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FROM SILENCE TO VOICE: GENDER, LANGUAGE AND THE STRUGGLE FOR EQUALITY IN CONTEMPORARY NIGERIAN COMMUNICATION

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ABSTRACT
This paper examined the relationship between gender, language and the struggle for equality in contemporary Nigerian communication. It argues that communication is not a neutral vehicle through which gender relations are simply described; rather, language participates in producing, legitimising, contesting and transforming relations of power. Drawing on feminist theory, Critical Discourse Analysis and communicative agency, the study interrogates how women and men are represented in Nigerian newspapers, political discourse, popular culture, digital communication and everyday public interaction. The study adopts a qualitative documentary design and thematic discourse analysis of selected scholarly studies, institutional reports and illustrative Nigerian media discourses. The analysis identifies four interconnected patterns: the persistence of masculine linguistic norms; the sexualisation, stereotyping and trivialisation of women in public communication; unequal access to authoritative speaking positions; and the emergence of counter-discourses through feminist activism, journalism, social media, popular culture and women's political advocacy. Recent Nigerian corpus research indicates that women continue to be disproportionately associated with marginalisation, abuse and social injustice, while men are more frequently connected with politics and land ownership (Amoniyana & Obasib, 2025). At the same time, Nigerian women increasingly use digital and media platforms to challenge stereotypes, tell alternative stories and demand political and social recognition. The article concludes that gender equality requires more than increasing women's visibility. It requires transforming the linguistic and institutional conditions under which people become visible, credible and heard. Gender-responsive communication policies, media accountability, inclusive language practices, digital safety, media literacy and stronger representation of women in communication decision-making are therefore essential to moving Nigerian communication from silence and symbolic visibility toward voice, agency and substantive equality.

Key words*: Gender; Language; Communication; Feminism; Media Representation; Nigeria*

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INTRODUCTION

Language is one of the principal means through which societies organise social reality. People use words not only to exchange information but also to assign identities, distribute status, construct social categories and establish relationships of power. Gender is particularly

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significant in this process because ideas about what women and men are expected to be, say and do are repeatedly communicated through everyday conversation, institutional documents, political speeches, journalism, advertising, entertainment and digital media. In Nigeria, where communication occurs across English, Nigerian Pidgin and numerous indigenous languages, gendered meanings are produced through a complex interaction between linguistic practices, cultural expectations, religious and customary norms, political institutions and rapidly changing media technologies. The struggle for gender equality is therefore also a struggle over who can speak, whose speech is believed, which experiences receive public attention and which descriptions of women and men become socially normal.

The expression "from silence to voice" captures a movement from exclusion toward communicative agency. Silence in this context does not mean that Nigerian women have literally been without speech. Women have always communicated, organised, protested, written, voted, negotiated and exercised influence in families and communities. Rather, silence refers to structural conditions that make some voices less audible, less authoritative or less institutionally consequential than others. A woman may speak and still be silenced when her testimony is dismissed, when her expertise is questioned, when her appearance becomes the focus of media attention, or when institutional rules and cultural expectations restrict her access to decision-making platforms. Communicative equality therefore involves not simply the right to speak but the right to be heard, interpreted fairly and recognised as an authoritative participant in public life.

The Nigerian media environment demonstrates both the persistence of these inequalities and the possibility of transformation. Earlier research described women as comparatively invisible in Nigerian news production and argued that the power to define the media agenda remained predominantly male (Okunna, 2005). More recent studies continue to identify gender imbalance, stereotyping and unequal visibility in Nigerian media. Amoniyana and Obasib (2025), for example, examined 150 gender-related newspaper articles and found that women were frequently connected with social injustice, marginalisation and abuse, whereas men were more strongly associated with politics and land ownership. The findings suggest that even when women receive substantial textual visibility, the terms through which they are represented can reproduce inequality. Visibility alone, therefore, cannot be equated with equality.

