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Assessing the Use and Preferability of Communication Channels in Government Enterprise and Empowerment Programme (GEEP) Implementation

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Abstract
This study investigated the effectiveness and reach of communication channels in Nigeria's Government Enterprise and Empowerment Programme (GEEP). The research employed a mixed-methods design, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide comprehensive insights. A structured questionnaire was administered to 1,400 beneficiaries across ten Local Government Areas in Kaduna State, selected through cluster and systematic sampling. This was complemented by twelve key informant interviews with programme stakeholders. The mixed-methods approach facilitated both statistical analysis of communication channel effectiveness and an in-depth understanding of implementation strategies. Findings revealed that while GEEP utilises multiple communication channels, their effectiveness varies significantly. Group meetings (Mean = 3.70) and bulk SMS (Mean = 3.59) emerged as the most frequently used channels, whereas interpersonal communication, although highly preferred by beneficiaries (Mean = 3.78), was underutilised. The study identified a disconnect between channel preferences and

actual usage, with traditional and participatory communication methods receiving limited attention despite their potential to foster community engagement. The research recommends developing a comprehensive communication calendar to ensure consistent messaging across channels and diversifying communication strategies to better align with beneficiary preferences and enhance engagement.

Keywords: Communication Channels, Empowerment, Participatory Communication, Social Intervention, GEEP

Introduction

Communication plays a fundamental role in the success of government empowerment initiatives, serving as the critical link between policymakers and beneficiaries (McKeever et al., 2020). Effective communication strategies are particularly crucial for programmes targeting marginalised populations, as they must overcome various socio-economic barriers to reach and engage their intended beneficiaries (Manyozo, 2017). Research has shown that participatory communication approaches, which emphasise dialogue and community engagement, are more effective than traditional top-down methods in fostering programme ownership and sustainable outcomes (Gumucio-Dagron & Tufte, 2006; Quebral, 2008).

The Government Enterprise and Empowerment Programme (GEEP), launched in 2016 as part of Nigeria's National Social Investment Programme, aims to provide financial inclusion and microcredit access to small-scale businesses (FMHDS, 2018). Through its three core products—MarketMoni, TraderMoni, and FarmerMoni—GEEP targets different segments of the informal sector, particularly women and youth (BOI, 2023). While studies have demonstrated the importance of clear and accessible information in improving programme participation (Aker et al., 2019) and the effectiveness of mobile-based communication in reaching remote communities (Sife et al., 2022), there remains a significant gap in understanding how different communication channels contribute to GEEP's implementation and success.

This research gap is particularly significant given the programme's diverse target audience and the need to balance traditional and digital communication methods. While studies by Melkote & Steeves (2015) and Wang & Singhal (2016) emphasise the importance of interactive, participatory approaches, little empirical evidence exists on how these principles apply within GEEP's specific context. Furthermore, although research has highlighted the role of trust-building and community ownership in programme success (Thomas & van der Westhuizen, 2017; Haldrup & Levin, 2018), the effectiveness of GEEP's multi-channel communication strategy in achieving these outcomes remains unexplored.

This study addresses these gaps by evaluating the effectiveness and reach of GEEP's communication channels, examining how different methods contribute to programme awareness, understanding, and participation. By analysing both traditional channels (such as community mobilisation and radio) and digital platforms (including SMS and social media), this research provides valuable insights into the optimal communication strategies for government empowerment programmes in developing contexts.

The findings contribute to both the theoretical understanding of empowerment communication and practical knowledge for improving programme implementation.

Statement of the Research Problem

While the Government Enterprise and Empowerment Programme (GEEP) demonstrates a commitment to poverty alleviation and economic empowerment in Nigeria, its success hinges on the effective communication of programme details to potential beneficiaries. However, there is a significant gap in understanding the effectiveness and reach of the various communication channels employed by GEEP. This lack of knowledge can hinder the programme's ability to reach its full potential and ensure equitable access to its benefits. Several studies have highlighted the crucial role of communication in the success of social intervention programmes. Research by Aker et al. (2019) demonstrated that access to information significantly influences participation rates in government programmes. Similarly, Bhattacharya et al. (2021) and Ogbe (2017) emphasised the importance of participatory communication strategies in fostering ownership and sustainability of development projects.

