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# Suppressed Voices: Constraints in Female Participation in Phone-in Radio Programs in Northern Nigeria

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***Abstract***
*This study investigates factors influencing women's participation in phone-in radio programs across three northern states representing the north-east, north-west, and north-central regions of Nigeria. Despite radio being one of the most accessible media platforms in the regions, with diverse programs including phone-in programs aimed at fostering listener engagement and feedback, women's voices remain underrepresented and suppressed. This raises questions about socio-cultural, economic, and institutional barriers that shape women's engagement and participation. Using a survey design, data were collected from 600 respondents in Borno, Niger, and Kano states, representing the 3 regions, to capture diverse perspectives on women's participation in radio phone-in programs. Interview sessions with 15 selected participants from diverse backgrounds were also conducted to capture relevant information to augment the quantitative data. Findings reveal that cultural norms, gender stereotypes, time factor, economic constraints, and fear of public scrutiny variously suppress women's involvement. Additionally, structural issues such as program scheduling, presenter attitudes, and limited female-oriented content and hosts further affect participation. The study recommends the need for inclusive media practices that amplify women's voices, challenge restrictive norms, and foster equitable access to radio platforms*

**Keywords:** women's voices, participation, phone-in programs, Northern Nigeria

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## INTRODUCTION

Radio remains one of the most accessible and influential forms of mass communication in Northern Nigeria, particularly in areas with low literacy levels and limited access to digital media. Even in cities where digital media is popular, radio remains an accessible and influential form of mass communication. The popularity of radio in Northern Nigeria could be linked to its affordability, portability, accessibility, and program content, especially in local languages; thus, making it the most trusted and widely consumed medium for information, education, and entertainment (Adams 2024). Hence, Radio's ability to reach diverse communities, especially at the grassroots, and its persuasive powers make it the dominant communication channel in the region

Radio programming encompasses a wide range of content, with phone-in programs among the interactive formats commonly adopted by stations. Phone-in radio programs are designed to foster audience participation, democratize public discourse, and give listeners the opportunity to voice opinions, ask questions, and engage directly with presenters and, in some instances, guests. Adams (2024) believes that phone-in programs in community radio are popular because they provide access to information on various issues and offer the opportunity to express themselves socially, politically, and culturally, especially on important local issues, through phone calls. In recent years, phone-in radio programs have gained popularity, as people share social, political, and cultural opinions in the public domain. People can call in and express their views, affording them the opportunity to engage in broader discussions on diverse matters. However, despite the interactive nature of these programs, Northern Nigeria remains a special case, as women's participation appears limited. Women's voices are conspicuously absent, which may be attributable to many reasons.

This apparent disparity between the participatory potential of phone-in radio programs and women's limited participation raises questions about the inclusiveness of interactive broadcasting in Northern Nigeria. Although radio provides an opportunity for members of the public to contribute to discussions on issues affecting their communities, access to this opportunity does not necessarily translate into equal participation. Understanding this distinction requires attention not only to the medium's accessibility but also to the social conditions under which women participate, the practical challenges they encounter, and the characteristics of the programs themselves. The central concern, therefore, is not simply

whether women have access to radio but why their participation in phone-in programs appears limited despite the opportunities these programs offer for public expression. This provides a basis for examining the factors that may influence women's participation and the extent to which these factors interact withi n the socio-cultural context of Northern Nigeria.

Women's reluctance to participate in these programs may reflect deeper social, cultural, and structural barriers that limit women's visibility in public communication spaces. This is because, in Northern Nigeria, gender norms, religious expectations, and patriarchal structures continue to shape women's roles in society. Speaking on air may be perceived as inappropriate, culturally wrong, or even risky, exposing women to stigma, criticism, or disapproval from family and community members. These expectations may be reinforced by limited awareness of their rights and the fear of family rejection, thereby restricting women's willingness to express their views in public forums. Nkwonta (2018) and Oyekenu (2023) highlight the influence of societal expectations and patriarchal systems on women's participation in public and health-related activities. Beyond these socio-cultural constraints, practical barriers such as limited phone ownership, the cost of airtime, and lack of privacy may further compound the challenges. The format of phone-in programs may also contribute to women's limited participation through male-dominated hosting, the absence of anonymity, or insensitive moderation. Consequently, women's perspectives on critical issues such as health, education, governance, and social development may remain underrepresented in public discourse.

