results

2.1 Formal Aspects

Several formal aspects concerning the composition of the news bulletins were assessed. They provide information about the preferences of different radio broadcasters when it comes e.g. to news size and use of soundbites. This section just describes these characteristics, but they do not refer to quality.

Opener/ headlines

Openers are the short headlines that ‘open’ a news bulletin announcing a longer news report broadcasted later in the transmission.

News broadcasts in Liberia have a distinctive ‘three-piece’ composition in common: After the headlines an overview over all the news stories is given, usually referred to as the ‘bulletin’ Some of those news later on are elaborated more in the ‘magazine’, though not necessarily all the headlines or stories of the bulletin are covered there.

According to the table below an average of approximately one third (32.9%) of all the news pieces is opened in the headlines. It is notable that Star Radio with 26.0% operates less with headlines than the other stations. Radio Veritas with 42.1% on the other hand remarkably exceeds the average.

Table 3: Use of openers

Opener	Medium				Total N
	Truth FM	Star	Veritas	ELBC	
Yes	35.0%	26.0%	42.1%	30.8%	32.9%
No	65.0%	74.0%	57.9%	69.2%	67.1%
Total N	60	77	57	52	246
%	100	100	100	100	100

Form

The coders identified the ‘form’ by distinguishing the soundbites acoustically i.e. without referring to the content yet. There were three possible forms: ‘News piece only’ (only a speaker who reads the news), ‘News piece with soundbites’ (speaker reads and additional voices are heard like sources or correspondents) and ‘Commentary’ (a speaker reads a comment or other opinion piece).

The results show that just two forms – ‘News piece only’, ‘News piece with soundbites’ – are represented in the sample. This leads to the conclusion that Liberian radio broadcasters do not consider commentary as an adequate form in the news.

Radio Veritas is the station which most frequently includes soundbites (59.6%) followed by Star Radio (44.2%).

Table 4: Form of news reports

Form	Medium				Total N
	Truth FM	Star	Veritas	ELBC	
News piece only	56.7%	55.8%	40.4%	67.3%	54.9%
News piece with soundbites	43.3%	44.2%	59.6%	32.7%	45.1%
Commentary	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Total N	60	77	57	52	246
%	100	100	100	100	100

Length of news reports

The length of the stories was counted in characters (without spaces) of the transcript.

- Short news reports were designed as of up to 800 characters (one minute),
- Middle length was subdivided in
 - medium 1, i.e. up to 1400 characters (one minute and 45 seconds) and
 - medium 2, i.e. up to 2000 characters (two minutes and 30 seconds)
- Long news equal up to 3500 characters (around 4 minutes) and
- Very long news are longer than 3500 characters (more than 4 minutes)

All news could be assigned to a length category, although some news pieces could not be transcribed in full due to poor sound quality. Almost half of all news pieces (45.5% on average) belong to the category short news. Radio ELBC (57.7%) is the station with most short news compared to Radio Truth FM (45%), Star Radio (40.3%) and Radio Veritas (42.1%). For Star Radio it is noticeable that the rest of the news are almost equally allotted to the further length categories (medium 1: 15.6%; medium 2: 15.6%; long: 15.6%; very long: 13.0%).

The four stations show remarkable differences on the level of long and very long sized news: Radio Truth FM that has comparatively little medium sized news (11.7% each on level medium 1 and medium 2) shows the strongest representation in the segment of long news (30.0%). The other three stations - Star Radio (15.6%), Radio Veritas (15.8%) and ELBC (13.5%) - cannot keep up with the leader of this category. On the other hand Star Radio proves to be the only station with a notable amount of very long sized news (13.0%). Radio ELBC does not have any news in this category and also Radio Truth FM (1.7%) and Radio Veritas (5.3%) lie behind.

Table 5: Length of news reports

Length	Medium				Total N
	Truth FM	Star	Veritas	ELBC	
Short (<800 ch.)	45.0%	40.3%	42.1%	57.7%	45.5%
Medium 1 (800 – 1399 ch.)	11.7%	15.6%	24.6%	15.4%	16.7%
Medium 2 (1400 – 1999 ch.)	11.7%	15.6%	12.3%	13.5%	13.4%
Long (2000 – 3500 ch.)	30.0%	15.6%	15.8%	13.5%	18.7%
Very long (>3500 ch.)	1.7%	13.0%	5.3%	0.0%	5.7%
Total N	60	77	57	52	246
%	100	100	100	100	100

Geographic reference

As the study focused the quality of local radio broadcasting and thus 'national' news reporting in and on Liberia, a distinction between purely national news (the story takes place in Liberia exclusively), mixed news (the story affects Liberia and one or several other countries) and purely international news (the story takes place only in a foreign country) was made. On the national level it was further examined whether the stations deal with counties/regions as differentiated entities.

The following table shows that the local perspective generally dominates news reporting on Liberian radio stations. Radio Veritas (87.7%), Star Radio (85.5%) and Truth FM (78.3%) in more than 3/4 of their cases geographically refer to 'Liberia only'. Accordingly low is the share of purely international news (11.4% on average) or mixed news (8.2%). The fact that Radio ELBC has a comparatively high international orientation might be explained with its

role as a state broadcaster who is expected to report on diplomatic activities and international occurrences.

