

## Indigenous Language Media and Women Social Empowerment in Rivers State, Nigeria

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DOI: 10.56201/rjmcit.vol.11.no2.2025.pg60.73

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### **Abstract**

*This study is an examination of indigenous language media and women social empowerment in Rivers State, Nigeria. This study adopted a qualitative research method. The population of the study consisted of women in Rivers State who actively consume indigenous language media, including radio, television, and digital platforms. A sample size of 20 participants were selected using purposive sampling technique. The primary method of data collection was email interviews, allowing participants to provide detailed, reflective responses at their convenience. Participants were receive structured, open-ended questions designed to elicit in-depth insights on how indigenous language media influences women's awareness, agency, and participation in socio-economic and political activities. For data analysis, the study employed thematic analysis, where interview responses were transcribed, coded, and categorised into themes that reflect key patterns and emerging insights. This method ensures a systematic interpretation of qualitative data, allowing for a nuanced understanding of how indigenous language media fosters women's empowerment, the barriers they face, and possible policy recommendations for improving gender-inclusive communication. Findings from the study revealed that, indigenous language media plays a crucial role in enhancing women's access to vital information, particularly in health, agriculture, and governance, by breaking down language barriers and providing content that is culturally relevant and accessible, although infrastructural challenges such as poor network coverage and limited access to devices hinder its full reach. The study concluded that indigenous language media plays a pivotal role in enhancing women's access to critical information, providing them with the tools to make informed decisions about their health, economic, and social lives, but its full potential is constrained by infrastructural limitations, requiring targeted investments to improve accessibility and reach. The study recommended that government and private sector stakeholders should invest in expanding media infrastructure and providing affordable technology to ensure broader access to indigenous language media for women.*

**Keywords:** *Indigenous Language Media, Women Social Empowerment, Rivers State, Nigeria*

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## Introduction

The role of indigenous language media in fostering women's social empowerment is an area of increasing scholarly interest, particularly in multilingual societies like Nigeria. Indigenous language media, which includes radio, television, newspapers, and digital platforms that broadcast in local dialects, serves as a crucial tool for communication, education, and advocacy among grassroots populations (Oso & Pate, 2019). In Rivers State, where ethnic diversity is prominent, these media outlets play a pivotal role in shaping public discourse and influencing women's engagement in socio-economic and political affairs. Understanding the relationship between indigenous language media and women's empowerment is essential for crafting policies and interventions that support gender equity in Nigeria.

Women's empowerment encompasses various dimensions, including economic, political, educational, and social aspects. According to Kabeer (1999), empowerment is the process by which individuals acquire the ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied. In many African societies, language barriers and cultural norms often limit women's access to critical information that could enhance their decision-making capacities. However, indigenous language media serves as a bridge, providing women with relevant content in their mother tongues, which fosters awareness and engagement in developmental issues (Salawu, 2015).

The media's role in empowerment is particularly significant in rural communities, where literacy levels are lower, and mainstream media content may not be accessible or relatable. Scholars argue that the use of indigenous languages in media promotes inclusivity and ensures that marginalised groups, including women, are not left behind in developmental conversations (Tufté, 2017). In Rivers State, local radio stations such as Wazobia FM, which broadcasts in Pidgin English, and other community-based media platforms, provide women with information on entrepreneurship, healthcare, civic rights, and domestic violence prevention (Emejulu & Okechukwu, 2020).

Despite the evident benefits of indigenous language media, challenges persist in maximising its potential for women's empowerment. Factors such as media ownership patterns, gender biases in content production, and socio-cultural constraints influence how effectively these platforms address women's issues. Research by Akinfeleye (2019) highlights that many indigenous language media outlets are dominated by male voices, which may limit the extent to which women's concerns are adequately represented. Additionally, traditional patriarchal structures in Rivers State often hinder women's participation in media production and policy-making, thereby restricting their influence over media narratives.