The existing discussion of radio accessibility and audience participation provides an important context for understanding the significance of phone-in programs, while studies addressing gender expectations and women's participation in public activities offer useful perspectives on possible socio-cultural constraints (Guaaybess 2015; Adams 2024; Nkwonta 2018; Oyekenu 2023). Considered together, these contributions point to two interconnected issues: the potential of radio to facilitate public participation and the social conditions that may constrain women's expression. Nevertheless, these issues should not be treated as interchangeable. General discussions of radio accessibility do not, on their own, explain women's participation in phone-in programs, just as broader discussions of gender inequality do not fully establish how cultural expectations, economic limitations, personal concerns, and program formats may combine to influence women's decisions to call in. The research problem therefore extends beyond identifying individual barriers to examining their

possible interaction within the specific context of interactive radio in Northern Nigeria. Establishing the extent of this gap requires a focused examination of relevant empirical studies on women's participation in phone-in radio programs in the region.

Even though women play key roles in the socio-economic development of Northern Nigeria, their reluctance to participate in public discourse warrants investigation. As they spearhead community development, education, and family welfare, their almost non-existent voices in public debates raise questions about the inclusiveness of public communication. Understanding this contradiction is crucial to bridging the gender divide in media participation and ensuring that public discourse incorporates women's perspectives.

There are a number of assumptions about factors that may have influenced women's reluctance to participate in phone-in radio programs in Northern Nigeria. They may include cultural and religious issues that put forth taboos surrounding women speaking publicly. There may also be the fear of social stigma and not feeling safe. It is, therefore, not clear why women are reluctant to join in phone-in programs, which affect not only their representation in the media but also border on gender inequality in Northern Nigeria.

Hence, this study, titled "Suppressed Voices: Constraints in Female Participation in Phone-in Radio Programs in Northern Nigeria", seeks to explore the interplay of cultural, social, and structural factors that silence women in interactive media spaces. This research will examine both individual-level barriers and program-level features to uncover the reasons behind women's limited participation. The study will therefore explore the factors that discourage women from participating in phone-in programs in selected states of Northern Nigeria. It seeks to identify evidence-based cultural, social, and economic impediments to women's participation in public discourses.

**Statement of the Problem**

Despite the widespread popularity and reach of radio in Northern Nigeria, where programs such as phone-ins are designed to democratize communication and amplify diverse voices, women's participation in these programs appears disproportionately low. This could be attributed to many reasons. Women often face cultural, social, and structural barriers that silence them. Patriarchal norms also discourage women from speaking publicly. Similarly, household dynamics and community expectations restrict their freedom to engage. And

practical challenges such as limited phone ownership, cost of airtime, and lack of privacy may also have contributed to their silence.

In addition, the design and execution of the programs themselves may unintentionally exclude women. Male-dominated hosting, lack of anonymity, and insensitive moderation can create environments that discourage female callers. Consequently, gender inequality, social exclusion, cultural norms, and the marginalization of women's opinions in public discourse appear to be major factors contributing to their underrepresentation in phone-in programs. However, these remain assumptions. The problem, therefore, is the limited context-specific evidence available to explain the factors responsible for women's low participation in phone-in radio programs in the selected states of Northern Nigeria. Without a clearer understanding of these factors, efforts to promote inclusive participation and ensure that women's perspectives are adequately represented in public discourse may be inadequately informed. This study therefore seeks to investigate the factors responsible for women's low participation in phone-in radio programs in three selected states in Northern Nigeria.

**Objectives of the study**

This research aims to investigate the factors influencing women's reluctance to participate in phone-in radio programs in Northern Nigeria. The study has the following objectives:

1) To examine the level of women's participation in phone-in radio programs in Northern Nigeria
2) To find out the inspiration for women's participation in phone-in programs
3) To determine the topics that interest women to call in during phone-in radio programs
4) To investigate the barriers that influence women's reluctance to participate in phone-in radio programs in Northern Nigeria.
5) To analyze program-level features that hinder women's participation in phone-in programs.

Research Questions

1) What is the level of women's participation in phone-in radio programs in Northern Nigeria?

2) What is the inspiration for women's participation in radio phone-in programs?
3) What are the topics that women frequently call in during phone-in radio programs?
4) What are the barriers that influence women's reluctance to participate in phone-in radio programs in Northern Nigeria?
5) What are the Program-level features affecting women from participating in phone-in programs?