Table 6: Geographic reference

Geographic reference	Medium				Total N
	Truth FM	Star	Veritas	ELBC	
Liberia only	78.3%	85.5%	87.7%	65.4%	80.0%
Liberia and foreign country	8.3%	5.3%	8.8%	11.5%	8.2%
Foreign country only	11.7%	9.2%	3.5%	23.1%	11.4%
No geographic reference	1.7%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.4%
Total N	60	76	57	52	245
%	100	100	100	100	100

On the local level the study aimed at answering the question whether radio reporting overemphasises the capital Monrovia or whether the regions/ counties are likewise represented. As to this aspect Star Radio with its high share of regional news (36.0%) remarkably differs from the other station. For Radio ELBC the contrary has to be stated as the station in a mere 10.2% of its cases deals with specific regional perspectives. This distinction seems to be clearly attributable to Star Radio's unique position in having regional correspondents that cover news stories from the counties. News reports which refer to the nation as a whole are rather frequent on all four stations, though more pronounced on Radio Truth FM (43.9%) and Radio ELBC (42.9%) than on Star Radio (34.7%) and Radio Veritas (33.9%).

Table 7: Regional reference

Regional reference	Medium				Total N
	Truth FM	Star	Veritas	ELBC	
Only Monrovia	15.8%	12.0%	32.1%	16.3%	18.6%
Liberian counties	17.5%	36.0%	21.4%	10.2%	22.8%
National (whole country)	43.9%	34.7%	33.9%	42.9%	38.4%
Not relevant	22.8%	17.3%	10.7%	30.6%	19.8%
Total N	57	75	55	49	237
%	100	100	96.6 ^{*2}	100	100

On the international level it was examined to what extent the focus reaches beyond Western Africa and the African continent. Star Radio shows an equivalent share of news referring to Western Africa/ Rest of Africa (37.5% each) on the one hand and Europe/ USA (12.5% each) on the other hand. Radio Veritas focuses on Western Africa (57.1%) and deals with news concerning the USA (28.6%) more often than with the rest of Africa (14.3%); the station did not consider Europe at all. Radio Truth FM and Radio ELBC offered a comparatively higher share of news concerning Europe and the USA than the other two stations. Further regions are almost completely lacking.

² 0.4% is missing due to a coder's error.

Table 8: International reference

Percentage of news referring to international context; base of N = all news, excluding all news for which the international reference was 'non applicable'.

International reference	Medium				Total N
	Truth FM	Star	Veritas	ELBC	
Western Africa	15.4%	37.5%	57.1%	36.8%	34.5%
Rest of Africa	30.8%	37.5%	14.3%	36.8%	32.7%
Europe	23.1%	12.5%	0.0%	10.5%	12.7%
USA	23.1%	12.5%	28.6%	15.8%	18.2%
Rest of the world	7.7%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	1.8%
Total N	13	16	7	19	55
%	100	100	100	100	100

Number of soundbites

To assess the number of soundbites the coder counts the number of spoken entities excluding the anchor's or speaker's voice. Correspondents' contributions were considered as soundbites.

The four stations all operate with soundbites though to a different extent. Before outlining the provisional results in this area some remarks to the data quality shall be made.

Quality of data

One focal point of the preparation-course had been to enable coders to define and count the soundbites. As to how the coders coped with that challenge mixed results have to be stated: The research team had emphasised e.g. that in an interview (questions of journalist answered by one source) all soundbites of the interviewee have to be summarised to one soundbite instead of counting every answer or statement separately. That instruction – amongst others – was not strictly followed. Hence one can suppose a tendency towards too many soundbites in the data. This has to be kept in mind when looking at the following results.

Table 9: Number of soundbites

Number of soundbites	Medium				Total N
	Truth FM	Star	Veritas	ELBC	
0	58.3%	51.9%	36.8%	65.4%	52.8%
1	23.3%	10.4%	31.6%	17.3%	19.9%
2	3.3%	6.5%	17.5%	15.4%	10.2%
3	6.7%	7.8%	5.3%	1.9%	5.7%
4-5	6.7%	5.2%	5.3%	0.0%	4.5%
6 and more	1.7%	18.2%	3.5%	0.0%	6.9%
Total N	60	77	57	52	246
%	100	100	100	100	100

Observations

According to the coders' findings more than half of all news pieces (52.8%) do not include any soundbite at all. On the state run Radio ELBC this is even the case in almost 2/3 of all news pieces (65.4%). Radio Veritas by contrast just in 36.8% does not provide any soundbite.

Rather big differences can also be stated for the use of one soundbite. Radio Veritas (31.6%) is the leader in this category against Truth Radio with still 23.3% but ELBC with only 17.3%. For Star Radio one particular feature has to be considered: According to bare data the station performs low in the category '1 soundbite' (10.4%) but has a high ranking when it comes to '6 and more soundbites' (18.2%). It is very probable that the two categories can be summed-up into one as the category '6 or more soundbites' presumably was assigned due to a misconception on the coders' side in the case of interviews. Consequently Star Radio with 28.6% almost reaches the same level as leading Radio Veritas. But Veritas held up the first position also on the levels between two and five soundbites; with 28.1% it clearly beats the other stations (Star Radio: 19.5%, ELBC: 17.3% and Truth FM: 16.7%). Altogether the use of three soundbites or more is rather seldom (10.2% on average, excluding the category 'six or more soundbites' for the above-mentioned reason).