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Language itself can also reproduce exclusion. Gendered occupational labels, masculine generic forms, male-first naming conventions, sexist metaphors and descriptions that reduce women to appearance or sexuality can subtly communicate who is assumed to be competent, powerful or normal. Research on Nigerian newspapers has found the continued use of masculine nouns and pronouns as generic references and male precedence in paired gender expressions, practices that may render women linguistically invisible (Olarewaju, 2020). Such patterns matter because repeated linguistic choices can naturalise social hierarchies. When leadership, expertise and authority are routinely encoded as masculine while domesticity, emotion and dependence are coded as feminine, language becomes part of the infrastructure through which inequality is reproduced.

Yet Nigerian women are not merely passive recipients of gendered communication. They are increasingly producers of counter-discourses. Feminist bloggers, journalists, activists, academics, entertainers, political aspirants and social-media users have created spaces in which dominant representations can be challenged. Dikwal-Bot (2020), analysing Nigerian female-authored blogs, demonstrates how online discourse can address both cultural recognition and material inequality. Social media can weaken some traditional gatekeeping structures by enabling women to publish directly, build networks and frame issues on their own terms. The digital sphere, however, is not automatically emancipatory. Online harassment, sexualised abuse, coordinated trolling and gendered disinformation can silence women in new ways. The same technologies that facilitate voice can therefore intensify vulnerability.

The political significance of communication is particularly evident in the representation of women as leaders. Women remain substantially underrepresented in Nigerian political institutions. UN Women reports that only 3.9% of parliamentary seats were held by women as of February 2024 (UN Women, n.d.). The organisation also identifies patriarchal norms, party processes, gendered media treatment and violence against women in politics as barriers to participation. Communication is central to these barriers because political legitimacy is partly constructed through public narratives: who is described as strong, competent, emotional, ambitious, experienced, respectable or unfit for leadership. Unequal linguistic treatment of male and female politicians can shape perceptions of political competence and legitimacy.

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The contemporary Nigerian context makes this inquiry especially important. Public communication has expanded from newspapers, radio and television to WhatsApp, Facebook, X, Instagram, TikTok, blogs, podcasts and online news platforms. These spaces have broadened access to public expression while simultaneously multiplying opportunities for gendered abuse and misinformation. Popular culture, especially Nollywood, also provides a powerful arena in which gender relations are imagined, challenged and negotiated. Recent discourse analyses of Nigerian films show that female identities can be constructed through both hegemonic and resistant narratives, including representations of women's agency in academic and workplace environments (Olowe, 2026; Ikpe et al., 2026). Communication is thus a contested field rather than a fixed structure of domination.

Objectives

This article investigates how gendered language and communication practices contribute to inequality in contemporary Nigeria and how women and their allies are creating counter-discourses that move from silence toward voice. The study has four objectives: to:

1. examine the ways gender is constructed through Nigerian communication;
2. identify recurring forms of linguistic and media inequality;
3. analyse emerging forms of communicative resistance and agency;
4. propose practical measures for gender-responsive communication.

The central argument is that equality cannot be achieved merely by adding women to existing communication structures. The structures, languages and institutional practices through which authority is produced must themselves become more inclusive.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Language, Gender and Social Power

Scholarship on language and gender has moved beyond the idea that women and men simply possess different conversational styles. Early approaches often emphasised gender difference, suggesting that women and men learn distinct communicative norms. More critical perspectives argue that gender is produced through social interaction and that communicative practices are embedded in relations of power. West and Zimmerman (1987) conceptualise gender as something people "do" in interaction, meaning that gender identities are continually produced through socially organised practices. Butler (1990) similarly treats gender as performative: repeated acts and conventions make historically contingent gender

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arrangements appear natural. These approaches are useful for Nigeria because they shift attention away from supposedly fixed male and female communication traits and toward institutions and cultural expectations that make certain forms of speech acceptable or unacceptable.

