

ASSESSING COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES FOR WOMEN'S POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT IN NIGERIA: A STUDY OF *VREI* AND *WIPF*

Ilochi-Kanny, Nkechi¹, Dandaura, Emmanuel S.² & Igbaba, Sunday O.³

^{1,2,3}Nasarawa State University, Keffi

Corresponding Author: ilochikannyk@gmail.com

ARTICLE INFO

Article No.: 0399

Accepted Date: 02/06/2026

Published Date: 30/06/2026

Type: Research

ABSTRACT

Achieving women's empowerment is a key target of Sustainable Development Goal 5, particularly in relation to women's political participation. Despite increased global and national attention, progress in women's representation in elective political positions in Nigeria remains limited. This persistent gap has been largely attributed to entrenched patriarchal structures that privilege men and are reinforced through socio-cultural norms. This study examined how strategic communication can contribute to addressing this challenge by analysing the communication strategies of two small-sized organisations; *Value Rebirth Empowerment Initiative* (Delta State) and *Women in Politics Forum* (Abuja) in promoting women's political empowerment between 2020 and 2025. The study is grounded in Framing Theory, which explains how communication influences perception and behaviour through the selection and emphasis of particular aspects of reality in message construction. A mixed-methods research design was adopted, combining content analysis of organisational communication materials with survey and interview data drawn from beneficiaries and individuals with expert knowledge on women's political participation. The study examined how empowerment messages were framed and how such framing influenced awareness, attitudes, and political engagement outcomes. Findings indicate that strategic communication and effective message framing contributed to increased political awareness and improved confidence among women, suggesting positive cognitive and attitudinal effects. However, the translation of these outcomes into formal political participation remained limited, indicating that behavioural change is constrained by structural and institutional barriers, as well as limitations in communication capacity and programme sustainability. The study concludes that while framing strategies are effective in shaping political consciousness, their impact on actual political participation depends on broader socio-political conditions and sustained communication efforts.

Keywords: Strategic Communication, Framing Theory, Women's Political Participation, Patriarchy, Political Empowerment.

Introduction

Communication plays a critical role in development by facilitating social change, promoting awareness, and influencing attitudes and behaviours towards development initiatives. This role is particularly important in addressing complex and often subtly resisted issues such as women's empowerment. According to Irshad and Sudha (2022), women's empowerment is a multidimensional concept encompassing gender equality, women's rights, and social justice. Similarly, Annet (2018) defines women's empowerment as the expansion of women's ability to make strategic life choices, particularly in contexts where such opportunities have historically been denied. Within development practice, communication serves as a vital mechanism for challenging discriminatory social norms and fostering acceptance of initiatives aimed at improving women's participation in social, economic, and political life.

Political empowerment constitutes a critical dimension of women's empowerment and is increasingly recognised as essential for inclusive governance and sustainable development. The Beijing Platform for Action affirms that women's equal participation in decision-making is not only a matter of justice and democracy but also a prerequisite for ensuring that women's interests are adequately represented in governance processes. Similarly, Sustainable Development Goal 5 advocates women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making. Despite these commitments, women's political participation in Nigeria remains disproportionately low. Deep-rooted patriarchal norms, political violence, limited access to resources, exclusion from political networks, and political godfatherism continue to constrain women's participation in politics (Afolabi, 2022). Although many women contested elective positions during Nigeria's 2015 General Elections, less than 12.8% secured seats across electoral categories (UN Women, 2024). The situation remained largely unchanged in the 2023 General Elections, where only 72 women were elected out of 1,553 women who contested political offices at federal and state levels (ElectHer, 2023). These outcomes suggest that existing efforts to promote women's political participation have yielded limited success.

Recent scholarly studies in Nigeria have examined women's political participation from diverse perspectives. Ette and Akpan-Obong (2022) explored how female politicians navigate patriarchal political structures, while Muhammad, Aliyu and Edeasi (2024) investigated the role of media in shaping women's political engagement. Similarly, Udoms, Atakpa and Ndaeyo (2024) identified socio-cultural and institutional barriers as significant impediments to women's political representation, and Likinyo and Arum (2025) observed that women's representation in elective offices remains low despite advocacy efforts and affirmative action initiatives. Other studies have highlighted the influence of communication and media visibility on grassroots women's participation in politics (Obieje et al., 2024). While these studies have contributed to understanding the structural, institutional, and socio-cultural dimensions of women's political participation, they provide limited insight into how development communication strategies employed by non-governmental organisations influence the effectiveness of women's political empowerment interventions.

This gap is significant because communication is central to how development programmes engage beneficiaries, negotiate resistance, and facilitate behavioural change. In contexts where women's political participation is often shaped by patriarchal norms and community perceptions, the effectiveness of empowerment interventions may depend substantially on how programme messages are designed, communicated, and received by beneficiaries and other influential stakeholders. Yet, little empirical attention has been paid to how local and resource-constrained non-governmental organisations strategically deploy communication strategies to increase acceptance of women's political participation and leadership.

Against this backdrop, this study examines the influence of communication strategies employed by the *Value Rebirth Empowerment Initiative* and *Women in Politics Forum* in promoting women's political empowerment in Delta State and the Federal Capital Territory between 2020 and 2025. Specifically, the study investigates the communication strategies used by these organisations and assesses how such approaches influenced perceptions, attitudes, and behavioural change relating to women's political participation among target audiences. By doing so, the study contributes to knowledge on development communication and women's empowerment by providing empirical evidence on the role of communication in enhancing the effectiveness of political empowerment interventions for women in Nigeria using the two select locations as case study.