Number of soundbite providers

Especially for news reports with two soundbites or more it is important to know whether one soundbite provider is just repeated or whether there are various soundbite providers, thus adding to diversity.

Table 10: Number of soundbite providers

Number of soundbite providers	Medium				Total N
	Truth FM	Star	Veritas	ELBC	
0	58.3%	58.4%	36.8%	71.2%	56.1%
1	31.7%	31.2%	36.8%	21.2%	30.5%
2	6.7%	7.8%	15.8%	5.8%	8.9%
3	3.3%	1.3%	3.5%	1.9%	2.4%
4 and more	0.0%	1.3%	7.0%	0.0%	2.0%
Total N	60	77	57	52	246
%	100	100	100	100	100

Observations

Not only does Radio Veritas according to the coders' findings provide most soundbites but it also offers the largest share of soundbite providers. In 26.3% of its news pieces there are two and more different soundbite providers followed by Star Radio (10.4%), Truth FM (10.0%) and Radio ELBC (7.7%).

Comparing the numbers of soundbites and soundbite providers Radio Veritas also shows the highest congruency: When the station offers two or more soundbites (28.1% of 2-5 soundbites) they mostly can be traced back to two or more soundbite providers (26.3%). The other three stations more often repeat soundbite providers. Although according to the coders Star Radio offers in 19.5% 2-5 soundbites those less frequently result from two or more soundbite providers (10.4%). The same tendency has to be stated for Truth FM (16.7% of two to five soundbites/ 10.0% of two or more soundbite providers) and Radio ELBC (17.3% of two to five soundbites/ 8.7% of two or more soundbite providers). Thus, Radio Veritas allows more different actors speaking on the radio.

Quality of data

Again the findings have to be taken with some reservations³. Not in every case the coders were able to assign the number of soundbite providers correctly. E.g. it happened that a coder defined the soundbites of different members of the Senate as one soundbite instead of

³ Examining the category '4 and more soundbite providers' for Star Radio one gets an affirmation that the assignment of six or more soundbites occurred by mistake as mentioned above: Only in 1.3% coders identified 4 or more different soundbite providers for Star Radio (compared to the 18.2% of '6 and more soundbites' in question).

counting distinct statements each as one soundbite. There happened also inconsistencies such as attributing one soundbite to zero soundbite providers.

2.2 Topics

What were the main topics of Liberian news reporting in the surveyed period? Are there any remarkable differences between the four stations concerning topic selection? In order to answer these questions the coders appointed the main subject of each news report out of a list of 37 topics, including 'topic mix' and 'other'. For the purpose of gathering further information about differences and commonalities between the stations the list was thereafter re-grouped by the research team – single topics were summarised in topic groups (see: Annex).

The topic range according to the code book turned out to be quite suitable as the over-all share of 'other' topics remained rather low (11.5%). Nevertheless it would be interesting to find out for Radio Truth FM, the station with the highest number of 'other' (17.0%), whether it would make sense to introduce additional single topics and thereby increase accuracy.

The following table shows the topic list after having been re-grouped:

Table 11: Re-groped topics

Base of N = all news, purely international news excluded (217 news reports)

Topic groups	Medium				Total N
	Truth FM	Star	Veritas	ELBC	
High politics	22.6%	17.4%	20.0%	35.0%	22.6%
Conflicts	18.9%	14.5%	7.3%	12.5%	13.4%
Civil war in Liberia	0.0%	0.0%	3.6%	0.0%	0.9%
Social development	1.9%	11.6%	10.9%	5.0%	7.8%
Events	11.3%	15.9%	9.1%	2.5%	10.6%
Economics	15.1%	18.8%	16.4%	27.5%	18.9%
Religion	0.0%	0.0%	1.8%	0.0%	0.5%
Culture	0.0%	0.0%	1.8%	0.0%	0.5%
Media	3.8%	2.9%	1.8%	0.0%	2.3%
Others	17.0%	7.2%	12.7%	10.0%	11.5%
Sport	9.4%	11.6%	14.5%	7.5%	11.1%
Total N	53	69	55	40	217
%	100	100	100	100	100

Observations

1. 'High Politics' (defined as including 'high-level' or abstract topics like 'state and administration reform', 'political process', 'elections' plus 'national security') and economics (comprising infrastructure, finances, development co-operation, foreign aid and agriculture) were the most significant topic groups - both most distinctively on Radio ELBC with a rate of 35.0% of news pieces on high politics and of 27.5% on economics. The general high share of economics might surprise does one link it with the finding that economic actor groups (1.7% on average) or source groups (0.7% on average) were almost inexistent in the sample. It might be explained by the fact that news e.g. on infrastructure, agriculture and development co-operation are not necessarily linked to economic actors or sources. Often governmental actors take the lead in those areas as reconstruction of public infrastructure is the key issue. On Star Radio economic news even take the first place among the topics the station deals with. The result might reflect that in the status-quo of the country news on economic recovery are very important and thus news worthy.