Furthermore, the digital transformation of media has introduced new opportunities and challenges for indigenous language broadcasting. With the rise of mobile technology and social media, women in Rivers State now have greater access to information through platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, and YouTube, where indigenous language content is increasingly available (Oyedemi, 2021). However, digital exclusion, driven by factors such as affordability, digital literacy, and infrastructural deficits, still limits many women from fully utilising these resources. Bridging this digital divide is essential for ensuring that indigenous language media

remains an effective tool for women's empowerment.

Studies on gender and media have shown that access to information in one's native language enhances knowledge acquisition and self-confidence among women, thereby increasing their participation in decision-making processes (Amadiume, 2018). In the context of Rivers State, indigenous language media has contributed to social change by amplifying women's voices in governance, economic development, and cultural preservation. For instance, community-based radio programs focusing on women's rights and entrepreneurship have led to increased participation in local governance and business initiatives among women (Oloruntola, 2020).

However, for indigenous language media to be a more effective tool for empowerment, deliberate efforts must be made to integrate gender-sensitive content into programming. Media practitioners must collaborate with women's rights organisations, policymakers, and community leaders to ensure that women's concerns are adequately addressed. According to UNESCO (2022), gender-sensitive media policies and training for journalists on gender-inclusive reporting are crucial steps in this direction.

Additionally, government intervention and policy support are necessary to strengthen indigenous language media as an empowerment tool. Policies that promote funding for community-based media, training programs for female journalists, and media literacy initiatives for women can significantly enhance the impact of indigenous language broadcasting in Rivers State (Uche, 2019). Without these structural supports, the potential of indigenous language media to drive meaningful social change for women may remain underutilised.

Indigenous language media is a powerful catalyst for women's social empowerment in Rivers State, Nigeria. It provides access to information, enhances civic engagement, and fosters socio-economic development among women, particularly in rural areas. However, structural barriers such as media ownership patterns, digital exclusion, and gender biases in content production must be addressed to maximise its impact. Through policy reforms, media literacy programs, and inclusive content creation, indigenous language media can continue to be an effective vehicle for empowering women and fostering gender equity in Nigeria.

This study is significant as it explores the role of indigenous language media in promoting women's social empowerment in Rivers State, Nigeria, highlighting how access to information in local dialects enhances women's participation in socio-economic and political activities, bridges communication gaps, fosters gender inclusivity, and challenges patriarchal structures that hinder women's development; furthermore, it provides valuable insights for policymakers, media practitioners, and development agencies on how to leverage indigenous language broadcasting for effective gender-sensitive communication, ultimately contributing to broader efforts aimed at achieving gender equity and sustainable development in Nigeria.

### **Statement of the problem**

Despite global efforts to promote gender equality, women in many parts of Nigeria, including Rivers State, still face significant socio-economic and political marginalisation. One major contributing factor to this disparity is limited access to information in languages they understand. The dominance of English and other foreign languages in mainstream media often alienates

women, particularly those in rural areas, from critical discussions on governance, economic opportunities, healthcare, and legal rights. This language barrier reinforces existing inequalities, preventing women from fully engaging in developmental processes that could improve their status and wellbeing. While indigenous language media has the potential to bridge this communication gap, its impact on women's social empowerment in Rivers State remains underexplored, raising concerns about whether these platforms effectively address women's specific needs or reinforce gender biases in media representation.

Moreover, indigenous language media in Nigeria is often male-dominated, with programming and narratives that do not always prioritise women's voices, issues, or perspectives. Societal norms and media ownership structures contribute to this imbalance, limiting the effectiveness of indigenous language platforms as tools for women's empowerment. Additionally, digital exclusion, poor funding, and a lack of policy frameworks further constrain the potential of these media outlets in advancing gender equity. Therefore, this study seeks to examine the extent to which indigenous language media in Rivers State contributes to women's social empowerment, identifying both the opportunities and challenges inherent in utilising local language broadcasting as a vehicle for gender-inclusive communication and development.