Feminist Perspectives on Communication

Feminist scholarship has long argued that communication is connected to broader structures of inequality. hooks (2000) emphasises the importance of voice as an instrument of resistance, especially for groups whose experiences have been marginalised. Feminist standpoint theory further suggests that social location shapes what people know and how knowledge is produced; the experiences of marginalised groups can reveal dimensions of social reality that dominant groups overlook (Harding, 1991). In communication, this implies that excluding women from newsrooms, legislatures, academic forums or editorial decision-making is not merely a numerical problem. It can also narrow the range of experiences and interpretations that enter public knowledge.

Critical Discourse and Gendered Representation

Critical Discourse Analysis is useful because it connects linguistic choices to social power. Fairclough (1995) argues that discourse can both reproduce and transform social structures. Texts do not exist independently of institutions: their vocabulary, framing, assumptions and patterns of emphasis reflect wider relations of power. Van Dijk (1993) likewise demonstrates how discourse can reproduce dominance through selective representation and unequal access to communicative resources. Applied to gender, this perspective encourages researchers to ask not only what is said about women but who is speaking, whose interpretation is treated as legitimate, what information is omitted and what social assumptions are presented as common sense.

Women and Nigerian News Media

Research on Nigerian media repeatedly identifies a gap between women's participation in society and their representation in public communication. Okunna (2005) described women as comparatively "invisible" in Nigerian news media, particularly in relation to news production and agenda-setting. Studies published subsequently continue to identify underrepresentation and stereotyping. Izunwanne et al. (2020) found concerns around the visibility of women, female reporters and the selection of women as news sources. Olarewaju

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(2020) identified gendered English constructions that privilege masculine forms and contribute to women's invisibility. These findings suggest that inequality can occur at several levels: employment, sourcing, story selection, framing, language and editorial authority.

Contemporary Corpus Evidence

Recent corpus research strengthens this literature. Amoniyana and Obasib (2025) analysed gender representation in selected Nigerian newspapers and found that gender discourse disproportionately foregrounded women in connection with marginalisation, abuse and social injustice, while men appeared more often in association with politics and land ownership. This pattern matters because repeated associations can influence public understandings of gender. If women are repeatedly represented as victims or subjects of social problems while men are represented as owners, leaders and political actors, communication may reproduce a hierarchy of agency. The problem is therefore not simply whether women appear in media texts, but whether they appear as autonomous subjects with expertise, authority and decision-making capacity.

Digital Media, Feminist Voice and Counter-Discourse

The growth of digital communication has created new opportunities for counter-discourse. Nigerian women can publish directly, organise campaigns, circulate testimonies and challenge traditional media narratives. Dikwal-Bot (2020) demonstrates that Nigerian female-authored blogs have provided spaces for debating gender inequality, recognition and economic justice. Digital communication can therefore weaken the gatekeeping power of established institutions. Nevertheless, digital participation remains unequal. Access to devices, data costs, digital literacy, social expectations and online harassment can restrict participation. The digital sphere should therefore be understood as a contested public space where empowerment and exclusion coexist.

Popular Culture and Gender Narratives

Popular culture is another major site of gender communication. Nollywood films, television programmes, music and advertising do not simply entertain; they provide narratives through which audiences encounter ideas about masculinity, femininity, marriage, sexuality, work, leadership and authority. Recent Nigerian studies using discourse analysis show that film narratives can reproduce hegemonic gender norms while also creating spaces for resistance and alternative female identities (Olowe, 2026; Ikpe et al., 2026). This dual character makes

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popular culture important to the struggle for equality. Challenging stereotypes requires not only criticising harmful representations but also supporting narratives in which women are complex social actors rather than symbolic objects.

Gender, Political Communication and Public Voice

Political communication provides a consequential arena for gender inequality. Women's political participation depends partly on their ability to be recognised as credible political actors. UN Women identifies patriarchal norms, political party structures, violence and gendered media treatment as barriers to women's participation in Nigeria (UN Women, 2026). The problem extends beyond election statistics. Public language surrounding women candidates can focus on marital status, clothing, age, family relationships or personality in ways that are less frequently applied to men. Such framing shifts attention from policy competence to gendered expectations of respectability. Conversely, communication can help transform political culture by foregrounding women's policy expertise, leadership achievements and civic contributions.