2. Sport was rather relevant for all four stations, most explicitly for Radio Veritas (14.5%).
3. Questions concerning civil war and reconciliation were hardly an explicit subject during the assessed period. Radio Veritas was the only station which touched it at all. For this aspect it could be interesting to analyse a sample of a more recent date: Did the civil war remain disregarded in Liberian news even after the trial against Charles Taylor was opened?
4. Conflicts – may they be personal or political, i.e. happening between governmental and other organisational or civil entities – play a bigger role on Truth FM (18.9%) and Star Radio (14.5%) than on Radio ELBC (12.5%) and Radio Veritas (7.3%).
5. For Star Radio a considerable number of events (news pieces covering e.g. crime, rape, accidents and disaster) sticks out (15.9%).
6. Social development issues receive the biggest attention on Star Radio (11.6%) and Radio Veritas (10.9%) compared to Radio ELBC (5.0%) and Radio Truth FM (1.9%).
7. Adding up the four most important topics for each station it can be stated that Radio ELBC offers the smallest topic range: The four leading topics occupy 85.0% of the station’s news bulletins. Star Radio (66.6%) and Radio Veritas (63.6%) got a more diverse set with their four leading topics occupying a smaller share.

2.3 Actors

For all news the three most important actors were identified according to a list in the code-book. This procedure allows identifying whether the radio stations prefer specific actors. In order to detect such preferences more clearly the identified actors were re-grouped into actor groups (see: Annex) as the following table shows:

Table 12: Re-grouped actors

Percentage of news with an actor from the actor groups; three most important actors in all news identified. Base of N = all news, purely international news and sport news excluded, in total 521 different actors.

Actor groups	Medium				Ø	N
	Truth FM	Star	Veritas	ELBC		
Executive government	37.1%	26.7%	30.6%	37.0%	32.2%	168
Political parties	11.4%	3.6%	4.8%	8.0%	6.7%	35
Legislative government	13.6%	7.9%	12.1%	14.0%	11.5%	60
Independent institutions	3.8%	3.0%	2.4%	2.0%	2.9%	15
Civil society (national)	1.5%	6.7%	6.5%	5.0%	5.0%	26
International groups	6.8%	13.9%	12.9%	11.0%	11.3%	59
Economy	3.0%	1.8%	.0%	2.0%	1.7%	9
Professionals	0.8%	1.8%	1.6%	1.0%	1.3%	7
General public	13.6%	19.4%	18.5%	9.0%	15.7%	82
Media	4.5%	7.3%	2.4%	6.0%	5.2%	27
Others	2.3%	3.6%	4.0%	1.0%	2.9%	15
Target groups development cooperation	1.5%	4.2%	4.0%	4.0%	3.5%	18
Total N	132	165	124	100		521
%	100	100	100	100	100	

Observations

1. The institutions of the executive government (comprising the president, the cabinet, the ministries, other central authorities and the local administration) take the leading position on all four stations, most notably on Radio Truth FM (37.1%) and Radio ELBC (37.0%).
2. Political parties play a much bigger role on Radio Truth FM (11.4%) than on Star Radio (3.6%) and Radio Veritas (4.8%).
3. The parliament is quite equally represented on Radio Truth FM (13.6%), Radio Veritas (12.1%) and Radio ELBC (14.0%). Star Radio is behind the others in this aspect (7.9%).
4. Civil society is mentioned more often by Star Radio, Radio Veritas and Radio ELBC (around 5 to 7%) than by Radio Truth FM (1.5%).
5. Although economy played a key part as a topic, economic actors are hardly represented in the news. International groups (including aid organisations like international NGOs and intergovernmental bodies) play a much bigger role for all stations.
6. People from the general public are quite important actors in radio news (15.7% on average), with Star Radio leading (19.4%) closely followed by Radio Veritas (18.5%). Radio ELBC lags behind (9.0%) in this regard. It points towards a tendency of reporting *for the people* when the ordinary people are perceived as actors in the news.
7. Star Radio (4.2%), Radio Veritas (4.0%) and Radio ELBC (4.0%) pay more attention to the typical target groups of development co-operation (such as refugees, migrants, ex-combatants, youth, disabled, women, people with HIV) than Radio Truth FM (1.5%).

2.4 Reporting style

Depths

It was examined how complete the news are. Therefore the coders applied the following model. News can potentially cover four different levels of reporting (called 'depths' of reporting):

1. The first level is a simple description of the event or problem (what happened?)
2. The second level describes the immediate reason or trigger for the event (why?)
3. The third level refers to the background or history of that event or problem
4. The fourth level explains potential consequences

According to the model it is assumed that the more levels are covered the better is the quality of news. The background level (third level) can be seen as a specific indicator for enhancing people's understanding of an issue.

Table 13: Analysis of reporting style (depth levels)

Percentage of news covering different levels of reporting; base of N = all news, purely international news and sport news excluded.