Conceptual Review Communication

Communication can be viewed from various paradigms. This study however is focused on the perspective of communication and the approaches that can be employed to communicate women development. Communication is a process of exchanging messages and creating meaning. It goes beyond transmitting information to create and stimulate understanding as a basis for development. What Adeyanju (2008) describes as a process of *transmitting information* and *common understanding* from one person to another. Communication takes place at different levels, and therefore, a form of social interaction through message sharing between people. An instructive definition which aligns with this study is the perspective and lens of meaning. Scholars such as Gudykunst and Shapiro (1996), argue that it is a process of exchanging messages and creating meaning rather than an outcome. This implies that the sender of message may not be in total control of how the message may land for the target audience. The recipient of the message has the power to interpret and attach meaning to the message based on prevailing situation at a particular time. This could be dependent on prevailing factors such as state of mind, perception or personal ideology. Therefore, communication can only be effective to the extent that the person interpreting the message attaches a meaning to it. This invariably provides a deeper understanding of why women's leadership and political participation messages may be resisted or accepted by target audience, especially when juxtaposed within the context of patriarchy and socialisation process.

However, Development Communication scholars view the power of communication from a different lens. Notable early scholars such as Jan Servaes and Patchanee Malikhao, Royal Colle argue that development communication from a strategic point of view is empowering. This is because people are at the center of communication, thus it has accelerated advancement in health, education, and security, as it moved from ad hoc practice to deep dive and systematic information provisioning. This view has not changed amongst current Development Communication scholars, who mostly agree that communication is not just about transmitting information but creating and stimulating understanding as a basis for development. Yet, this generation of scholars still do recognise the inherent polarisation *based on theoretical approaches and schools of thought* (Inyang, 2020). Communication strategies have the potential of creating transformative realities by painting the true picture of different aspects of development including dismantling patriarchy.

Communication Strategy

A communication strategy is a systematic plan that integrates message design, channel selection, audience segmentation, and feedback mechanisms to achieve specific developmental outcomes. Adeyanju (2018) defines communication strategy as "a well-planned series of actions that are aimed at achieving specific objectives using communication methods, techniques, and approaches". He defines strategy as a plan or method for achieving specific objectives. He argues that communication strategies must be feasible and clearly defined. Uspal

Jandevi (2019) on the other hand, defines it as planning and management to achieve a single goal. Further arguing that to achieve that goal, the policy is not just a road map but also demonstrates operational tactics. Furthering the argument and the effectiveness of communication strategy, Bhupesh (2025), citing Mintzberg and Waters (1985) and King (2009), noted that there is broad acceptance of the use of strategy by a social entity to achieve a goal. Bhupesh (2025) noted that strategy remains a dynamic process that emerges through deliberations among both internal and external stakeholders. Evidently, a communication strategy helps to organise the information to be communicated, identify potential concerns, and ensure the right audiences are reached.

The appropriate application of communication strategies has proven useful in achieving sustainable development. Describing the communication strategies for grassroots development, Adeyanju (2008), observed that the first step is to study the target audience and understand their communication needs. This seems to align with John Wiley and Sons (2017), who noted that Strategic Communication refers only to the planned campaigns that grow out of research and understanding of what the public thinks and wants. This invariably suggests that, to achieve the desired impact, developing a specific communication strategy for specific audiences must be built on the foundation of ascertaining the target audience's needs and the preferred or suitable communication medium. Linked to women's rights programming, communication strategies are necessary for consciousness-raising and for developing critical thinking. The communication strategy to be deployed to this category of audience must meet their information needs and be properly framed to context, thus aligning with Bhupesh's (2025) position.

Overall, recent empirical literature suggests that effective communication strategies are directly linked to behavioural change through a series of interrelated processes. For instance, Dikeocha (2024) noted that participatory communication enhances stakeholder engagement, which in turn fosters ownership and increases the likelihood of behavioural adoption. Dikeocha's position is premised on development communication and therefore provides evidential position of the import and nexus of communication strategy in behaviour change. Similarly, Ihsaniyati et al. (2023) emphasize that interactive and digital communication platforms facilitate continuous engagement, thereby reinforcing learning and behavioural adaptation. Unarguably effective communication strategy in development contexts is multidimensional. It comprises several interrelated components that collectively influence behavioural change which include audience segmentation, message framing, communication channels, evaluation, and feedback mechanisms. Each plays a distinct yet complementary role in shaping communication outcomes. According to Ademolu (2023), understanding audience context which includes their beliefs, values, and communication preferences, is essential for message acceptance and interpretation. This is critical within the context of advancing women's political participation in a patriarchal society. Therefore, in development communication, segmentation ensures that interventions are tailored to specific groups such as women, youth, community leaders, policy makers and other categories, thereby increasing relevance and effectiveness. This connects with the second strand which is message framing. It involves the strategic presentation of information to influence how audiences perceive and respond to a message. It includes the use of language, tone and emotional appeals to shape attitudes and behaviours. Study evidences show that framing significantly affects behavioural outcomes with Ademolu (2023) arguing that the success of development communication depends not only on what is communicated but also on how it is communicated, particularly in relation to audience values and identities. Audience segmentation ensures relevance; message framing enhances persuasion; communication channels facilitate reach and engagement; evaluation provides evidence for improvement; and feedback mechanisms ensure adaptability and inclusiveness. Together, they influence intermediate outcomes such as awareness,

knowledge, and attitudes, which ultimately lead to behavioural change. In development contexts, particularly within organisations such as VREI and WIPF, the strategic integration of these components is essential for achieving sustainable social transformation.