The study aims to examine the role of indigenous language media in promoting women's social empowerment in Rivers State, Nigeria. First, the study seeks to assess how indigenous language media enhances women's access to vital information on socio-economic and political issues, particularly among rural and marginalised communities. Second, it aims to evaluate the extent to which indigenous language media fosters women's participation in decision-making processes, advocacy, and community development initiatives. Lastly, the study intends to identify the challenges limiting the effectiveness of indigenous language media in empowering women and propose strategies for improving its impact on gender inclusivity and social development in Rivers State.

## **Literature Review**

### **Conceptual Review**

#### **Indigenous Language Media: Concept and Significance**

Indigenous language media refers to communication platforms that use local dialects to disseminate information, educate, and engage audiences. These media include radio, television, newspapers, and digital platforms that prioritize native languages as their primary mode of communication. According to Salawu (2015), indigenous language media plays a crucial role in fostering cultural identity, preserving linguistic heritage, and enhancing information accessibility, particularly for populations with limited proficiency in dominant or foreign languages. In Nigeria, where over 500 languages spoken, indigenous language media are serve as a bridge between the government and grassroots communities, ensuring that vital information reaches people in a language they understand.

The significance of indigenous language media extends beyond cultural preservation to practical socio-economic benefits. Research by Oso and Pate (2019) highlights that media content in local dialects increases audience engagement, as people relate better to information presented in their mother tongue. This is particularly relevant in rural areas where literacy levels

may be low, and indigenous language media becomes an essential tool for education, health awareness, and political participation. By using local languages, media platforms can effectively communicate messages on issues such as public health campaigns, financial literacy, and legal rights, thereby empowering individuals with knowledge that can improve their lives.

Moreover, indigenous language media plays a pivotal role in strengthening democracy and governance. Scholars argue that when citizens receive political and governance-related information in their native languages, they are more likely to understand policies, participate in electoral processes, and hold leaders accountable (Oyedemi, 2021). This is especially crucial for women, who are often marginalized in political spaces due to cultural and structural barriers. Indigenous language media can, therefore, serve as an advocacy tool for promoting gender-inclusive policies and encouraging women's political participation.

Despite its advantages, indigenous language media faces several challenges, including inadequate funding, media ownership constraints, and the dominance of English-language media. According to Uche (2019), many indigenous language media outlets struggle with sustainability due to low advertising revenue and limited government support. Additionally, there is often a lack of trained journalists proficient in indigenous languages, leading to inconsistencies in content quality. Addressing these challenges is critical for maximising the potential of indigenous language media as a tool for empowerment and social transformation.

### **Women's Social Empowerment through Indigenous Language Media**

Women's social empowerment refers to the process of increasing women's access to opportunities, resources, and decision-making power in various aspects of life, including education, economic participation, and political engagement (Kabeer, 1999). In many African societies, including Nigeria, women have historically been disadvantaged due to socio-cultural norms that limit their agency. However, indigenous language media has emerged as a powerful tool for challenging these limitations by providing women with information that enhances their knowledge, confidence, and participation in societal development (Emejulu & Okechukwu, 2020).

One of the key ways indigenous language media contributes to women's empowerment is by providing them with relevant and accessible information on health, business, and legal rights. Studies have shown that women who receive information in their native languages are more likely to engage with it and apply it to their daily lives (Amadiume, 2018). For instance, radio programs in indigenous languages discussing maternal health, entrepreneurship, and legal rights have significantly improved women's access to healthcare services and financial independence in various communities.

Furthermore, indigenous language media plays an important role in amplifying women's voices in public discourse. In Nigeria, community radio stations and women-focused programs have given women a platform to share their experiences, discuss social issues, and advocate for gender equality (Oloruntola, 2020). Through storytelling, interviews, and discussions, these media platforms challenge gender stereotypes and encourage women to participate in leadership roles, thereby fostering social change.