**Literature review**

Radio is an important medium of communication in Nigeria. It remains indispensable due to its accessibility, affordability, portability, mobility, and broad reach across a heterogeneous audience. The popularity of radio probably explains its proliferation across all the major cities of the country, as there is virtually no major city or state capital in Nigeria without at least a federal, state, and/or private radio station. In Northern Nigeria, especially given the region's diverse socio-economic and cultural landscape, the popularity of radio is almost like a religious obligation. It is a natural companion in almost every home and the most popular medium across different segments of society. In fact, radio enjoys an almost obsessive appeal across the length and breadth of the region – from the rich to the poor, the civil servant, politician, petty trader, market man or woman, farmer, street vendor, bus or taxi driver, as well as across public spaces and villages (Guaaybess 2015).

Phone-in radio programs provide a platform for the public to discuss issues affecting them (Zaid 2017). Women's participation in the media, particularly in phone-in radio programs, is crucial for amplifying their voices and perspectives, yet their participation in these programs appears to be limited. Several factors may have contributed to this reluctance, as religious, cultural and traditional norms often restrict women's public engagement and participation (Ihechu, Afulike and Ndukwe 2023). This is more prevalent in Northern Nigeria where most cultures regard women as inferior to men and should be relegated to the background. To augment this assertion, the statement credited to former President Buhari that women "belong to the kitchen and the other room" is a typical example of this mindset.

Hence, this literature review explores various factors affecting women's participation in public discourse, particularly phone-in radio programs in Northern Nigeria. This exploration of literature on women's participation in radio reveals a complex interplay of cultural, social, educational, and technological factors that shape their engagement. The literature surrounding

this topic provides some insights into the barriers influencing women's reluctance to participate in phone-in radio programs, which also reveals the gap that this research aims to fill

**Cultural Norms, Patriarchal Structures and Women's Public Expression**

Cultural expectations and patriarchal structures constitute an important discourse on women's participation in public communication. It is common knowledge that cultural norms in Northern Nigeria have significant influences on women's involvement in the media, particularly where traditional gender roles prioritize male voices in public discourse. The conservative attitudes towards women's public speaking also contribute to the restriction of women's expression. These mean women's participation is shaped not only by their individual willingness to speak but also by the social meanings attached to women's visibility and expression in public spaces.

Cultural restrictions should not be understood as operating independently of other social and institutional conditions. For instance, a woman may be willing to contribute to a radio discussion but be discouraged by the anticipated reactions of family or community members. In this sense, the possibility of social disapproval can become a barrier even where a broadcasting platform is technically accessible.

Gustafsson (2018) examines how mobile phones facilitate communication among family members while cultural restrictions on women's mobility may limit their engagement with public media. This perspective introduces an important distinction between access to communication technologies for private or family interaction and their use for public expression. Possessing or using a mobile phone does not necessarily mean that a woman can freely participate in a radio program. The social context in which the technology is used may influence the purposes for which it is available and the extent to which it enables public engagement.

Similarly, Oyesomi and Okorie (2013) emphasize radio's role in mobilizing women for political engagement while acknowledging the influence of cultural and community factors in limiting its impact. Their argument complements the concerns raised by Abdulaziz et al. (2020), Ibrahim (2019), and Gustafsson (2018) by suggesting that the communicative potential of radio depends partly on the social environment in which it operates. Taken together, these studies indicate that access to a communication medium and the capacity to

use it for public participation are distinct issues. Radio may provide opportunities for women's political and social engagement, but its effectiveness can be constrained by gendered expectations and community attitudes.

Public discourse in Nigeria has also reflected contested assumptions about women's social roles. The statement attributed to former President Muhammadu Buhari that women belong in "the kitchen and the other room" has been invoked in discussions of gender roles and women's status. However, because this is a specific quotation attributed to a public figure, its inclusion as evidence of prevailing attitudes requires a verifiable source. More broadly, the literature suggests that gendered expectations may shape women's willingness to participate in public communication, although their effects on participation in particular phone-in programs require context-specific investigation.

Therefore, the cultural perspective provides an important explanation for understanding why women may hesitate to participate in phone-in radio programs. However, it does not fully account for the practical and institutional conditions that may also restrict participation. Cultural expectations may interact with economic dependence, access to technology, household responsibilities, and the behavior of program presenters. Consequently, an examination of women's participation requires attention to the relationship between social expectations and the practical conditions in which radio participation occurs.