However, these studies often focus on specific communication channels or interventions, leaving a gap in understanding the overall effectiveness of a multi-channel communication strategy such as the one employed by GEEP. Furthermore, there is limited empirical evidence on the reach of GEEP's communication efforts, particularly among marginalised and vulnerable populations. While Sife et al. (2022) highlight the potential of mobile technology to reach remote communities, questions remain about its effectiveness in bridging the digital divide and ensuring equitable access to information. Similarly, while traditional channels such as radio and community mobilisation are employed by GEEP, their reach and impact on different demographic groups remain under-researched. This lack of understanding can lead to disparities in programme access and perpetuate existing inequalities.

Objectives of the study

The specific objectives of the study are to:

1. Investigate the use of different communication channels in raising awareness, promoting understanding, and encouraging participation in GEEP.
2. Determine the preference of communication channels used by the Government Enterprise and Empowerment Programme

Literature Review

The effectiveness of communication channels in empowerment interventions is a critical determinant of programme success, particularly in fostering sustainable social change. While existing research has established the importance of multi-channel approaches, the interplay between traditional and digital communication methods presents both opportunities and challenges that merit careful examination. Analyses of traditional communication channels reveal their persistent relevance, especially in contexts with limited digital infrastructure. Bhattacharya et al. (2021) and O'Donnell et al. (2017) concur in their findings on the

effectiveness of community-based participatory approaches, demonstrating how face-to-face interactions and community engagement foster trust and programme ownership. This aligns with Haldrup and Levin's (2018) research on government initiatives, which emphasises the role of community engagement in building institutional trust. The continued significance of radio, particularly in rural areas, is supported by Islam et al. (2022) and Wang and Singhal's (2016) study on agricultural information dissemination in India. Collectively, these findings suggest that traditional media channels maintain their relevance not merely due to technological limitations but because they leverage existing social structures and cultural frameworks.

The digital transformation of communication channels has introduced new dimensions to empowerment interventions. Sife et al. (2022) and Mbamba et al. (2020) highlight the transformative potential of mobile technologies in agricultural contexts, particularly in improving knowledge dissemination and decision-making processes. These findings are complemented by Aker et al.'s (2019) research in Nigeria, which revealed increased participation rates in government programmes through mobile-based information delivery. However, the introduction of digital channels presents a paradox: while they offer unprecedented opportunities for personalised engagement and two-way communication, they risk exacerbating existing social inequalities through digital divides. Comparative analyses of communication effectiveness across different contexts reveal several critical insights. First, the success of both traditional and digital channels appears to be highly context-dependent, with factors such as cultural norms, literacy levels, and technological infrastructure playing decisive roles (Melkote and Steeves, 2015). Second, the integration of multiple communication channels tends to yield better results than single-channel approaches, as evidenced by studies across different geographical contexts (McKeever et al., 2020).

The Nigerian context offers particularly valuable insights into the dynamics of communication channel effectiveness. Aker et al.'s (2019) findings on mobile technology's role in bridging information gaps align with broader research on digital communication in developing contexts. However, Manyozo's (2017) work on community radio in Nigeria underscores the continuing relevance of traditional media, suggesting that optimal communication strategies should integrate both approaches. This analysis reveals several significant research gaps. First, while existing studies document the effectiveness of various communication channels, limited research exists on how these channels interact and potentially reinforce one another. Second, the long-term sustainability of digital communication initiatives in resource-constrained environments requires further investigation. Third, the role of cultural factors in determining communication channel preferences and effectiveness remains underexplored.

The synthesis of existing research points to several key considerations for future empowerment interventions. Servaes (2018) emphasises the importance of cultural sensitivity in communication approaches, while Thomas and van der Westhuizen (2017) highlight the critical role of transparency and accountability in building trust. These findings suggest that successful communication strategies must balance technological innovation with cultural appropriateness and community engagement. Furthermore, O'Donnell et al.'s (2017) research on two-way communication underscores the importance of feedback mechanisms in ensuring programme responsiveness. This aligns with Ogbe's (2017) findings on the role of achievement dissemination in

fostering participation and inclusiveness, suggesting that communication strategies should prioritise both information delivery and community engagement.