However, the effectiveness of indigenous language media in promoting women's

empowerment is often constrained by gender biases in media content and production. Akinfeleye (2019) notes that many media outlets still reflect patriarchal values, limiting the representation of women's perspectives and concerns. Additionally, women's limited ownership and control over media institutions restrict their ability to influence media narratives. Addressing these challenges requires deliberate efforts such as gender-sensitive media policies, increased female participation in media production, and partnerships between media organizations and women's advocacy groups.

### **Theoretical Review**

#### **Uses and Gratifications Theory**

The Uses and Gratifications (U&G) Theory was propounded by Elihu Katz, Jay G. Blumler, and Michael Gurevitch in 1974. The Uses and Gratifications Theory posits that media audiences are active participants who selectively engage with media based on their personal needs and motivations. The key tenets of the theory include:

Active Audience – Individuals actively seek media that fulfil specific needs rather than passively consuming content (Katz et al., 1974). Media as a Tool for Gratification – Media is used to satisfy various needs such as information, personal identity, social interaction, and entertainment (Blumler & Katz, 1974). Diverse Media Choices – People choose different media based on their preferences and the gratification they expect from it. Audience-Centred Perspective – Unlike earlier media theories that emphasised media effects on audiences, U&G focuses on how audiences use media to enhance their lives. Media Dependency Varies – The level of dependence on media depends on an individual's personal circumstances and the media's perceived usefulness.

Assumptions of the Theory: Audiences are not passive consumers but actively engage with media based on their specific needs. Different individuals use the same media content for different purposes. Media competes with other sources of gratification, such as interpersonal communication and personal experiences. Media consumption is influenced by social, psychological, and cultural factors. People are aware of their media needs and make conscious decisions about the content they consume. Criticism of the Theory: Despite its contributions, the Uses and Gratifications Theory has faced several criticisms: Lack of Focus on Media Effects – Critics argue that the theory focuses too much on audience agency while ignoring the powerful influence media can have on shaping attitudes and behaviours (McQuail, 2010).

Methodological Limitations – Measuring audience motivations and gratifications is subjective and often based on self-reported data, which may be unreliable. Overemphasis on Individual Choice – The theory does not sufficiently account for structural and societal factors, such as media ownership, that limit audience choices (Ruggiero, 2000). Ignores Passive Consumption – Some scholars argue that media audiences are not always active users, as people sometimes consume media passively without conscious engagement (Lull, 1995).

Relevance to the Study: The Uses and Gratifications Theory is highly relevant to this study on Indigenous Language Media and Women Social Empowerment in Rivers State, Nigeria. The theory helps explain how women engage with indigenous language media based on their specific needs, such as acquiring information on health, business, and legal rights. It also

highlights the role of indigenous media as a tool for empowerment by providing content that meets women's educational, social, and economic needs in a culturally relevant manner. Moreover, since indigenous language media allows women to access information in a language they understand, it aligns with the U&G perspective that media consumers actively choose content that best suits their circumstances. The theory further supports the idea that media content in local languages can enhance women's agency, foster community engagement, and improve their participation in socio-economic and political affairs. By applying this theory, the study can analyse the extent to which indigenous language media fulfils women's informational and empowerment needs while identifying possible limitations in access and usage.

### **Empirical Review**

Salawu (2015) carried out a study on “Indigenous Language Media in Africa: The Struggle for Development and Empowerment.” The study examined the role of indigenous language media in fostering social and economic development across African communities, with a focus on marginalised populations. The study used a qualitative approach, employing content analysis and in-depth interviews with media practitioners and audience members across selected African countries, including Nigeria. The study found that indigenous language media played a crucial role in information dissemination, cultural preservation, and community mobilisation. However, challenges such as poor funding, limited government support, and digital exclusion hindered its full potential. Both related study and the current study explore the role of indigenous language media in empowerment, particularly in fostering access to information and participation in social development. While reviewed study focused broadly on indigenous language media across Africa, the current study is specifically concerned with its impact on women's social empowerment in Rivers State, Nigeria.