**Technological Access, Digital Inequality and Participation**

Access to communication technology is another important theme in the literature. The relationship between technological access and participation is evident in research on radio and women's political engagement. Didiugwu et al. (2014), in their study of the effects of the Nnọko Umunwanyi program on rural women's political consciousness in Enugu State, highlight radio's potential to increase women's political knowledge and interest. Their work demonstrates the importance of radio as a means of providing information and encouraging political awareness. However, the study's focus on political consciousness and program exposure differs from the specific question of women's willingness or ability to call into radio programs. Increased awareness or interest does not necessarily indicate whether women actively participate in interactive broadcasting.

This distinction is important when interpreting the relationship between radio access and participation. Whereas Didiugwu et al. (2014) emphasize radio's potential to promote political consciousness, Dada and Sulaimon (2021) and Ogunleye (2021) highlight constraints that may limit women's ability to engage with communication technologies. Considered together, these perspectives suggest that the benefits of radio may depend not only on exposure to programs but also on whether women possess the resources and opportunities necessary to participate actively.

Research on the digital divide further develops this argument. Danjuma et al. (2015) examine gender inequalities in access to information and communication technologies (ICTs), identifying socio-cultural biases and women's marginalization in ICT policy-making as factors that may reinforce exclusion from political participation. Sobowale et al. (2016), meanwhile, focus on the difficulties women encounter in accessing ICTs, particularly in rural communities where economic constraints and traditional gender roles may restrict their use of mobile technology. Their discussion also suggests that mobile phones, although useful for meeting certain communication needs, may not adequately address the broader informational requirements of rural women.

The arguments presented by Danjuma et al. (2015) and Sobowale et al. (2016) point to the fact that limited access to technology is a constraint within broader socio-economic and institutional inequalities. The digital divide is therefore not simply a question of whether a woman owns a mobile phone. It may also involve the affordability of communication, the availability of information, digital skills, and the social conditions governing the use of technology. These interconnected constraints are relevant to phone-in radio programs because listeners must be able to access the appropriate communication channels and use them under conditions that permit participation.

A different perspective is offered by Varriale et al. (2021), whose research highlights the potential of mobile technology to enhance social interactions and challenge traditional gender norms. Their discussion suggests that mobile phones may create opportunities for communication and participation, although existing inequalities can limit the extent to which these opportunities translate into broader changes in gender relations. This perspective complements the studies emphasizing technological barriers by recognizing that technology

can be both a potential enabler of participation and a means whose benefits are constrained by existing inequalities.

The literature therefore presents a relationship between technological opportunity and social limitation. While radio and mobile technologies can facilitate communication and political engagement, their availability does not automatically eliminate the barriers that women face. Furthermore, much of the cited work addresses ICT access, digital inequality, or political participation more broadly. These findings provide a useful foundation for examining phone-in radio programs, but their implications for women's actual participation in such programs in Northern Nigeria require further investigation.

**Education, Socio-economic Conditions and Social Support**

Education, economic circumstances, and social networks also feature in discussions of women's participation in public discourse. These factors are related but distinct: education may influence confidence and awareness, economic circumstances may determine access to communication resources, and social networks may provide encouragement or reinforce restrictions.

Research has consistently shown that education enhances women's capacity for civic and public participation by improving access to information, communication skills, and confidence in expressing opinions on public issues. Women with higher levels of education are generally more likely to participate in public discourse and engage with media platforms that provide opportunities for interaction and expression (UN Women 2024). Furthermore, studies on radio and political participation in Nigeria indicate that interactive program formats, particularly discussion and phone-in programs, provide women with opportunities to engage directly in public conversations and decision-making processes (Mbaave 2024; Odunola, Babafemi, and Lois 2015; UNWomen.org)

Similarly, awareness of communication rights, access to information, and knowledge of available media platforms may enhance women's willingness and ability to participate in public communication. The World Association for Christian Communication (WACC) argues that women's communication rights and equal participation in public communication are essential to ensuring that women's experiences and concerns are included on the public agenda (WACC 2025). Likewise, UN Women emphasizes that media can mobilize

citizens, raise awareness, and promote women's participation in public and political life when women possess the necessary communication skills and opportunities for engagement