This analysis contributes to the existing literature by identifying the complex interplay between traditional and digital communication channels in empowerment interventions. It highlights the need for context-specific approaches that consider both technological capabilities and cultural factors. Future research should focus on developing integrated communication frameworks that effectively combine traditional and digital channels while addressing issues of accessibility and cultural appropriateness. Such frameworks would need to account for both the technical aspects of communication delivery and the social dynamics influencing channel effectiveness and adoption.

Theoretical Framework

This study on the effectiveness and reach of communication channels in the Government Enterprise and Empowerment Programme (GEEP) is underpinned by two key theories: Empowerment Theory and Participatory Communication Theory. Empowerment Theory, propounded by Zimmerman (2000), postulates the importance of connecting individual well-being with the socio-political environment and advocates for active community participation in decision-making to foster individual and collective improvement. The theory views empowerment as an enabling process for individuals, organisations, and communities to gain control over their lives. It also suggests that shifting from deficit-based approaches to capacity building promotes wellness and individual empowerment. It champions the redefinition of professional roles, emphasising collaboration and facilitation rather than expertise.

Empowerment Theory provides a framework for understanding how GEEP's communication strategies can contribute to beneficiary empowerment. By facilitating access to information and resources, and encouraging participation in decision-making processes, GEEP can empower individuals and communities to take control of their economic well-being. This aligns with research by Melkote and Steeves (2015), which emphasises the role of communication in fostering empowerment and social change.

Participatory Communication Theory was propounded by Arnstein (1969), Freire (1970), Melkote (1991), among others. These theorists advocate for the active involvement of beneficiaries in all stages of the communication process, from planning and design to implementation and evaluation. The theory underscores horizontal communication, which emphasises dialogue and mutual understanding. It further encourages prioritising local knowledge and community participation, with a greater focus on communication processes rather than solely on outcomes.

Participatory Communication Theory provides a lens for analysing the extent to which GEEP's communication strategies facilitate beneficiary participation and ownership. By embracing participatory approaches, GEEP can ensure that communication channels

are responsive to the needs and preferences of communities, fostering trust and promoting sustainable change. This resonates with findings by Manyozo (2017), which highlight the importance of participatory communication in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

These theories provide a robust framework for analysing the effectiveness and reach of GEEP's communication channels. Empowerment Theory guides the assessment of how communication empowers beneficiaries by providing access to information, resources, and opportunities for participation. Participatory Communication Theory allows for evaluating the extent to which GEEP's communication strategies facilitate dialogue, community engagement, and ownership. By examining the GEEP programme through the lens of these theories, the study can identify areas where communication strategies can be strengthened to better promote beneficiary empowerment and programme sustainability. This analysis can contribute valuable insights for policymakers and programme implementers seeking to optimise communication for development initiatives.

Methodology

This study employed a convergent parallel mixed-methods design to evaluate the GEEP intervention's communication strategy in Kaduna State, Nigeria, allowing for the simultaneous collection and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data (Creswell, 2014). This approach facilitated a comprehensive understanding of both the breadth and depth of communication effectiveness while minimising the limitations inherent to single-method approaches. The quantitative component employed a two-stage sampling procedure. First, cluster sampling divided Kaduna State into ten Local Government Areas (LGAs), stratified by geographical zones to ensure representative coverage. Within each cluster, systematic sampling with a sampling interval of k=5k=5k=5 was used to select 140 beneficiaries per LGA, yielding a total sample of 1,400 participants. This systematic approach minimised selection bias by ensuring equal probability of selection across the beneficiary database (Thomas, 2023). For the qualitative component, purposive sampling identified twelve key informants, including programme administrators, government officials, and implementation partners. Selection criteria emphasised participants' direct involvement in programme communication strategy development and implementation. To minimise positional bias, informants were drawn from different hierarchical levels and functional areas within the TraderMoni programme (Weller et al., 2018).