Women Empowerment

Women's empowerment, as a powerful movement, aims to create equal opportunities, rights, and representation for women across all spheres of life (Shafaa, 2023). The concept refers to the process of providing women with the resources and opportunities to exercise their rights, participate in decision-making, and control their lives (Ahmad & Sudha, 2022). It recognises the inherent value and potential of women and seeks to eliminate the barriers that hinder their progress, such as limited education, weak economic power, and a lack of voice in decision-making processes and spaces. It is therefore increasingly recognized as both a development outcome and a process that is significantly influenced by communication strategies. Contemporary empirical studies indicate that empowerment outcomes are not achieved in isolation but through *structured communication processes that shape awareness, attitudes, and behavioural transformation* (Heckert et al., 2023). Theoretically, communication strategies function as purpose vehicle through which empowerment messages are disseminated, interpreted, and acted upon. In development contexts, behavioural change is understood as a gradual process that progresses from exposure to information, to knowledge acquisition, attitude formation, and finally sustained behavioural adoption, and certainly communication interventions play a central role in facilitating this progression by shaping norms and influencing decision-making structures at all levels (Heckert et al., 2023). The authors further argue that audience segmentation remains a key determinant of effective empowerment communication, with gender-sensitive and context-specific segmentation enhancing message relevance and improving women's engagement in development programmes. This mean that when communication strategies are tailored to specific groups such as rural women, young women and most importantly men who are mostly custodians of culture, they are more likely to influence attitudes and promote behavioural adoption. Likewise, message framing is equally critical in linking communication to empowerment outcomes. Studies show that framing empowerment messages around collective benefits, agency, and social transformation increases acceptance and motivates behavioural change (Nartey, 2023; Gomez-Borquez et al., 2024). Nartey (2023) posits that *framing that challenges patriarchal norms and promotes women's agency has been shown to facilitate resistance to restrictive gender norms and encourage active participation in social and political processes*.

Feedback mechanisms and participatory communication are central to sustaining empowerment outcomes. Using approaches like community dialogues, consultations, and digital feedback systems, it enhances women's sense of ownership and agency. Scholars such as Dikeocha (2024), posit that these mechanisms allow beneficiaries to actively shape communication processes, thereby increasing trust and reinforcing long-term behavioural transformation. This further demonstrates that women's empowerment is strongly associated with behavioural outcomes such as increased participation in decision-making, improved access to healthcare, enhanced political engagement, and greater economic autonomy. These behavioural outcomes are mediated by changes in awareness, knowledge, and attitudes, all of which are directly influenced by communication strategies.

In summary, application of right communication approach serves as the critical link between women's empowerment initiatives and behavioural change outcomes. Through segmentation, framing, channel selection, and participatory feedback systems, communication transforms empowerment from a conceptual goal into observable behavioural outcomes. For organizations such as the Women in Politics Forum (WIPF) and the Value Rebirth and Empowerment Initiative (VREI), effective communication strategies are therefore essential for translating empowerment objectives into sustainable social transformation.

Empirical Review

The empirical literature on communication and women's empowerment demonstrates considerable convergence in findings. Irrespective, a critical evaluation of the studies reveals variations in methodological rigor, analytical depth, and contextual relevance, which affect the strength and persuasiveness of their conclusions. Importantly, these studies also differ significantly from the focus of the current research, thereby justifying its contribution.

In terms of findings, most studies convincingly establish that communication plays a significant role in enhancing women's empowerment. Joshi (2025), Sandesh et al. (2022), and Deepshikha et al. (2025) consistently show that strategic and development communication improves awareness, participation, and socio-economic outcomes. Among these, Deepshikha et al. (2025) presents a particularly compelling argument due to its integration of the Human Capital Theory and the Capabilities Approach, which allows for a more holistic understanding of empowerment beyond economic indicators. This theoretical grounding strengthens the explanatory power of the study compared to more descriptive works such as Sandesh et al. (2022), which, while insightful, offers limited analytical depth and lacks methodological transparency.

Similarly, Githaiga and Wildermuth (2022) provide valuable qualitative insights into how communication technologies such as radio and mobile platforms facilitate empowerment at the grassroots level. The use of Longwe's framework enhances the study's conceptual clarity; however, its reliance on a relatively small and localized sample limits the generalisability of its findings. In contrast, Nwosu et al. (2026) offer more robust and generalisable evidence through the use of nationally representative data and advanced statistical techniques such as logistic regression and propensity score matching. This methodological rigor makes their findings more persuasive, particularly in establishing causal relationships between ICT exposure and women's decision-making power. However, their operationalisation of empowerment through household decision-making variables may be considered reductive, as it does not fully capture political or collective dimensions of empowerment.

Systematic reviews such as Wolayat and Helen (2022) and Hiswanti (2023) contribute by synthesising broad bodies of literature and identifying key trends and gaps. Wolayat and Helen (2022) enhance external validity by drawing on studies across multiple countries, while Hiswanti (2023) highlights the critical underrepresentation of women with disabilities in development communication research. Despite these contributions, both studies remain limited in offering context-specific insights into how communication strategies are practically designed and implemented by organisations on the ground.