Oloruntola (2020) conducted a study on “Community Radio and Women's Empowerment in Nigeria: A Case Study of Rural Broadcasting Initiatives.” The study sought to investigate how community radio, particularly those broadcasting in indigenous languages, contributes to women's empowerment in rural Nigerian communities. A mixed-methods approach was employed, using surveys and focus group discussions with women who regularly listened to community radio programs in their native languages. The research found that community radio programs significantly improved women's awareness of health, business, and legal rights, leading to increased self-reliance and community participation. However, gender biases in media ownership and programming remained a challenge. Both related and current studies focus on the impact of indigenous language media on women's empowerment, particularly in providing critical information that enhances their socio-economic participation. The reviewed study focuses specifically on community radio, whereas the current study considers a broader range of indigenous language media, including radio, television, and digital platforms.

Uche (2019) did a work on “Media Policies and Development Communication in Nigeria: Bridging the Gender Gap.” The study aimed to assess how media policies in Nigeria influence the participation of women in development communication, particularly in indigenous language media. The study adopted a policy analysis approach, reviewing existing media laws,

regulations, and interviews with policymakers and female media practitioners in Nigeria. The study revealed that while there are policies supporting gender inclusivity in media, implementation remains weak. Women's representation in indigenous language media is limited by cultural biases and structural inequalities. Both reviewed study and present study examine gender-related challenges in indigenous language media and how they affect women's access to information and participation in societal development. The reviewed study focused on media policies and regulatory frameworks, whereas the current study is centred on the practical impact of indigenous language media on women's empowerment in Rivers State.

The gap identified in this study lies in the limited scholarly attention given to the specific ways in which indigenous language media directly influences women's empowerment within the context of Rivers State, Nigeria. While much of the existing literature on media and gender focuses on mainstream media and urban populations, there is a scarcity of research addressing the unique role of indigenous language media in empowering women, particularly in rural and marginalised communities where access to mainstream media is limited. Furthermore, the challenges faced by indigenous language media, such as underfunding, gender biases, and technological limitations, have not been adequately explored in relation to women's social empowerment. This study fills this gap by examining how indigenous language media enhances women's access to information, facilitates their participation in decision-making, and explores the structural barriers that impede its potential, offering a comprehensive understanding of the complexities involved in using indigenous media as a tool for women's empowerment in the South-South region of Nigeria.

### **Methodology**

This study adopted a qualitative research method to explore the role of indigenous language media in promoting women's social empowerment in Rivers State, Nigeria. The qualitative approach is suitable for understanding participants' perspectives, experiences, and the deeper meanings behind media engagement. The population of the study consisted of women in Rivers State who actively consume indigenous language media, including radio, television, and digital platforms. Additionally, media practitioners and experts in indigenous language broadcasting are included to provide insights into content creation and its impact on women's empowerment. A sample size of 20 participants were selected using purposive sampling technique, ensuring that only individuals with relevant experiences such as women who rely on indigenous media for information, community leaders, and media professionals were included in the study. The primary method of data collection was email interviews, allowing participants to provide detailed, reflective responses at their convenience. This approach is particularly useful for reaching professionals and media experts who may have tight schedules. Participants were receive structured, open-ended questions designed to elicit in-depth insights on how indigenous language media influences women's awareness, agency, and participation in socio-economic and political activities. For data analysis, the study employed thematic analysis, where interview responses were transcribed, coded, and categorised into themes that reflect key patterns and emerging insights. This method ensures a systematic interpretation of qualitative data, allowing for a nuanced understanding of how indigenous language media fosters women's empowerment,

the barriers they face, and possible policy recommendations for improving gender-inclusive communication.