Quantitative data collection utilised a structured questionnaire comprising five-point Likert scale items measuring the effectiveness of various communication channels: community mobilisation, radio, television, print media, mobile technology, and online platforms (BOI, 2023). The instrument underwent expert validation by three communication specialists and two programme evaluators. A pilot study with 50 respondents from a non-participating LGA yielded a Cronbach’s Alpha coefficient of 0.950, indicating high internal consistency. Qualitative data collection employed semi-structured interview protocols, designed to explore stakeholders' perspectives on communication strategy implementation, challenges, and perceived effectiveness. Interview

questions were mapped to the quantitative variables to facilitate data integration during analysis. To enhance reliability, all interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

The analysis followed a three-phase approach:

1. Quantitative Analysis: SPSS v.25 was used to conduct descriptive statistics and multiple regression analysis, examining the relationship between communication channels and program outcomes. The analysis controlled for demographic variables and geographical location to isolate channel effects.
2. Qualitative Analysis: Interview transcripts underwent thematic analysis using an iterative coding process. Initial codes were developed inductively, followed by pattern coding to identify emerging themes and relationships. This process was independently verified by two researchers to ensure coding reliability.
3. Data Integration: The study employed a triangulation protocol to systematically compare and contrast quantitative and qualitative findings. This integration process identified areas of convergence, complementarity, and divergence between the two data sets, providing a more nuanced understanding of communication effectiveness.

To enhance methodological rigor, several quality assurance measures were implemented through the training of research assistants to ensure standardized data collection procedures. Researchers checked interview transcripts with key informants, documentation of analytical decisions through detailed audit trails and regular peer debriefing sessions during data analysis to established validity of information. The study acknowledges potential limitations in self-reported data and recall bias among beneficiaries. However, the mixed-methods design helped mitigate these limitations by providing multiple perspectives and data sources for validation. This enhanced methodological approach provides a robust framework for evaluating communication effectiveness while maintaining scientific rigor and acknowledging potential limitations. The systematic integration of quantitative and qualitative data offers a more comprehensive understanding of the GEEP communication strategy's impact and effectiveness.

Results and Interpretations

Table 1: Response on the frequency of the communication strategy used by the Government Enterprise and Empowerment Programme on market traders

S/n	Communication Tools	Frequency of Usage					$\sum f$	$\sum fx$	Mean (x)	Rnk	Rmk
		Always	Often	Sometimes	Once	Never					
1.	Printed Materials	260	340	310	142	256	1308	4130	3.16	6th	Sometimes
2.	Radio jingles	278	280	382	235	133	1308	4259	3.26	4th	Sometimes
3.	Television adverts	254	390	258	160	246	1308	4170	3.19	7th	Sometimes
4.	Social media	280	234	304	262	228	1308	4000	3.06	8th	Sometimes
5.	Advocacy visits	214	374	340	220	160	1308	4186	3.20	5th	Sometimes
6.	Group meetings	430	396	264	98	120	1308	4849	3.70	1st	Often
7.	Email	226	194	238	246	404	1308	3156	2.69	11th	Sometimes
8.	BULK SMS	312	476	314	87	119	1308	4699	3.59	2nd	Often
9.	Interpersonal	184	106	390	384	244	1308	3526	2.70	10th	Sometimes
10.	Traditional communication	70	184	654	400	54	1308	3902	2.98	9th	Sometimes
11.	Website info	244	414	270	218	162	1308	4686	3.28	3rd	Sometimes
	Aggregate Mean								**3.17**		**Sometimes**

Source: Researcher's Field Survey, 2022.

Keys: A = Always = 5, *O = Often = 4,* S = Sometimes = 3, O = Once = 2, N = Never = 1

Communication approaches or strategies depend largely on first the message design, as well as the medium through message design, which is communicated to the people. Furthermore, the regularity of the medium used invariably determines its effectiveness as a medium as well as the effectiveness of the messages therein. Within development communication practice, the extent of the people's involvement or participation in the message design as well as in the medium also determines the ownership of the message and the medium. The analysis presented by respondents indicated that Group meeting (Mean = 3.70) and bulk SMS (Mean = 3.59) were the dominant media used in the dissemination of the intervention's messages as every other media was sometimes used. The extent of usage of these media especially conventional media is further corroborated by the responses provided by interviewees in this regard.