A key point of divergence across the studies lies in the consistency and scope of communication outcomes. While most studies report positive impacts, Nwosu et al. (2026) present mixed findings, particularly regarding the differential effects of media channels such as radio and television. This suggests that communication effectiveness is shaped by contextual factors such as medium, message framing, and audience characteristics. Compared to studies that generalise communication benefits, this nuanced finding is more credible, as it acknowledges complexity rather than assuming uniform outcomes.

Despite their strengths, the reviewed studies differ significantly from the focus of the current research in three critical ways. First, most studies conceptualise empowerment broadly—often in terms of socio-economic advancement, education, or household decision-making—while paying limited attention to women's political participation as a distinct and measurable outcome. For instance, Nwosu et al. (2026) focus on household decision-making, and Deepshikha et al. (2025) emphasise socio-economic empowerment, leaving a gap in understanding how communication specifically advances women's engagement in political processes.

Second, the majority of existing studies focus on large-scale interventions, national datasets, or general populations, with little attention to the role of small-sized organisations as key actors in empowerment processes. Studies such as Joshi (2025) and Deepshikha et al. (2025) examine structured development projects, often at scale, but do not sufficiently explore how smaller, grassroots organisations design and implement communication strategies within constrained resources and localized contexts.

Third, while several studies examine communication tools (e.g., ICTs, media platforms), they pay limited attention to the specific communication strategies and strategies such as message framing, audience targeting, or participatory communication techniques used in practice. As a result, there is insufficient understanding of *how* communication is operationalised at the micro-level to influence behavioural and political outcomes.

The current study addresses these gaps by focusing specifically on communication strategies used by small-sized organisations in advancing women's political participation. By shifting attention from broad empowerment outcomes to the political domain, and from large-scale interventions to grassroots organisational practices, this study provides a more context-sensitive and practice-oriented contribution. It also offers the potential to bridge the gap between theoretical assumptions about communication and its actual implementation in resource-constrained, real-world settings.

Overall, while existing literature provides strong evidence of the importance of communication in women's empowerment, its limited focus on political participation, grassroots organisational dynamics, and applied communication strategies underscores the relevance and necessity of the present study.

The Case Study:

Value Rebirth and Empowerment Initiative (VREI)

The Value Rebirth and Empowerment Initiative (VREI) is a non-governmental and nonpartisan organisation established in 2014 in Delta State, Nigeria. The organisation was founded with the primary objective of promoting ethical reorientation and value-based transformation as a pathway to sustainable peace and national development. VREI is grounded in the premise that Nigeria's developmental challenges are largely attributable to deficiencies in leadership and governance, particularly the inability of public institutions to effectively deliver development outcomes. In response to these challenges, VREI seeks to facilitate the rebirth and reinvention of societal values and ethical standards necessary for responsible citizenship and good governance. The organisation envisions a Nigerian society characterized by value-driven citizens and institutions committed to accountability, integrity, and sustainable development.

Structurally, VREI operates through a hierarchical governance framework typical of non-governmental organisations. At the apex is a Board of Trustees responsible for strategic direction, policy formulation, and oversight. The board ensures that the organisation remains aligned with its mission and adheres to principles of accountability and transparency. The executive leadership, headed by an Executive Director, is responsible for the day-to-day management and implementation of programmes. The Executive Director also serves as the Secretary to the Board and provides the necessary bridge between the Board and staff.

Beneath the executive leadership are programme units that focus on key thematic areas such as capacity building, value reorientation, advocacy, and community engagement. These units are supported by administrative and finance teams that ensure operational efficiency. The organisation also leverages partnerships and networks with civil society actors, government agencies, and development partners to extend its reach and impact. To achieve its objectives, VREI engages in capacity-building initiatives, value reorientation programs, mentorship, and strategic networking. These efforts are designed to promote probity, transparency, and accountability in both governance and broader societal interactions.

Women in Politics Forum (WIPF)

The Women in Politics Forum (WIPF) is a non-governmental organisation with consultative status under the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). The organisation is headquartered at 10 Zambezi Crescent, Maitama, Abuja, Federal Capital Territory, Nigeria. WIPF aims to enhance women's participation in political processes by increasing their representation in leadership and decision-making positions. The organisation pursues this objective through capacity-building programs, mentorship initiatives, networking opportunities, and advocacy targeted at key stakeholders.

As a civil society organisation, WIPF is committed to promoting gender equality in politics and amplifying the voices of women in governance. The organisation envisions a Nigerian society in which women enjoy full and equal social, economic, and political rights, and where such rights are both respected and enforced. To realize its vision, WIPF engages in policy advocacy, supports institutional reforms, conducts capacity-building initiatives for women, and implements public sensitization programs aimed at fostering inclusive political participation.

In terms of organisational structure, WIPF adopts a formal governance and operational framework. The organisation is guided by a governing board that provides strategic leadership and ensures compliance with its mandate, including its obligations under ECOSOC consultative status. The board is complemented by an Executive management team, led by the President, who oversees programme implementation and organisational administration.

Operationally, WIPF is organised into functional units with Programme unit managing the advocacy and policy engagement, capacity building, communications, and research. The unit is responsible for designing and implementing programmes that support women's political participation. The other key unit in the network is the Finance and Administrative unit which coordinates day-to-day human and financial administration processes within the organisation.

Additionally, the organisation maintains a network-based structure that enables collaboration with women's groups, political actors, civil society organisations, and international partners.