Gap in the Literature

Existing scholarship provides important evidence about gender representation, language and media visibility, but there remains a need for an integrated account that treats Nigerian communication as a multidimensional field spanning traditional media, political discourse, popular culture and digital platforms. Many studies focus on a particular medium or text. This article synthesises these strands and interprets them through the broader question of communicative equality: how do linguistic and institutional practices determine who can speak, who is heard and who gains public authority? The "silence to voice" framework links representation with agency and asks how communication can move beyond symbolic inclusion toward substantive equality.

Theoretical Framework

Feminist Theory

The study is primarily anchored in feminist theory, which provides a framework for understanding gender inequality as a structural relationship rather than a series of isolated interpersonal problems. Feminist theory interrogates how institutions, cultural practices and representations distribute power unequally between women and men. It also highlights voice, agency, experience and resistance. In the Nigerian context, feminist analysis is valuable

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because gender relations are shaped by intersecting cultural, economic, political and institutional structures. The framework does not assume that Nigerian women constitute a single homogeneous group. Gender intersects with class, age, ethnicity, region, disability, religion, education and political status. Communication practices may therefore affect different women in different ways.

Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis complements feminist theory by providing tools for examining how power is embedded in language. Fairclough (1995) treats discourse as a form of social practice that participates in the reproduction or transformation of social relations. In this study, CDA directs attention to lexical choices, naming practices, metaphors, presuppositions, agency, quotation patterns and the distribution of speaking roles. It also asks how texts connect to institutional practices. For example, a newspaper report that describes a female politician through her appearance while discussing a male politician through policy expertise is not simply making two stylistic choices; it may reproduce a broader gendered understanding of political authority.

Communicative Agency

The study further employs the concept of communicative agency to capture the capacity of individuals and groups to use communication to challenge existing power relations. Agency involves more than speaking. It includes the ability to frame issues, define identities, circulate alternative narratives, mobilise audiences and influence institutional agendas. This concept is particularly relevant to digital feminism and contemporary Nigerian advocacy, where individuals can produce content without relying exclusively on traditional media gatekeepers. The combination of feminist theory, CDA and communicative agency provides a framework for analysing both domination and resistance: feminist theory identifies structural inequality, CDA reveals how inequality is encoded and reproduced in discourse, while communicative agency highlights the ways marginalised actors challenge those structures.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a qualitative documentary research design. The design was selected because the purpose was to synthesise and critically interpret existing evidence on gender, language and communication in Nigeria rather than to generate a new survey dataset. Documentary analysis is appropriate for examining published research, institutional reports

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and public communication because it permits comparison across different communication environments and historical periods.

The study drew on three broad categories of material. First were scholarly studies on language, gender and Nigerian media, including research on newspaper discourse, television, Nollywood and feminist blogs. Second were institutional publications, particularly materials from UN Women concerning women's political participation, representation and gender equality in Nigeria. Third were contemporary public communication examples discussed in the scholarly literature, including newspaper reports, digital feminist discourse and popular-cultural texts. Preference was given to peer-reviewed scholarship and authoritative institutional sources. Recent literature was used alongside foundational theoretical works to connect current Nigerian developments with established debates.

Purposive selection was used to identify materials directly relevant to the research objectives. The analysis focused on recurring issues rather than attempting statistical generalisation to all Nigerian communication. The unit of analysis was therefore the communicative pattern: a recurring linguistic, representational or institutional practice that affects gender visibility, authority or agency. Examples included masculine generic language, gendered occupational references, victim-centred portrayals of women, unequal sourcing, appearance-focused framing, women's political representation and feminist counter-discourse.