Depth levels	Medium				Ø	N
	Truth FM	Star	Veritas	ELBC		
What?	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	198
Why?	85.4%	85.5%	86.3%	78.4%	84.3%	167
Background	16.7%	30.6%	15.7%	13.5%	20.2%	40
Consequences	29.2%	40.3%	25.5%	21.6%	30.3%	60

Observations

1. All news contains a description of the event or problem (what).
2. The immediate reason for an event or problem (why?) is usually given, though less frequently on Radio ELBC (78.4%) than on the other three stations (Radio Veritas: 86.3%, Star Radio: 85.5% and Truth FM: 85.4%).
3. The average of background information (20.2%) is rather low. Yet Star Radio (30.6%) notably outperforms the other stations. This finding can be taken as encouraging as it shows that under given circumstances Liberian radio stations - beyond mere reporting - can contribute to the orientation of citizens. Owing to quality of data (see next paragraph) the result for Star Radio should not be overrated though.
4. Reporting on the (potential) consequences of news (30.3%) is generally provided to a larger extent than reporting on the background. Also in this aspect Star Radio (40.3%) considerably outperforms the other stations.

In addition it was examined how often three different depth levels - beside 'what' which was appointed in 100% of all cases - were integrated into one news report. According to the coders' findings Star Radio is the station where most frequently two or more depth levels were considered (43.4%). Radio Truth FM is on the second place (34.6%) though it never considered more than two depth levels. These results have to be taken with caution though as the analysis of data's quality shows (see next paragraph).

Table 14: Number of depth levels

Percentage of news covering different levels of reporting; base of N = all news, purely international news and sport news excluded.

Number of depth levels	Medium				Ø	N
	Truth FM	Star	Veritas	ELBC		
1	13.5%	18.8%	10.9%	20.0%	15.7%	34
2	51.9%	37.7%	61.8%	60.0%	51.4%	111
3	34.6%	27.5%	25.5%	15.0%	26.4%	57
4	0.0%	15.9%	1.8%	5.0%	6.5%	14
Total N	52	69	55	40		216
%	100	100	100	100	100	

Quality of data

As introductory mentioned the research team re-coded a part of the news bulletins. Comparing own data with the coders' results it has to be stated that the coders were not always able to identify the immediate reason ('why?') when such was given in the news piece. Therefore one can suppose that the share of news answering to 'why?' tends to be bigger than stated in this paragraph. On the other hand the proportion of news pieces outlining the background might lie below the coders' results. The reason: The coders partly misconceived extensive reporting on pure facts as background. But such detailed reporting does not fulfil the criteria of real background information as it does not refer to a larger (e.g. time) horizon nor to deeper-lying reasons.

2.5 Perspectives

Post-conflict countries in Africa face not only the challenge of rehabilitation and recovery but also of diminishing neo-patrimonialistic rules on the political level, thus developing from formal to 'sound' democracies. Against this background it is interesting to see whether and to what extent the news cover the public discourse around issues and do report on that political debate (in contrast to just describing what the government said, omitting other voices and opinions). The presence/absence of political debate were measured by the variable 'public discourse'.

As democracies need to address the concerns of the ordinary people it was additionally important to see whether and to what extent the news covers the concerns of ordinary people in contrast to those of the elite. By reporting on those concerns the media emphasise them in the course of political processes and enable the people to hold those who govern more accountable.

The issue of a school reform shall exemplify how a theme can be approached from different angles: There can be covered the views of political parties and the government concerning the financing of a school reform (the 'public political discourse'). Another perspective is the one of the parents regarding the quality of teaching due to the reform (this is the 'concerns of ordinary people').

Table 15: Perspectives in radio news

Percentage of news covering different pre-defined perspectives; base of N = all news, excluding purely international news and sport.

Perspectives	Medium				Ø	N
	Truth FM	Star	Veritas	ELBC		
Public discourse/political struggle	6.3%	22.6%	11.8%	5.4%	12.6%	25
Concerns of Ordinary people	22.9%	53.2%	27.5%	40.5%	36.9%	73

Observations

1. **Public discourse:** Concerning the perspective of public discourse Star Radio (22.6%) tops the other stations by far. Radio ELBC ranks behind (5.4%). This leads to the conclusion that the state run broadcaster does not promote public discourse, a statement which is backed by the analysis of sources. Radio ELBC provides a rather low range of sources; the four most important sources mount to 72.6% (see: Who are the sources?). This might offer one explanation why the share of 'public discourse' is comparatively low. Similarly small is the percentage of public discourse on Truth Radio (6.3%), the station with a pronounced amount of government sources (see: Who are the sources?).
2. **Ordinary people:** Star Radio strikes with its big share of news pieces including ordinary people's perspective (53.2%). Also ELBC shows a high share in this regard, (40.5%) according to the coders' findings, Radio Veritas on the other hand a comparatively low one (27.5%).

2.6 Sources

In journalism a large number of sources usually counts as a quality indicator. The more sources the more probable it is to obtain a broader spectrum of information, additional opinions and reliability checks. Thus, source diversity seems to foster democracy and enlightening of the people. Therefore the coders stated the number and other characteristics of the sources represented in the news.

Table 16: Average number of sources

Percentage of different number of sources; base of N = all news, excluding purely international ones and sport. Cases with more than six sources (3 cases, plus 3 cases with '88') were excluded as one can suppose that they happened due to a misconception of the coders.

Average number of sources	Medium				Total N
	Truth FM	Star	Veritas	ELBC	
Ø	1.21	1.35	1.51	1.38	1.37
N	47	62	51	37	197

Table 17: Diversity of sources

Percentage of different number of sources; base of N = all news, excluding purely international ones and sport. Cases with more than six sources (3 cases, plus 3 cases with '88') were excluded.