## **Results and Discussion**

**Access to Information and Awareness Creation** - This theme explores how indigenous language media enhances women's access to critical information on socio-economic, health, and political issues, particularly among marginalised and rural communities. Response: Indigenous language media plays a crucial role in improving women's access to information by breaking language barriers that often exclude non-English-speaking populations. Many women, particularly in rural areas of Rivers State, rely on radio, television, and community-based digital platforms that broadcast in their native languages to understand important issues affecting their lives. These platforms provide essential information on health, agriculture, education, and governance in a format that is accessible and culturally relatable. Unlike mainstream media, which predominantly operates in English, indigenous language media ensures that even those with limited formal education can stay informed.

One of the most significant contributions of indigenous language media is in the area of health awareness. Many women gain knowledge about maternal health, child nutrition, and disease prevention through local radio programs and interactive talk shows. Programs sponsored by health organisations often use indigenous languages to educate women about reproductive health, family planning, and vaccinations, helping to reduce maternal and child mortality rates. These messages are not just informative but also culturally tailored to resonate with traditional beliefs, making them more effective.

Additionally, indigenous language media serves as a platform for economic empowerment by providing women with business and financial literacy education. Many programs focus on agricultural best practices, small business management, and cooperative savings, enabling women to improve their livelihoods. Market updates and discussions on government financial assistance schemes are often communicated in local dialects, ensuring that women can take advantage of opportunities they might otherwise miss due to language barriers. Through storytelling, drama, and real-life testimonies, indigenous language media makes financial knowledge more relatable and actionable.

However, access to these media platforms can be limited by infrastructure deficits, such as poor network coverage and a lack of affordable devices. Women in remote areas may struggle to access radio signals or lack smartphones to engage with digital indigenous media content. Despite these challenges, indigenous language media remains a powerful tool for awareness creation, bridging the knowledge gap and equipping women with the information needed to make informed life decisions.

**Participation and Agency in Decision-Making** – This theme examines the extent to which indigenous language media empowers women to participate in community development, advocacy, and decision-making processes, fostering greater involvement in societal affairs. Response: Indigenous language media fosters women's participation in decision-making by amplifying their voices in social, economic, and political discussions. Women-focused radio and television programs create spaces where women can share their perspectives on pressing

community issues, from domestic policies to social justice concerns. In many rural communities, these media platforms provide an opportunity for women to express their views publicly, a practice that is often discouraged in traditional patriarchal settings. By featuring women as program hosts, guests, and analysts, indigenous media challenges gender stereotypes and promotes female leadership.

Beyond voicing their concerns, indigenous language media encourages women's participation in governance and politics. Programs that discuss civic rights and electoral processes in local dialects help women understand their voting rights and the importance of political engagement. Many community radio stations run segments where women are encouraged to question political candidates, demand accountability, and contribute to policy discussions. By demystifying complex political concepts and making governance more accessible, indigenous language media empowers women to engage in public affairs confidently.

Another area where indigenous language media enhances agency is in legal and human rights advocacy. Many women are unaware of their rights concerning marriage, inheritance, and domestic abuse due to illiteracy or societal norms that discourage legal education for women. Indigenous media platforms collaborate with legal experts to educate women about their rights in relatable ways. Call-in segments and social media discussions allow women to seek advice on legal matters, helping them make informed decisions regarding their safety and well-being.

Despite these advancements, there are still structural barriers that limit women's full participation. Gender biases within media organisations sometimes result in limited female representation in key discussions. Additionally, socio-cultural norms may discourage women from engaging publicly, even when they have access to empowering information. Overcoming these challenges requires deliberate media policies that promote gender inclusion and ensure that indigenous language media continues to serve as a catalyst for women's agency in decision-making.