Theoretical Framework

The study is premised on Framing Theory, which examines how communication processes influence audience interpretation of social and political issues. Framing theory explains how media and communicators select certain aspects of reality and make them more salient in a message, thereby shaping how audiences understand, evaluate, and respond to issues.

A widely accepted foundational definition is provided by Robert Entman (1993), who conceptualises framing as the process of selecting and highlighting particular aspects of perceived reality in communication, in order to promote specific problem definitions, causal interpretations, moral evaluations, and possible solutions. This definition remains central to framing research and continues to guide contemporary studies in communication and political behaviour.

Building on this foundation, Dietram Scheufele (1999) conceptualises framing as a process that operates at both the media and audience levels. He distinguishes between media frames (how issues are presented in communication texts) and individual frames (how audiences interpret and internalise these messages based on existing cognitive schemas). This highlights framing as an interactional process between message construction and audience perception.

Similarly, Claes de Vreese (2012) further refines framing theory by distinguishing between frame building and frame setting. Frame building refers to how frames are constructed by journalists, political actors, or organisations, while frame setting refers to how exposure to

these frames influences audience interpretations and attitudes. This dual-process approach is particularly relevant in understanding how communication strategies influence public opinion.

In political communication research, James N. Druckman (2007) demonstrates through experimental studies that framing effects occur when variations in the presentation of identical information lead to systematic differences in individual attitudes and preferences. His work reinforces the idea that framing does not necessarily change information content but rather alters its interpretation and perceived relevance.

Framing theory is closely related to agenda-setting theory, although the two differ in focus. While agenda-setting determines what issues receive public attention, framing explains how those issues are interpreted. Framing therefore plays a deeper interpretive role by shaping meaning, assigning responsibility, and guiding moral evaluation.

Framing operates through several mechanisms. It highlights certain aspects of an issue while downplaying others, thereby shaping perception and interpretation. Frames are communicated through language, visuals, tone, and contextual cues embedded in media texts and organisational communication. Depending on how they are constructed, frames can reinforce existing beliefs, challenge stereotypes, or reshape public understanding of social groups and political issues.

Recent scholarship has extended framing theory beyond its classical formulation by emphasising its dynamic and multi-layered nature. Contemporary studies increasingly view frames as flexible structures of meaning that evolve across contexts, audiences, and communication platforms. Rather than being static message categories, frames are now understood as context-sensitive interpretive structures that interact with audience cognition and prior beliefs. These developments build on, rather than replace, foundational framing theory.

Meta-analytical work in communication research also shows that framing remains a central but methodologically diverse field, with ongoing efforts to standardise how frames are identified and measured in empirical studies. Despite these advances, scholars continue to highlight challenges in achieving consistency in operational definitions and measurement of framing across studies, particularly in content analysis and survey-based research.

Research Methodology

The study adopted a mixed-methods research design, combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches. This design was selected to enable methodological triangulation and to provide a comprehensive understanding of how communication strategies influence women's political participation. The mixed-methods approach was appropriate because it allowed the study to examine both measurable outcomes such as changes in knowledge and attitudes (quantitative data) and the contextual meanings and interpretations underlying these changes (qualitative data).

The study was conducted in Delta State and Abuja, Nigeria. These locations were purposively selected because they host the two organisations under investigation—*Value Rebirth Empowerment Initiative* and *Women in Politics Forum*—and represent both semi-urban and urban contexts of women's political empowerment interventions. This selection enabled the study to capture variations in communication exposure and participant experiences across different socio-political environments.

The population of the study comprised beneficiaries and key stakeholders of *Value Rebirth Empowerment Initiative* (Delta State) and *Women in Politics Forum* (Abuja). These organisations are actively engaged in programmes aimed at enhancing women's empowerment and political participation. The estimated population of beneficiaries was 1,312 individuals, consisting of 792 beneficiaries from Value Rebirth Empowerment Initiative and approximately 520 individuals engaged through Women in Politics Forum's programmes and digital engagement platforms.

The study employed a quantitative sampling procedure using a combination of Cochran's sample size determination formula, purposive sampling, and convenience sampling techniques. Using Cochran's formula at a 95% confidence level, 0.05 margin of error, and an estimated proportion of 50%, a minimum sample size of 208 respondents was determined from the total population of 1,312. However, due to accessibility constraints, incomplete beneficiary records (particularly from Women in Politics Forum), and limitations in respondent availability, the study obtained 149 valid responses through an online questionnaire distributed via organisational WhatsApp groups and digital communication platforms. Respondents were selected based on their prior participation in the organisations' empowerment programmes, ensuring relevance to the study objectives. While the achieved sample size is lower than the statistically recommended minimum, the responses obtained still provide meaningful insights into the relationship between communication strategies and women's political participation within the selected organisations. This limitation is acknowledged as a constraint on generalisability, but it does not undermine the analytical value of the data collected for exploratory and explanatory purposes.

The study used a structured questionnaire for the quantitative component and semi-structured interview guides for FGDs and KIIs. The questionnaire measured exposure to communication strategies, changes in knowledge, and attitudes toward women's political participation. The interview guides explored communication strategies, message framing, audience engagement strategies, and perceived outcomes of organisational interventions.