Source number	Medium				Ø	Total N
	Truth FM	Star	Veritas	ELBC		
0	6.3%	6.5%	2.0%	8.1%	5.6%	11
1	70.8%	61.3%	60.8%	56.8%	62.6%	124
2	14.6%	24.2%	27.5%	24.3%	22.7%	45
3	6.3%	6.5%	7.8%	10.8%	7.6%	15
4 and more	2.1%	1.6%	2.0%	0.0%	1.5%	3
Total N	48	62	51	37		198
%	100	100	100	100	100	

Observations

1. Just 5.6% of news had no mentioned source at all. This means that generally at least one source was offered - a fact not to be taken for granted as studies from other developing countries demonstrate. Radio Veritas is outstanding in this regard; in just 2.0% of its news no source is mentioned.
2. However, rather frequently there was only one source (62.6%). This has to be seen in conjunction with the hard working conditions Liberian journalists face, such as very restricted time and financial resources.
3. Radio Veritas has the highest average of source numbers (1.51 sources per news), Radio Truth FM the lowest (1.21 sources per news). Star Radio (1.35 sources per news) and Radio ELBC (1.38 sources per news) are in between.
4. Consistently with its top position regarding number of soundbite providers Radio Veritas proves to be also the station with the biggest share of two or more sources (37.2%) followed by Radio ELBC (35.1%) and Star Radio (32.2%). Truth FM is the last in this regard (22.9%).

Quality of data

After analysing the major difficulties coders had with the determination of this variable it can be supposed that the stated number of sources tends to be too low. An example: Reported speech was not in every case recognised as the statement of an additional source (e.g. "Members of the House have acknowledged...", "according to a confirmation of the Supreme Court...").

Who are the sources?

Differences among the broadcasters might be found by examining which sources are chosen and to which groups they belong. Therefore, the sources of the news (up to three different sources) were examined for their identity, transparency and context. The following table shows the sources after they were re-grouped (see: Annex).

Table 18: Re-grouped sources

Percentage of news with a source from the source groups; three most important sources in all news identified. Base of N = all news, purely international news and sport news excluded, in total 271 different sources.

Source groups	Medium				Ø	Total N
	Truth FM	Star	Veritas	ELBC		
Executive government	56.7%	30.1%	29.9%	25.5%	35.1%	95
Political parties	8.3%	3.6%	7.8%	7.8%	6.6%	18
Legislative government	8.3%	9.6%	5.2%	19.6%	10%	27
Independent institutions	3.3%	6.0%	5.2%	2.0%	4.4%	12
Civil society (national)	1.7%	7.2%	7.8%	5.9%	5.9%	16
International groups	0.0%	6.0%	6.5%	15.7%	6.6%	18
Economy	0.0%	2.4%	0.0%	0.0%	0.7%	2
Professionals	1.7%	0.0%	2.6%	2.0%	1.5%	4
General public	5.0%	16.9%	16.9%	5.9%	12.2%	33
Media	8.3%	10.8%	7.8%	11.8%	9.6%	26
Others	5.0%	2.4%	7.8%	2.0%	4.4%	12
Target groups development cooperation	1.7%	4.8%	2.6%	2.0%	3.0%	8
Total N	60	83	77	51		271
%	100	100	100	100	100	

Observations

1. Truth FM relies in 56.7% of all its news - and thus to a much higher extent than the other stations - on sources related to the executive government. The least extent has the state run broadcaster ELBC. However it needs to be considered that ELBC has the highest share of non-transparent sources, so it might have more government sources than it mentions (see table 19).
2. Radio Veritas has the widest range of different source groups. The four most frequently quoted source groups mount up to 62.4% on Radio Veritas in comparison to Star Radio (67.4%), Radio ELBC (72.6%) and Truth FM (78.3%) (calculation based on table 18).
3. Civil society rather gets a word on Radio Veritas (7.8%) and Star Radio (7.2%) than on the other two stations.
4. The same as for the civil society can be said for the general public as a source (represented with 16.9% each on Star Radio and Radio Veritas). It is very interesting that these two broadcasters do not only use the general public as an actor in the news, but also as a source. Thus, the voice of the ordinary people is really present, in comparison to Radio Truth FM (5.0%) and Radio ELBC (5.9%) where they only play a minor role as sources.
5. Radio ELBC outnumbers the others in the share of the parliament (19.6%).
6. Political parties have a rather low share on all four stations (6.6% on average). So do professionals (1.5%). It seems that there are no experts whom journalists rely on. Whether this is due to the brain drain as a result of the civil war or whether journalists habitually do not involve experts is open.
7. Voices from the economic division are almost inexistent (0.7%) among the quoted sources.

Source transparency

The transparency of sources is a quality indicator by its own. It is important for the listener to identify the source. Whether it was identifiable was coded for all news except for sport news. Identifiable usually means that a name and a function are attributed, so that the listener can judge the source's position or importance or could even trace the source.

Table 19: Source transparency⁴

Percentage of news covering different levels of reporting; base of N = all news, purely international news and sport news excluded.