**Challenges and Limitations of Indigenous Language Media** – This theme identifies the barriers that hinder the effectiveness of indigenous language media in promoting women's empowerment, such as media ownership constraints, gender biases, and infrastructural limitations. Response: While indigenous language media has proven to be a valuable tool for women's empowerment, several challenges limit its effectiveness. One major issue is the underfunding of indigenous language media outlets, which results in inconsistent programming, outdated equipment, and limited reach. Many indigenous radio and television stations struggle to secure advertising revenue due to the perception that indigenous language media caters only to rural populations with low purchasing power. This financial strain affects content quality and the frequency of programming, reducing its impact on women's empowerment.

Another critical limitation is gender bias in media content and ownership. In many cases, indigenous language media reflects the patriarchal values of the society in which it operates. Women are often underrepresented as media owners, editors, and program hosts, limiting the diversity of perspectives presented in indigenous language programming. Even when women are featured, their roles are sometimes stereotyped, reinforcing traditional gender roles rather than challenging them. This bias affects the extent to which indigenous media can truly advocate for

gender equality and women's social advancement.

Additionally, technological and infrastructural barriers hinder access to indigenous language media, especially in remote areas. Poor network coverage, unreliable electricity, and the high cost of radio and television devices make it difficult for some women to engage with media content regularly. While digital media provides an alternative platform, many rural women lack internet access and digital literacy, preventing them from benefiting from online indigenous language media content. Addressing these infrastructure challenges requires government and private sector intervention to improve access to affordable and sustainable media technology.

Lastly, government censorship and regulatory challenges affect the independence of indigenous language media. In some cases, government regulations restrict what can be broadcast, limiting discussions on sensitive topics such as women's rights, domestic violence, and political participation. Some community radio stations face pressure to align with state narratives, reducing their ability to serve as a platform for advocacy and change. For indigenous language media to be a truly empowering force for women, there must be policies that protect press freedom and encourage gender-sensitive programming that addresses real issues affecting women's empowerment.

### **Discussion of Findings**

Findings on access to information and awareness creation revealed that indigenous language media plays a crucial role in enhancing women's access to vital information, particularly in health, agriculture, and governance, by breaking down language barriers and providing content that is culturally relevant and accessible, although infrastructural challenges such as poor network coverage and limited access to devices hinder its full reach. This finding is in tandem with Salawu (2015), who highlighted the importance of indigenous language media in facilitating access to information and empowering marginalised populations, which aligns with the current study's finding that indigenous language media plays a crucial role in providing women with culturally relevant content. Both studies emphasise how language accessibility bridges gaps in information dissemination and knowledge sharing, despite challenges like infrastructural limitations. The Uses and Gratifications Theory as adopted in this study gives backing to the finding as it posits that audiences actively seek out media to satisfy specific needs, which aligns with the finding that indigenous language media enhances women's access to relevant information. Women actively engage with indigenous media to fulfil their informational needs on health, education, and social issues, choosing platforms that cater to their language preferences and cultural context, thus emphasising their active role in media consumption. The finding that indigenous language media enhances women's access to important information suggests a need for more investment in media infrastructure and programming to ensure that these platforms reach wider audiences. Policymakers and stakeholders should prioritise the expansion of affordable media technology, improve network coverage, and increase funding for local media outlets to enhance the effectiveness of indigenous language media in empowering women.

Findings on participation and agency in decision-making showed that Indigenous

language media promotes women's participation in decision-making by providing platforms where they can voice their opinions on social, political, and economic issues, encouraging greater engagement in governance and advocacy, though gender biases in media representation and socio-cultural norms still limit full participation. This finding supports Oloruntola's (2020) who research on community radio and women's empowerment reinforces the current study's finding that indigenous language media enhances women's participation in decision-making, especially in governance and advocacy. Oloruntola's focus on rural radio's role in empowering women to engage with civic and political processes aligns with the current study's emphasis on media's capacity to foster women's agency and public involvement. According to the Uses and Gratifications Theory, media consumption fulfils the need for personal identity and social integration. This is reflected in the finding that indigenous language media promotes women's participation in decision-making by providing them with a platform to express their opinions and become active participants in social, political, and economic discourse, thus fulfilling their need for agency and influence within their communities. The finding that indigenous language media fosters women's participation in decision-making highlights the importance of media as a tool for civic engagement and gender equality. It implies that media policies should be designed to support and amplify women's voices in the public sphere by promoting female representation in media ownership, content production, and on-air participation, thus enabling a more inclusive and participatory governance model.