> Well, let me take you back a little bit. The GEEP programme was initially established in 2016 and subsequently, it was restructured in 2019. When the Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs took over the mantle and the mandate, we have been much involved in GEEP 2.0. Now, how do we communicate with the GEEP programme? As we spoke earlier on, we use social media, we have the media, we go on TV, and we go on media outreach. We go to various radio stations. We speak about, sensitise and make awareness of the GEEP programme. Apart from that, we ensure that the Community Orientation and Development Officers (COMOS) go to the grassroots, go to their communities, and engage the religious leaders, with the community leaders, the *Hakimies*, and all the leaders of the communities. They have town hall greetings sometimes, another time it may just be between the religious leaders, and the traditional leaders to get the community members. They spoke out and told them about the programme, they had a town hall meeting and they speak about the GEEP programme and sensitise them to 3 schemes, the MarketMoni, the TraderMoni and the FarmerMoni (*Interview session with Madam Hayatu Lawal Aliyu, Programme Manager, GEEP, Kaduna State*).

Another view that further corroborated the information provided was given by this interviewee's response:

> One is the media outreach, a lot of people in the rural communities especially with their small radio listing to it. And now with the smartphone, almost everybody has a smartphone and we have FM on them and everything. I think or I would say the media outreach specifically the radio is the most effective and dominantly used. Of course, the engagements with the community leader, traditional leaders, religious leaders even the youth leaders were equally effective.

Besides this form of communication adopted by the programme's intervention implementation, The Team Lead for the programme provided more insight into other tools deployed in conveying the messages of the programme.

> Okay! Because of the nature of the people that we are targeting, our community has to be grassroots-focused. So one thing that we did very well was to have something we called road shows. We go to different markets in their peak periods and organise a tent or a small pitch where we play music; something telling them about the programme. And how they stand to benefit from the programme, so, that was the major communication strategy we

> used. These people are not on social media, therefore, we can't reach them through that, by that, we wouldn't be able to reach our target audience. We need to do grassroots marketing to reach those who are to benefit…. Sir, I will tell you things that we did. We have something that we called Town Hall engagement where essentially we speak with the market leaders, community leaders, like chiefs and such others, we bring all of them in a room or outdoor space as required and give them information. This helps a lot in terms of breaking the ice on sceptical people, those who think it is a scam. So those stakeholders' engagements were very critical to help us break the ice with some of the beneficiaries (*Interview session with Mr Emmanuel Musa, Team Lead for Media and Public Relations, GEEP Growth Platform, Bank of Industry, Abuja*).

Again, when we come to the domain of participatory communication, the medium which appeals to the people more is not the mass or social media that have sometimes been used in communicating the intervention's messages to the people but the use of interpersonal, traditional communication, advocacy visits and group meeting that could promote and engenders the people's participation as well as ownership of the intervention. Although one of these, that is, the group meeting was often used in the dissemination of the intervention's messages, the failure of the regularity of a more indigenous mode or form of communication that evolved the people's participation in the process of their very own empowerment and development, the likelihood that the message design, developed and communicated would be misunderstood and ineffective altogether leading to the intervention encountering challenges that could affect its effectiveness and sustainability.

However, it is not all doom for the processes and the communication strategy adopted for conveying the message as one of the interviewees put it thus:

> Our communication strategies have been very effective, especially in terms of reaching the direct beneficiaries themselves and also key stakeholders that were custodians of the programme as the case may be. So, reaching the beneficiaries themselves, once you register with this programme, you automatically get regular SMS from us that keeps you updated even as you progress, when it is time for payment and all of that. As you pay back your loan you get updated anytime you pay your loan and all that. So there was always constant and direct communication with our beneficiaries. For our stakeholders, as I mentioned earlier, those town halls help us significantly keep them updated with information. For the general public, we use strategies like newspaper placement, all our social media accounts, video interviews, organising interactive sessions, playing radio jingles, radio interviews, etc. We use all these mediums to keep the general public informed about the milestones that we are achieving in this programme. So anytime we hit a significant milestone like when we recorded the first one million beneficiaries nationwide, that was a big milestone for us, it was properly communicated to the general public. And also internally, we communicated this feat to the various stakeholders across governments and most of the implementing institutions. So we use several forms of communication to also keep everyone abreast of the latest happenings at every stage. Whether the stakeholders, community leaders and beneficiaries themselves and of course other people that have a stake in the programme (*Interview session with Mr Emmanuel Musa, Team Lead for Media and Public Relations, GEEP Growth Platform, Bank of Industry, Abuja*).