Source transparency	Medium				Ø	Total N
	Truth FM	Star	Veritas	ELBC		
Source identified	91.7%	88.1%	84.7%	64.2%	82.3%	233
Source not identified	8.3%	10.7%	15.3%	11.9%	11.7%	33
88 ⁵	0%	1.2%	0%	17.9%	4.6%	13
N	60	84	72	67		283
%	100	100	100	94	98.6% ⁶	

Observations

1. Radio Truth FM (91.7%), Star Radio (88.1%) and Radio Veritas (84.7%) declare the origin of their sources to a quite similar extent.
2. Radio ELBC stands out for a low transparency of its sources; their origin is indicated in only 64.2% of the stations' cases.

Source context

The source context is analysed in order to detect in which occasions journalists collect quotes of sources. The main aim is to find out, whether they gather quotes in occasions such as events and press conferences or whether they act independently in order to get in touch with a source.

⁴ Without re-coding the variable 'source transparency' the research team was confronted with the fact that the coders introduced a new category of possible answers ('88' besides '1' for 'source identified' and '2' for 'source not identified'). As this answer-category is used in the code-book for other variables and there usually indicates 'not known' one can presume that in the context of source transparency the coders could not identify the source. For Radio ELBC the doubtful answer was assigned in 17.9% of all the station's cases (in 6% source transparency was labelled with '0' on ELBC, see footnote). In order to assert the station's low source transparency it would be first necessary to clarify how to interpret that answer category.

⁵ Comparing the total of answers to 'source transparency' and the total of answers to 'sources' one can suppose that '88' most probably means there was no source and hence no source transparency could be stated.

⁶ For Radio ELBC the source transparency was labelled with '0' in 6% due to a misconception on the coders' side. This is reflected also in column for ELBC where the % only amounts to 94%.

Table 20: Source context

Percentage of source context; base of N = all news, purely international news and sports excluded; cases with the answer source context ,unknown' excluded.

Source context	Medium				Ø	Total N
	Truth FM	Star	Veritas	ELBC		
Press conference/ Media event	12.7%	8.5%	4.6%	6.3%	7.9%	19
Press release	7.3%	7.0%	0.0%	10.4%	5.9%	14
Conference	3.6%	7.0%	4.6%	8.3%	5.9%	14
Demonstration	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	6.3%	1.3%	3
Other event	18.2%	11.3%	10.8%	6.3%	11.7%	28
Own inquiry by journalist	52.7%	62.0%	73.8%	52.1%	61.1%	146
Written document	1.8%	0.0%	0.0%	2.1%	0.8%	2
Quoted from news agency	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	2.1%	0.4%	1
Quoted from other media	1.8%	0.0%	1.5%	0.0%	0.8%	2
Other	1.8%	0.0%	4.6%	4.2%	2.5%	6
Call-in show	0.0%	4.2%	0.0%	2.1%	1.7%	4
Total N	55	71	65	48		239
%	100	100	100	100	100	

Observations

1. Does one consider the difficult working conditions of Liberian journalists the big share of own inquiry is impressive: On Radio Veritas the journalists' own research (= own inquiry) serves as an initial point of news reports in 73.8% of the cases. Also on Star Radio own efforts lead to a news report in still 62.0%.
2. Different events and occasions arranged by media-external actors and organisations played distinct roles for the four stations: Star Radio e.g. relied equally on press conferences (8.5%), press releases (7.0%) and other conferences/ seminars (7.0%). Meanwhile Radio Veritas did not pay any mentioned attention to press releases at all. On Radio ELBC on the other hand press releases were the second reason (10.4%), after own inquiries, to create a news report. Other events such as official meetings and ceremonies were important for Truth FM (18.0%).

One caveat is worth mentioning: The source contexts might be different due to differences in the 'real' context, but could also be due to different habits of the radios in telling the public about the source context.

2.7 Soundbites

When sources speak directly in the news ('soundbites') it attracts the listener much more than when the source is only quoted indirectly. Thus, with a soundbite one's viewpoint gets more attention and gains in importance. Therefore, in addition to the number and other characteristics of sources the coders assessed whether these sources were cited directly as a soundbite.

Who is quoted in the soundbites?

It is also important to see which groups are used as soundbite providers. First the coders attributed each soundbite to one actor. Thereafter these actors were summarised to groups (same procedure as with actor groups or source groups). However, the conclusions in this paragraph have to be taken with caution as the total number of soundbites was low.

Bear in mind that the media were excluded for the analysis of this variable as in most cases media as a soundbite meant that the speaker talks to his/ her own correspondent in the field.

Table 21: Re-grouped soundbites

Percentage of re-grouped soundbites; base of N = all news, purely international news and sport news excluded. Media as a soundbite excluded.