Data were analysed thematically and through principles of Critical Discourse Analysis. The first stage involved identifying recurring gendered communication practices. The second involved grouping them into broader themes: linguistic invisibility, stereotypical representation, unequal authority, digital harassment and communicative resistance. The third stage interpreted these themes in relation to power, institutional practices and gender norms. The final stage compared evidence across communication platforms to identify both continuities and changes. The study also observed ethical principles relevant to documentary research. It relied primarily on publicly available scholarly and institutional material and did not collect private personal information. Because the analysis concerns gendered representations, care was taken not to reproduce harmful stereotypes unnecessarily. The study acknowledges that a documentary synthesis cannot establish causal effects between individual media messages and audience behaviour. Its contribution lies instead in identifying patterns, interpreting their social significance and proposing a framework for more equitable communication.

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RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Linguistic Invisibility and Masculine Norms

The first major theme is linguistic invisibility. Nigerian communication can reproduce gender hierarchy through generic masculine forms, male-first naming conventions and occupational labels that implicitly associate authority with men. Olarewaju (2020) found that Nigerian newspapers frequently used masculine nouns and pronouns generically and gave male terms precedence in paired references. Such practices may appear grammatically conventional, but their cumulative effect can be ideological. When masculine forms are treated as default references for humanity or professional authority, women become linguistically secondary. The issue is not that every masculine form automatically constitutes discrimination, but that systematic patterns can make male experience appear universal while female experience appears exceptional.

Representation Without Equality

The second theme concerns the difference between visibility and substantive representation. Recent Nigerian newspaper corpus research found that women appeared frequently in gender discourse but were strongly associated with marginalisation, abuse and social injustice, while men were more closely connected with politics and land ownership (Amoniyana & Obasib, 2025). This suggests that numerical visibility may coexist with symbolic inequality. A woman may occupy substantial media space as a victim, celebrity or subject of controversy without being represented as an expert, decision-maker or policy actor. Equality requires both adequate visibility and meaningful attribution of competence, authority and voice.

Stereotyping and the Policing of Femininity

A third pattern is the policing of femininity through language and media framing. Women in public life may be evaluated through appearance, marital status, motherhood, sexual morality, age or perceived emotionality. Such framing places women within a narrower range of acceptable identities than men. A male politician can be described as ambitious and assertive, whereas similar traits in a woman may be framed as arrogance or aggressiveness. This double standard is a form of discursive discipline because it communicates the boundaries of acceptable female behaviour. Popular culture can reinforce these expectations, although recent Nollywood scholarship also demonstrates that women's identities can be narrated through resistance, professional competence and agency (Olowe, 2026; Ikpe et al., 2026).

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Unequal Access to Authoritative Voice

Communication inequality also operates through access to speaking positions. Okunna (2005) observed that women's presence among Nigerian news producers and bylines was limited, leaving agenda-setting power largely in male hands. Although the media environment has changed substantially since that study, the structural question remains relevant: who owns media organisations, edits stories, selects sources, moderates political debates and determines what counts as news? Gender equality requires women to participate not only as subjects of communication but also as producers, editors, analysts, presenters and institutional decision-makers. Without such participation, media institutions may continue to interpret women's experiences through frameworks shaped primarily by men.

Digital Voice and Counter-Discourse

Digital platforms provide important evidence of movement from silence toward voice. Nigerian female bloggers and online activists have used digital spaces to discuss gender inequality, recognition and economic justice (Dikwal-Bot, 2020). Digital communication can enable women to name experiences that traditional institutions ignored, connect individual stories to collective campaigns and challenge established narratives. Contemporary advocacy around women's political participation also uses multimedia storytelling to reshape public perceptions. UN Women's 2026 Nigerian initiative, for example, used a Nollywood film to encourage public discussion of women's political inclusion ahead of the 2027 elections. This illustrates how storytelling can become a tool of civic mobilisation rather than merely entertainment.