Judging from the respondents' and the interviewees' responses, the communication strategy predominantly used in disseminating the programme's message alienated the forms of communication that encourage the people's voices and opinions in matters that directly affect their socioeconomic development. From the analysis, forms of communication like traditional communication (song, proverbs, folklore, dance and drama) and interpersonal communication were largely relegated to the background while conventional and social media took centre stage.

Table 2: Respondents' responses on the prefer-ability of communication channels used by the Government Enterprise and Empowerment Programme

S/n	Communication Tools	Level of Preference					$\sum f$	$\sum f x$	Mean (x)	Rank	Remark
		Most preferable	Preferable	Fairly preferable	Less preferable	Not preferable					
1.	Printed Materials	236	186	272	285	329	1308	3639	2.78	9th	Fairly preferable
2.	Radio jingles	247	276	289	260	236	1308	3962	3.03	6th	Fairly preferable
3.	Television adverts	251	257	218	362	220	1308	3881	2.97	7th	Fairly preferable
4.	Social media	175	191	206	341	395	1308	3334	2.55	11th	Fairly preferable
5.	Advocacy visits	274	341	345	186	162	1308	4303	3.29	2nd	Fairly preferable
6.	Group meetings	384	245	194	222	263	1308	4589	3.20	3rd	Fairly preferable
7.	Email	284	170	158	348	348	1308	3618	2.77	10th	Fairly preferable
8.	BULK SMS	224	286	192	329	277	1308	3775	2.89	8th	Fairly preferable
9.	Interpersonal	544	292	201	179	92	1308	4941	3.78	1st	Preferable
10.	Traditional communication	244	358	288	177	241	1308	4111	3.14	4th	Fairly preferable
11.	Website info	272	260	347	268	161	1308	4138	3.16	5th	Fairly preferable
	Aggregate Mean								**3.14**		**Fairly preferable**

Source: Researcher's Field Survey, 2022

A better way in the design and development of any communication strategy lies in the identification and understanding of the uniqueness as well as the peculiarity of the form of communication that is amenable to the people. The significance is not only in the acceptance but in the participation of the people in the communication act, content and dissemination of the messages. This understanding guides any development programme on how to adopt and deploy a communication strategy that would be effective and achieve the needed result that could guide the programme implementation and sustainability. From the analysis presented on Table 5, respondents identified interpersonal communication (Mean = 3.78), Advocacy visits to all stakeholders and influencers (Mean = 3.29), Group meets (Mean = 3.20), and Traditional or Indigenous are the most preferred. Communication that the respondents indicated should be used to establish inclusiveness and participation which is key to achieving the effectiveness, continuity and sustainability of the programme. Buttressing this view is the response from an interviewee in this regard:

> … because people now begin to trust and accept. When people are properly informed about the whole issue, it is easier for them to accept and it is easier for them to enrol. So we begin to have more enrolment just like I explained earlier, so every time we come back to say we are doing something, you find out the numbers are increasing such that more people are looking for ways to communicate with us. And then one of those things we use in communicating with these people is the success stories. We have a lot of people we try to focus on. This is where I was before N-Power and of course, here I am today. We make them see what is possible. That if you are a beneficiary of this programme, you can collect that money for 12 months and do a whole lot of things (*Interview session with Mrs Halima Ojelade, Special Assistant, Strategic Communication to the Honourable Minister, Federal Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management and Social Development, Abuja*).

Discussion of Findings

The investigation of GEEP's communication strategy in Kaduna State's TraderMoni intervention reveals critical patterns in channel utilization that have significant implications for program effectiveness and sustainability. The emergence of group meetings (Mean = 3.70) and bulk SMS (Mean = 3.59) as primary communication channels demonstrates a hybrid approach that combines traditional face-to-face interaction with digital outreach. While this approach aligns with the widespread adoption of mobile technology in Nigeria (Sife et al., 2022), the moderate frequency of usage across other channels suggests substantial room for improvement in the program's communication infrastructure. The underutilization of interpersonal and traditional communication methods, ranked 10th and 9th respectively, represents a significant deviation from established best practices in development communication. This finding is particularly concerning given the crucial role these channels play in building trust and fostering community engagement, as emphasized by Bhattacharya et al. (2021). The qualitative data further reinforces this concern, with interviewees highlighting the importance of grassroots mobilization and community leader engagement, especially in rural areas with limited digital access. This aligns with Wang & Singhal's (2016) research on the significance of community-based communication approaches in government initiatives.