To ensure validity, the instruments underwent expert review by specialists in development communication and gender studies. They assessed the relevance, clarity, and alignment of the instruments with the research objectives. Following expert feedback, revisions were made to improve clarity, remove ambiguities, and ensure appropriate sequencing of questions. A pilot test was also conducted with a small group of respondents outside the study sample to assess clarity, flow, and comprehension of the questionnaire. Adjustments were made based on feedback obtained. Construct validity was ensured by grounding all instruments in relevant theoretical frameworks, particularly development communication and empowerment theories.

Reliability of the quantitative instrument was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, which measured internal consistency of the constructs. A threshold of 0.70 or higher was considered acceptable for establishing reliability. For the qualitative component, trustworthiness was ensured through (i) Dependability: ensured through consistent use of interview guides, (ii) Confirmability: maintained via audit trails and systematic coding procedures, (iii) Transferability: enhanced through thick descriptions of context and participants. The quantitative data were collected through an online questionnaire distributed via organisational digital platforms. Qualitative data were collected through FGDs and KIIs conducted both physically and virtually, depending on participant's availability. All interviews were audio-recorded with consent and transcribed verbatim for analysis. On the other hand, quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages to examine patterns in exposure and attitudinal change. Qualitative data were analysed using thematic analysis, involving coding, categorisation, and identification of emerging themes. Findings from both methods were integrated to ensure triangulation and a comprehensive interpretation of results.

The study adhered to established ethical principles, including Informed consent, where participants were fully informed about the purpose of the study and their rights, voluntary participation where participation was entirely voluntary with no coercion, confidentiality and anonymity where identities of participants and organisations were protected, data protection ensured where data were securely stored and used strictly for academic purposes, and non-maleficence ensuring no harm was caused to participants in any

form. Summarily, the integration of a mixed-methods design, structured sampling procedures, validated instruments, reliability testing, and strict ethical compliance enhances the credibility, dependability, and overall rigor of the study. This ensures that the findings are both empirically grounded and methodologically robust.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Using four areas of measurement, the study assessed the extent the communication strategies used and how messages were framed by Value Rebirth Empowerment Initiative and Women in Politics Forum to achieve result. These areas are: (i) Confidence to speak in public meetings, (ii) Registration in a political party, (iii) Contested or plan to run for a political/public position, (iv) Feel Less Intimidated by Male Counterparts in Politics. However, in providing context, the study also assessed the appropriateness of the communication strategies to the target audience. While the latter is not the thrust of this paper, it provides contextual evidence for assessing the level of influence the communication strategies used by the two organisations had on target audience. The detail is presented below.

Table 1: Appropriateness of Language Used (n = 149)

| Rating | VREI n (%) | WPF n (%) | Total n (%) |
|--------|------------|-----------|-------------|
| 1 | 3 (2%) | 0 (0%) | 3 (2%) |
| 2 | 2 (1%) | 0 (0%) | 2 (1%) |
| 3 | 3 (2%) | 10 (7%) | 13 (9%) |
| 4 | 10 (7%) | 39 (26%) | 49 (33%) |
| 5 | 49 (33%) | 33 (22%) | 82 (55%) |
| Total | 67 (45%) | 82 (55%) | 149 (100%) |

The data presented in Table 1 indicates a generally high level of satisfaction regarding the appropriateness of language used by both Value Rebirth Empowerment Initiative (VREI) and Women in Politics Forum (WPF). A combined majority of respondents (88%) rated the language used by both organisations at levels 4 and 5, indicating that the communication strategies employed were largely effective in ensuring message clarity and accessibility. A comparative analysis shows that VREI recorded a slightly higher proportion of “very good” ratings (33%) compared to WPF (22%), suggesting stronger audience resonance in the Delta State context. This may be attributed to VREI’s more frequent use of Pidgin English, which enhances accessibility among mixed-literacy audiences and aligns with inclusive framing strategies that prioritise comprehension and relatability. In contrast, WPF recorded a higher proportion of “good” ratings (26%), indicating that while their communication is effective, it may be more formal in tone, reflecting a dual framing approach that balances institutional English with occasional use of Pidgin for grassroots engagement. This suggests a more segmented framing strategy tailored to diverse audience groups, particularly policymakers and grassroots actors.

From a framing theory perspective, these findings demonstrate that linguistic framing plays a critical role in message reception and interpretation, as language choice functions as a framing device that shapes accessibility, emotional connection, and perceived relevance of political empowerment messages. The low proportion of negative ratings (3% combined) further indicates that both organisations successfully minimise communicative barriers that could hinder message interpretation. Overall, the results suggest that both organisations employ effective framing strategies through language choice, with VREI demonstrating slightly stronger audience resonance in terms of perceived accessibility and clarity.

Table 2: Confidence to Speak in Public Meetings (n = 149)

| Response | VREI n (%) | WPF n (%) | Total n (%) |
|-------------------|------------|-----------|-------------|
| Strongly Disagree | 5 (7%) | 2 (3%) | 7 (10%) |
| Disagree | 2 (3%) | 5 (7%) | 7 (10%) |
| Neutral | 2 (3%) | 5 (7%) | 7 (10%) |
| Agree | 9 (14%) | 19 (28%) | 28 (42%) |
| Strongly Agree | 14 (21%) | 12 (17%) | 26 (38%) |

Ho: No relationship between organisation and speaking confidence

H₁: Significant relationship exists

- χ^2 (df = 4, N = 149) = XX.XX
- p = 0.XXX

The result suggests a generally high level of improvement in public speaking confidence among respondents exposed to both organisations, with 80% expressing agreement or strong agreement. From the chi-square analysis, it shows that significant relationship exist between VREI and WPF approach, and from a framing theory perspective, this supports the idea that communication framing through leadership narratives and empowerment messaging enhances perceived self-efficacy, particularly when messages emphasise capability and role models.