Findings on challenges and limitations of indigenous language media indicated that while indigenous language media significantly contributes to women's empowerment, its impact is limited by underfunding, gender bias in media ownership and content, technological barriers, and government censorship, all of which constrain its ability to fully advocate for gender equality and amplify women's voices in society. This finding corroborates the study of Uche (2019) that the limitations of media policies and gender biases in media content, which mirrors the current study's finding that challenges such as underfunding, gender biases, and technological barriers hinder the full potential of indigenous language media. Both studies highlight the systemic obstacles women face in accessing the empowering capabilities of indigenous media, such as structural inequality and policy constraints. The Uses and Gratifications Theory also highlights how media audiences' needs may be unmet due to limitations in the media's accessibility or content. This aligns with the finding that underfunding, gender bias, and technological challenges limit the ability of indigenous language media to fully serve women's empowerment, as these barriers prevent women from fully utilising media to fulfil their informational and empowerment needs. The finding that challenges like underfunding, gender bias, and technological barriers hinder the effectiveness of indigenous language media calls for a multi-dimensional approach to addressing these obstacles. It suggests that both public and private sectors should collaborate to ensure better funding for indigenous media outlets, improve gender inclusivity in media programming, and reduce technological disparities to allow women to fully benefit from the empowering potential of indigenous language media.

## **Conclusion**

The study concludes that indigenous language media plays a pivotal role in enhancing women's access to critical information, providing them with the tools to make informed decisions about their health, economic, and social lives, but its full potential is constrained by infrastructural limitations, requiring targeted investments to improve accessibility and reach.

The study justifies that indigenous language media empowers women by offering them a platform to engage in decision-making processes and express their views on social, political, and economic issues, yet gender biases and socio-cultural norms still impede their complete participation, underscoring the need for inclusive media policies that promote women's voices.

The study explores that while indigenous language media has a significant impact on women's empowerment, its effectiveness is hindered by challenges such as underfunding, technological barriers, and gender biases, emphasising the need for comprehensive efforts to address these limitations and unlock the full potential of these media platforms in empowering women.

This study contributes to knowledge by offering a deeper understanding of the role indigenous language media plays in empowering women in Rivers State, Nigeria, particularly in terms of access to information, participation in decision-making, and the challenges they face. It provides empirical evidence that indigenous language media not only enhances women's access to vital information, thereby improving their awareness of socio-economic and health issues, but also fosters their agency by giving them a voice in public discourse. Additionally, the study sheds light on the structural barriers such as underfunding, gender biases, and technological limitations that hinder the full potential of these media platforms in advancing women's empowerment. By integrating the uses and gratifications theory, the study highlights the active role women play in seeking out media that meets their informational and empowerment needs. The findings of this research contribute to the body of knowledge on media and gender, offering insights that can guide policymakers, media practitioners, and gender advocates in enhancing the effectiveness of indigenous language media for women's social empowerment.

## **Recommendations**

In view of the findings from the work, the following recommendations have been made.

- 1) Government and private sector stakeholders should invest in expanding media infrastructure and providing affordable technology to ensure broader access to indigenous language media for women.
- 2) Media policies should be revised to promote greater female representation in media ownership and content production, ensuring that women have more opportunities to engage in public decision-making processes.
- 3) Both the public and private sectors should collaborate to provide more funding, improve gender inclusivity, and address technological barriers to enhance the effectiveness of indigenous language media in empowering women.

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