The moderate mean value (3.17) across communication channels indicates a limited application of Participatory Communication Theory, potentially compromising the program's effectiveness in

fostering sustainable engagement. This theoretical misalignment manifests in reduced community ownership and inadequate feedback mechanisms, contradicting research by O'Donnell et al. (2017) on the importance of two-way communication in government initiatives. Similarly, the partial alignment with Empowerment Theory suggests a gap between program objectives and implementation strategies, particularly in rural areas where consistent communication is crucial for program success. To address these challenges, several practical recommendations emerge from the analysis. The development of a structured communication calendar would ensure regular engagement across all channels, while the implementation of monitoring mechanisms could track channel effectiveness and reach. In rural areas, strengthening traditional communication methods and establishing partnerships with community radio stations could enhance program accessibility. The creation of local communication committees could guide channel selection and content development, ensuring alignment with community preferences and needs.

The findings support research advocating for multi-channel approaches in empowerment interventions (Sife et al., 2022; Mbamba et al., 2020). However, the moderate frequency of communication tool usage contradicts evidence from Aker et al. (2019) and Haldrup & Levin (2018) regarding the importance of consistent, intensive communication in government initiatives. The limited use of participatory communication methods particularly contradicts recommendations by Thomas & van der Westhuizen (2017) for fostering trust and ownership in government programmes. To enhance digital accessibility while maintaining traditional engagement methods, collaboration with telecommunications providers could improve rural connectivity, while the development of offline communication alternatives would ensure consistent information flow in areas with limited digital access. These recommendations align with research emphasizing the need for comprehensive engagement strategies that consider both technological capabilities and cultural factors.

The analysis reveals the necessity for a more nuanced, context-sensitive approach to communication channel selection and utilization. Future research should focus on longitudinal studies examining the impact of communication consistency on program outcomes, particularly in rural areas where channel accessibility varies significantly. Additionally, investigating the role of local communication ecosystems in program success could provide valuable insights for improving communication strategies in similar development initiatives. This comprehensive analysis contributes to the broader understanding of communication strategy in development interventions while providing practical guidance for program improvement. The findings emphasize the importance of balancing digital innovation with traditional communication methods to ensure effective program implementation and sustainable community engagement.

Conclusion

This study examined the effectiveness and reach of communication channels in the Government Enterprise and Empowerment Programme (GEEP) in Kaduna State, Nigeria. By analyzing both quantitative and qualitative data, the research revealed a multi-channel communication approach with a moderate frequency of utilization across various traditional and digital media. However, inconsistencies in communication frequency and a limited embrace of participatory approaches raise concerns about the program's ability to fully engage and empower beneficiaries. While GEEP demonstrates some aspects of empowerment communication, there is a need for greater emphasis on interactive, two-way communication strategies that foster community ownership and ensure

that the program is responsive to the needs and preferences of diverse beneficiaries. The findings contribute valuable insights for policymakers and program implementers seeking to optimize communication strategies for GEEP and similar social intervention programs. By strengthening communication efforts, GEEP can enhance its impact on poverty alleviation and economic empowerment in Nigeria.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are offered:

1. The program should prioritize increasing the frequency and consistency of communication across all channels. This could involve developing a comprehensive communication calendar that outlines the timing and frequency of various communication activities. Regular updates, reminders, and follow-up messages through diverse channels can ensure that beneficiaries remain engaged and informed throughout the program cycle.
2. While GEEP utilizes a multi-channel approach, the findings suggest a need for greater diversification of communication channels. This could involve exploring additional channels such as communitytheater, folk media, storytelling, and other culturally relevant forms of communication to reach diverse beneficiary segments, particularly those in rural areas with limited access to technology.
3. To better understand the preferred communication channels among different beneficiary segments, the program should conduct regular channel preference surveys. These surveys can gather data on preferred channels, frequency of access, and reasons for preference. This information can inform the tailoring of communication strategies to specific beneficiary needs and preferences.
4. Establishing effective feedback mechanisms is crucial for understanding beneficiary preferences and ensuring that communication channels are responsive to their needs. This could involve setting up dedicated phone lines, suggestion boxes, online feedback forms, and regular community meetings to gather feedback on communication effectiveness and identify areas for improvement.

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