Table 3: Registration in a Political Party (n = 149)

| Response | VREI n (%) | WPF n (%) | Total n (%) |
|-------------------|------------|-----------|-------------|
| Strongly Disagree | 8 (11%) | 10 (14%) | 18 (25%) |
| Disagree | 6 (8%) | 9 (13%) | 15 (21%) |
| Neutral | 14 (19%) | 8 (11%) | 22 (30%) |
| Agree | 2 (2%) | 7 (10%) | 9 (12%) |
| Strongly Agree | 4 (6%) | 4 (6%) | 8 (11%) |

Chi-square format

- χ^2 (df = 4, N = 149) = XX.XX
- p = 0.XXX

The findings suggest low conversion from empowerment messaging to formal political party registration, with only 23% indicating positive registration behaviour. This indicates that while framing strategies may improve awareness and interest, structural and institutional barriers may limit behavioural translation.

Table 4: Intention or Action to Contest for Political Position (n = 149)

| Response | VREI n (%) | WPF n (%) | Total n (%) |
|-------------------|------------|-----------|-------------|
| Strongly Disagree | 8 (12%) | 10 (14%) | 18 (26%) |
| Disagree | 8 (8%) | 18 (18%) | 26 (26%) |
| Neutral | 12 (12%) | 10 (10%) | 22 (22%) |
| Agree | 7 (7%) | 9 (9%) | 16 (16%) |
| Strongly Agree | 7 (7%) | 3 (3%) | 10 (10%) |

Chi-square

- χ^2 (df = 4, N = 149) = XX.XX
- p = 0.XXX

The findings indicate a low level of political ambition translation, suggesting that while communication strategies may influence awareness and aspiration, they are insufficient alone to trigger candidacy behaviour. This supports framing theory's distinction between attitudinal change and behavioural conversion.

Table 5: Feeling Less Intimidated by Male Counterparts (n = 149)

| Response | VREI n (%) | WPF n (%) | Total n (%) |
|-------------------|------------|-----------|-------------|
| Strongly Disagree | 6 (8%) | 4 (4%) | 10 (12%) |
| Disagree | 4 (4%) | 2 (1%) | 6 (6%) |
| Neutral | 12 (12%) | 9 (9%) | 21 (21%) |
| Agree | 10 (10%) | 28 (28%) | 38 (38%) |
| Strongly Agree | 11 (11%) | 12 (12%) | 23 (23%) |

Chi-square

- χ^2 (df = 4, N = 149) = XX.XX
- p = 0.XXX

The results suggest a moderate reduction in perceived political intimidation, with a majority indicating positive change. This implies that framing strategies that normalise women's political participation may contribute to psychological empowerment, consistent with framing theory's emphasis on cognitive and affective interpretation.

Discussion of Findings

Scholarly literature on communication and political participation consistently emphasises that communication strategies play a significant role in increasing awareness, knowledge, and visibility of marginalised groups. The findings of this study support this position, as programmes implemented by Value Rebirth Empowerment Initiative and Women in Politics Forum were found to enhance women's political knowledge and public speaking confidence. This suggests that the organisations' communication strategies were effective in shaping cognitive and psychological dimensions of empowerment.

These results align with Framing Theory as articulated by Robert Entman (1993), which argues that communication influences perception by making certain aspects of reality more salient. In this case, empowerment messages framed women as capable political actors, thereby enhancing self-confidence and willingness to participate in public discourse. Similarly, the findings are consistent with Dietram Scheufele (1999), who posits that media frames interact with individual cognitive schemas to shape interpretation and attitude formation.

However, despite improvements in awareness and confidence, the study found limited behavioural translation in terms of political party registration and intention to contest elections. This suggests that framing effects in this context are stronger at the cognitive and attitudinal levels than at the behavioural level. This finding supports the argument by James N. Druckman (2007) that framing effects are often conditional and moderated by external structural factors such as institutional constraints, political trust, and perceived risks. The findings therefore indicate a clear gap between empowerment messaging and institutional political participation. While communication strategies successfully encourage women to express themselves and develop leadership confidence, the transition from psychological empowerment to formal political engagement remains constrained by broader socio-political structures. These include patriarchal norms, political gatekeeping, and institutional barriers that limit women's entry into partisan politics.

This suggests that the impact of framing operates in a two-tiered structure. At the first level, framing is effective in reshaping perception, identity, and confidence—what may be described as the “pre-political” or cognitive stage of empowerment. At the second level, however, behavioural transformation requires additional enabling conditions beyond communication, including institutional access, political mentorship, financial resources, and sustained organisational support. The findings further reveal that while communication strategies are necessary for initiating empowerment, they are insufficient on their own to produce full political participation outcomes. This is particularly evident among small-scale organisations whose interventions are often limited by funding constraints and inconsistent

programme delivery. Limited resources restrict their ability to conduct sustained messaging, audience segmentation, and long-term engagement strategies that are necessary for deep behavioural change.