Re-grouped soundbites	Medium				Ø	Total N
	Truth FM	Star	Veritas	ELBC		
Executive government	53.1%	24.2%	30.8%	30.0%	34.3%	47
Political parties	15.6%	3.0%	3.8%	0.0%	5.8%	8
Legislative government	3.1%	12.1%	7.7%	30.0%	10.9%	15
Independent institutions	12.5%	3.0%	3.8%	0.0%	5.1%	7
Civil society (national)	3.1%	9.1%	7.7%	5.0%	6.6%	9
International groups	0.0%	6.1%	7.7%	15.0%	6.6%	9
Economy	0.0%	6.1%	0.0%	0.0%	1.5%	2
Professionals	0.0%	3.0%	3.8%	0.0%	2.2%	3
General public	3.1%	24.2%	23.1%	0.0%	15.3%	21
Others	9.4%	6.1%	9.6%	15.0%	9.5%	13
Target groups development cooperation	0.0%	3.0%	1.9%	5.0%	2.2%	3
Total N	32	33	52	20		137
%	100	100	100	100	100	

Observations

1. The executive government is the leading soundbite provider on all four stations, most remarkably on Radio Truth FM with almost 53.1% government related sources.
2. Radio ELBC considers the parliament as an equivalent source: Both government and parliament speak out in 30.0% of its news reports.
3. Representatives of the civil society get more often a possibility to speak out on Star Radio (9.1%) and Radio Veritas (7.7%) than on the other two stations.
4. International groups appear as soundbites most frequently on Radio ELBC (15.0%). As mentioned above (see: Geographic reference) this is probably due to the station's role as a state broadcaster reporting on diplomatic activities and international occurrences.
5. Consistently with further findings Star Radio (24.2%) and Radio Veritas (23.1%) do give the ordinary people a voice by conceding them airtime, i.e. direct speech. Radio ELBC by contrast does not provide any soundbites of the general public at all.
6. Political parties get more often a word on Radio Truth FM (15.6%) than on the other stations. This result is consistent with the findings in the categories 'source groups' and 'actor groups'; in both categories political parties are stronger represented on Radio Truth FM than on the other stations.

New information?

From a common understanding a soundbite serves to provide new information plus opinion or interpretation. Therefore a variable was introduced to measure how much new information – additional to what the speaker already said – a soundbite provides.

Table 22: New information in the soundbite

Percentage of soundbites offering additional information; base of N = all news, purely international news and sport news excluded.

Source content	Medium				Ø	Total N
	Truth FM	Star	Veritas	ELBC		
Yes	97.1%	97.5%	89.1%	59.4%	87%	141
N	35	40	55	32		162

Observations

1. It is quite common that soundbite providers deliver information beyond what the speaker said preliminarily (87.0 on average).
2. Radio ELBC is the station with the smallest number of soundbites in which content additional to the speaker's introduction could be distinguished (59.4%).

Annex

Re-grouped topics Liberia 2007

Nr.	Topic groups	Single topic
101	High politics	
		Reform of political institutions
		Organisation of administration and political process
		Elections
		National security (army, military, security sector)
		Foreign affairs of Liberia
102	Conflicts	
		Political or personal conflicts Corruption
103	Civil War in Liberia	
		Events of civil war Reconciliation in Liberia Disarmament
104	Pure international events	
		War and civil war elsewhere incl. peace talks Terrorist acts and prevention
105	Social development issues	
		Education Health and nutrition Environment Water and sanitation Cases of social problems and poverty
106	Events	
		Crime Rape Accidents and disasters Miscellaneous Sports
107	Economics	
		Infrastructure Trade and commerce Industry, business Agriculture and forestry Employment Finances (taxes and bourse) Development co-operation and humanitarian aid Economy in general
108	Science	Science
109	Religion	Religion
110	Culture	Culture
111	Media	Media
112	Others	
		Topic mix Others

Re-grouped actors Liberia 2007

Nr.	Actor groups	Single actors
101	Executive government	President
		Government
		Central authorities
		Military
		Police
		Local administration
102	Political parties/stakeholders	Ruling party
		Other political parties
		Former government
		Various political stakeholders
103	Legislative government	Parliament
104	Independent institutions	Judiciary
		Truth and reconciliation commission
105	Civil society (national)	National NGOs
		Churches/Religious groups
106	International groups	International NGOs
		Intergovernmental organisations
		Foreign political bodies
		Foreign country as a nation
107	Economy	National entrepreneurs
		International business
108	Professionals	Culture
		Science/education/university
109	General public	Employees
		Person from general public
		Liberia as a nation
		Person from a call-in show
110	Media	Media
111	Other	Others
112	Development cooperation: Target Groups	Refugees, migrants
		Ex-combatants
		Youth
		Disabled
		Women
		People with HIV

Re-grouped sources Liberia 2007

Nr.	Source group	Single sources
101	Executive government	President
		Government
		Central authorities
		Military
		Police
		Local administration
102	Political parties/stakeholders	Ruling party
		Other political parties
		Former government
		Various political stakeholders
103	Legislative government	Parliament
104	Independent institutions	Judiciary
		Truth and reconciliation commission
105	Civil society (national)	National NGOs
		Churches/Religious groups
106	International groups	International NGOs
		Intergovernmental organisations
		Foreign political bodies
		Foreign country as a nation
107	Economy	National entrepreneurs
		International business
108	Professionals	Culture
		Science/education/university
109	General public	Employees
		Person from general public
		Liberia as a nation
		Person from a call-in show
		Eye witness
110	Media	Media
		News agency
111	Other	Others
		Public document
112	Development cooperation: Target Groups	Refugees, migrants
		Ex-combatants
		Youth
		Disabled
		Women
		People with HIV