The Paradox of Digital Empowerment

The same digital spaces that expand voice can generate new forms of silencing. Women who become visible online may face sexualised insults, threats, character attacks, coordinated trolling and other forms of harassment. Such practices can create a chilling effect in which women reduce participation or self-censor. Digital equality therefore requires more than internet access. It requires safe participation, platform accountability, digital literacy and institutional responses to technology-facilitated gender-based abuse. Communicative agency gained through digital media is fragile if the costs of speaking are disproportionately imposed on women.

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Political Communication and the Legitimacy of Women Leaders

UN Women reports that women occupied only 3.9% of parliamentary seats in Nigeria as of February 2024, illustrating the scale of political underrepresentation (UN Women, n.d.). Communication contributes to this problem when women candidates receive gendered scrutiny or when public narratives portray political leadership as naturally masculine. UN Women's work in Nigeria explicitly identifies patriarchal norms and gendered media practices as barriers and seeks to strengthen women's political participation and positively portray women leaders. Changing political communication is therefore part of changing political opportunity. Women must be represented not merely as beneficiaries of policy but as authors of policy and holders of public authority.

Summary of Findings

The data indicate that gender inequality in Nigerian communication operates through interconnected mechanisms rather than a single form of discrimination. Linguistic invisibility can coexist with media visibility; visibility can coexist with stereotyping; digital voice can coexist with digital harassment; and formal inclusion can coexist with unequal authority. Nevertheless, the evidence also shows significant possibilities for transformation. Feminist blogs, digital activism, women journalists, political advocacy and progressive popular culture provide spaces for counter-discourse. The central analytical conclusion is therefore dialectical: communication reproduces inequality, but it also provides resources for challenging inequality.

Discussion

The findings support the argument that gender inequality should be understood partly as a communicative problem. Social structures do not reproduce themselves without language. Institutions need categories, narratives and descriptions through which people are classified and evaluated. Gendered language supplies some of these categories. When authority is repeatedly described in masculine terms and women's public identities are framed around appearance, family or vulnerability, communication helps stabilise unequal expectations. Fairclough's (1995) conception of discourse as social practice is therefore particularly useful: language is both a reflection of social relations and an instrument through which those relations are maintained.

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The Nigerian evidence also complicates the assumption that increased visibility automatically equals progress. Earlier concerns about women's invisibility remain relevant, but contemporary communication presents a more complex picture. Women may now be highly visible as media subjects while still being underrepresented as agenda-setters, experts and institutional decision-makers. The recent corpus study by Amoniyana and Obasib (2025) is important because it demonstrates that the content and associations of gender discourse matter. The question should therefore shift from "Are women visible?" to "How are women visible, under whose terms, and with what degree of agency?"

The findings reinforce the importance of intersectionality. Nigerian women experience communication differently depending on social location. A politically influential urban professional may have greater access to media and digital platforms than a rural woman with limited literacy or internet access. Women from minority or economically disadvantaged communities may also face distinct representational problems. A gender-sensitive communication policy must therefore avoid treating "women" as a single category. Equality requires attention to differences in resources, language, geography, education and institutional access.

Another implication concerns the relationship between language and institutional authority. Changing vocabulary can contribute to equality, but inclusive terminology alone cannot overcome structural exclusion. Replacing gendered occupational labels is useful when accompanied by equal opportunities for women to occupy corresponding positions; otherwise, linguistic reform risks becoming symbolic. Similarly, increasing the number of women appearing in media without increasing their presence among editors, owners, producers and political decision-makers may create the appearance of progress without changing the distribution of communicative power.

The digital environment introduces both hope and danger. Digital platforms can democratise publication and enable counter-publics, but they can also reproduce offline inequalities and introduce new forms of abuse. The movement from silence to voice therefore requires infrastructure and protection. Women need affordable access to digital technologies, opportunities to develop digital literacy and mechanisms for reporting and responding to online harassment. Media organisations and platforms should recognise that gendered abuse is not simply a matter of individual incivility; it can become a barrier to democratic participation when it systematically discourages women from speaking.