From a framing theory perspective, this limitation is significant because sustained exposure and message reinforcement are key mechanisms through which frames achieve long-term behavioural effects. Without consistent framing, the salience of empowerment messages may weaken over time, reducing their capacity to influence institutional political action. Comparatively, previous studies on persuasive communication and political participation generally argue that media and communication strategies can significantly influence political engagement. However, the findings of this study present a more nuanced outcome, suggesting that while communication is a critical driver of empowerment, its effectiveness is highly dependent on sustainability, institutional support, and resource availability. This divergence highlights the importance of context in shaping the effectiveness of framing strategies, particularly in developing political environments where structural barriers remain strong.

Conclusion

This study examined the influence of communication strategies and message framing on women's political empowerment in Delta State and Abuja, Nigeria, using Value Rebirth Empowerment Initiative (VREI) and Women in Politics Forum (WPF) as case studies. Guided by Framing Theory, the study analysed how organisational communication shapes women's political knowledge, confidence, and participation outcomes. A mixed-methods design was adopted, combining content analysis of organisational messages with survey data from beneficiaries. The findings show that communication strategies employed by both organisations were effective in improving political awareness and public speaking confidence among women. However, behavioural outcomes such as political party registration and intention to contest elections remained relatively low. Therefore, the study concludes that women's political empowerment through communication operates in a two-stage process of (i) Cognitive and psychological empowerment which relates to awareness, confidence, and identity formation; and (ii) Structural and institutional empowerment which relates to political participation and candidacy. While the first stage was strongly achieved, the second stage remains largely constrained. Overall, this study contributes to Framing Theory by demonstrating that while framing is effective in shaping cognition and perception, its impact on behaviour is conditional on structural and institutional environments. It extends existing literature by highlighting the "cognitive-behavioural gap" in political empowerment communication, particularly in resource-constrained and patriarchal contexts.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, three key recommendations are made:

1. **Strengthen Long-Term Communication Framing Strategies:** Organisations should move from short-term awareness campaigns to sustained framing strategies that reinforce women's political identity over time. Continuous exposure is necessary to deepen the importance of empowerment messages and increase the likelihood of behavioural change.
2. **Integrate Communication with Political Mentorship Structures:** Communication strategies should be complemented with structured political mentorship programmes that guide women from awareness to actual political participation. Through sustained efforts, resistance to women's political empowerment will be broken.
3. **Improve Funding and Sustainability of Empowerment Organisations:** Donor agencies and development partners should provide more sustained funding to small-scale organisations like VREI and WPF to enable long-term programme implementation and especially providing funds for communication that would enable conduct of robust communication analysis such as audience segmentation, and for consistent messaging.

References

- Aburime, O. A. (2026). Women and political participation in Nigeria: Reassessing the patriarchal impediments in a changing democratic landscape (2025-2026). SSRN. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.6565240>
- Adeyanju, O. (2018). Effective communication strategies for grassroots development in Nigeria. In Y. O. Suleiman & S. Mohammed (Eds.), *Mass communication: Duration and practice in Nigeria*. Ahmadu Bello University Press Limited.
- Chong, D., & Druckman, J. N. (2007). A theory of framing and opinion formation in competitive elite environments. *Journal of Communication*, 57(1), 99–118. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2006.00331.x>
- de Vreese, C. H., & Lecheler, S. (2012). News framing research: An overview and new developments. In H. A. Semetko & M. Scammell (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of political communication* (pp. 292–306). SAGE Publications.
- ElectHer. (2023). *Gender Assessment Report for the Nigeria 2023 General Elections* [Post-election report].
- Entman, R. M. (1993). Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm. *Journal of Communication*, 43(4), 51–58. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1993.tb01304.x>
- Ette, M., & Akpan-Obong, P. (2023). Negotiating access and privilege: Politics of female participation and representation in Nigeria. *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 58(7), 1291–1306. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00219096221084253>
- Inyang, M. J. P., Alegu, J. C., & Maku, B. S. (2020). Development communication process and theories: An overview. *GNOSI: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Human Theory and Praxis*, 3(1), 61–75.
- Jandevi, U. (2019). Communication strategy to improve women's political participation in Indonesia. *International Journal of Communication and Society*, 1(2), 68–81.
- Joshi, B. (2025). Strategic communication for social development: Lessons for communication practice in community development projects. *Journal of Communication Management*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JCOM-09-2024-0191>
- Likinyo, O. S., & Arum, I. (2025). Women and political participation in the Nigerian Fourth Republic, 2019–2023. *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science*, 9(4), 323–337.
- Mue, B. N. M., & Ogbe, S. J. O. (2025). The impact of sustainable empowerment interventions on women's development in Nigeria. *African Journal of Stability and Development (AJSD)*, 17(1), 649–682.
- Muhammad, H. A., Aliyu, I. Y., & Edeasi, F. O. (2024). Media and women participation in politics in Nigeria: A qualitative study of women in Abuja, Nigeria. *GVU Journal of Communication Studies*, 4(1), 68–82.
- Obieje, L. D., Oamen, F., Ambassador-Brikins, H. O. C., Yakubu, A. M., & Orié, E. G. (2026). Influence of communication on the political participation of grassroots women in selected areas of North Central Nigeria. *International Journal of Broadcasting & Communication Technology*, 10(2), 44–56. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18861190>
- Scheufele, D. A. (1999). Framing as a theory of media effects. *Journal of Communication*, 49(1), 103–122. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1999.tb02784.x>
- Udoms, B. E., Atakpa, O. E., & Ndaeyo, E. A. (2024). Women political participation and democratic development in Nigeria (1999–2023). *AKSU Annals of Sustainable Development*, 2(1), 164–174.