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The political dimension of the findings is especially significant. UN Women's evidence of women's low parliamentary representation shows that communication inequality exists alongside institutional inequality. Public narratives about leadership can either reinforce or challenge this condition. If citizens repeatedly encounter women as competent policy actors, community leaders, professionals and political strategists, the boundaries of political imagination can expand. Conversely, if women are consistently framed through family roles, appearance or scandal, audiences may internalise a narrower conception of female leadership. Communication is therefore part of the social environment in which political legitimacy is produced. The analysis also highlights the importance of men in the struggle for communicative equality. Gender transformation should not be framed as a project in which women alone must change their communication or become more assertive. Men occupy many positions of editorial, political, corporate and institutional authority and can contribute directly to transforming organisational norms. Male journalists can diversify sourcing; editors can challenge sexist framing; political parties can reject misogynistic campaign rhetoric; teachers can model inclusive classroom interaction; and community leaders can challenge gendered stereotypes. Equality is a collective institutional responsibility.

Finally, the movement from silence to voice should be understood as a continuous process rather than a completed transition. Nigerian women have always exercised communicative agency through family networks, market associations, religious organisations, community groups and informal political structures. Contemporary digital and media platforms add new possibilities rather than creating agency from nothing. The goal is to connect these existing forms of agency with institutional reforms that make women's voices consequential in formal decision-making. Substantive equality is achieved when women can speak, be heard, shape agendas and influence outcomes.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This article has argued that the struggle for gender equality in Nigeria is inseparable from the struggle over language and communication. Gendered inequality is reproduced through linguistic conventions, media representation, unequal access to authoritative speaking positions, political narratives and digital practices. Nigerian research shows that women have historically been underrepresented in news production and can remain stereotypically represented even when they receive visibility. At the same time, feminist blogs, digital platforms, journalism, popular culture and political advocacy demonstrate that

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communication can be transformed into an instrument of resistance. The transition from silence to voice is therefore not simply a movement from speaking less to speaking more. It is a movement toward communicative agency, recognition and institutional influence. Gender equality requires communication environments in which women are represented as full social actors, their expertise is recognised, their experiences are not trivialised, and their participation in agenda-setting is substantive. The future of Nigerian communication should consequently be measured not only by how many women appear in media but by whether women can shape the narratives, institutions and decisions that govern public life.

Policy Recommendations

1. Media organisations should adopt and enforce gender-responsive editorial guidelines that discourage sexist stereotypes, appearance-based framing and unnecessary references to women's marital or family status.
2. Newsrooms should improve gender balance among reporters, editors, producers, presenters and senior management through transparent recruitment, mentoring and promotion systems.
3. Journalists should diversify expert and source lists so that women are routinely quoted as authorities in politics, economics, security, science, technology, law and other fields rather than being approached mainly for gender-related stories.
4. Universities and journalism schools should strengthen training in gender-sensitive language, feminist media literacy, digital ethics and Critical Discourse Analysis.
5. Political parties and electoral institutions should develop communication standards that prohibit gendered harassment and encourage substantive coverage of women candidates' policies and qualifications.
6. Government agencies and civil society organisations should support digital-literacy programmes that enable women and girls to participate safely and effectively in online public discourse.
7. Technology platforms operating in Nigeria should strengthen mechanisms for reporting, investigating and responding to technology-facilitated gender-based harassment, threats and coordinated abuse.
8. Nollywood producers, broadcasters and advertisers should promote diverse representations of women as leaders, professionals, innovators and decision-makers while avoiding narratives that normalise violence, dependency or sexual objectification.

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9. Public institutions should collect and publish gender-disaggregated data on media employment, political representation and participation in communication decision-making so that progress is measurable.
10. Gender equality advocacy should include men and boys, recognising that sustainable change requires transformation of institutional cultures and social norms rather than placing the burden of change exclusively on women.
11. Future research should combine corpus analysis, audience research, interviews and digital ethnography to examine how Nigerians interpret gendered communication across languages, regions and media platforms.

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