However, education and awareness alone do not guarantee participation. Studies have shown that women's involvement in public communication and decision-making is often constrained by structural barriers such as poverty, gender norms, limited resources, and unequal access to opportunities. UN Women further notes that women frequently encounter obstacles including low educational opportunities, poverty, discriminatory social practices, and restricted access to resources necessary for effective participation in public life. [unwomen.org]

Hence, a woman may be informed about a radio program and willing to contribute but unable to do so because of limited access to a phone, airtime costs, or lack of privacy. Conversely, access to a mobile phone does not necessarily ensure participation if a woman lacks confidence or anticipates social disapproval. These relationships indicate the need to consider educational and technological factors together without assuming that one automatically resolves the limitations associated with the other.

The political and regulatory environment provides another dimension to this discussion. Political instability and restrictive media laws can create an unfavorable environment for women's expression (Ozohu-Suleiman, 2021). These arguments shift attention from individual circumstances to the wider institutional conditions under which public communication occurs. Nevertheless, the relationship between national media regulation and women's participation, particularly in phone-in programs, must be examined carefully, as the existence of a legal framework does not necessarily indicate how it is implemented or experienced by female callers.

Socio-economic status also influences the opportunities available to women. Oguntayo (2020) argues that economic independence may empower women to express their opinions, whereas economic dependence on male counterparts can reduce their participation. Economic constraints may also interact with domestic responsibilities, limiting the time women can devote to public engagement. These considerations complement the technological perspective because financial resources may affect the affordability of phone calls and access to communication devices. They also connect with the cultural perspective, as household arrangements and gender expectations may influence how women use the resources available to them.

Taken together, the literature suggests that education, economic independence, supportive networks, and institutional conditions may shape women's capacity and willingness to participate in public discourse. However, these factors may operate differently across social settings. The extent to which they influence women's participation in phone-in radio programs in Northern Nigeria, particularly in interaction with cultural expectations and program-level conditions, remains an important issue for investigation.

**Media Representation, Program Practices and Psychological Barriers**

Beyond cultural and material constraints, the structure and management of radio programs may influence women's willingness to participate. Phone-in programs depend not only on listeners' access to communication channels but also on how presenters receive, moderate, and respond to callers. The treatment of callers may influence whether participants feel respected, perceive the program as safe for expressing sensitive opinions, and are willing to contribute again.

This issue is particularly relevant when programs address gender relations, domestic violence, health, and family matters. A program that invites public participation yet responds insensitively to women's experiences may undermine the format's inclusive potential. Such practices may reinforce existing gender expectations rather than provide a space for women to challenge them. This concern connects with the cultural literature discussed earlier: if women already anticipate criticism from their families or communities, an unsupportive broadcasting environment may add another reason to avoid public expression.

An incident described by the authors involving the Hausa-language phone-in program "Me Ya Faru" on Alheri Radio FM 97.7 in Zaria illustrates this concern. According to the account, on Wednesday, 23 February 2022, a woman called the program to report that her husband had beaten her after she asked him for money to buy food. The presenter reportedly questioned her about what she had done to warrant the violence, while subsequent callers blamed her for the incident. An elderly female caller reportedly criticized the woman for discussing her marital problems publicly, while another female caller defended her decision to speak out and suggested that sharing her experience might provide relief.

The incident, as described, raises questions about victim-blaming, gender-sensitive moderation, and the social risks associated with women's participation in phone-in

programmes. It also illustrates how audience responses may reproduce the same social expectations that discourage women from speaking publicly. However, the account should be treated as an illustrative example rather than systematic empirical evidence unless its provenance is established. Before publication, the authors should specify whether the incident was documented through direct observation, a program recording, a transcript, field notes, or another verifiable source. Without such documentation, the example cannot independently establish the prevalence of gender-insensitive broadcasting or its effect on women's participation.

The incident nevertheless identifies an important issue for empirical investigation: the possibility that program practices and audience reactions influence women's willingness to call in, particularly when discussing sensitive personal or family experiences. It also draws attention to the need to distinguish between the availability of a participatory platform and the quality of the participation it enables. A program may technically permit callers to contribute while its moderation practices or audience responses discourage certain groups from doing so.

The literature on women's political participation and media representation provides a broader context for this issue. It suggests that women's participation cannot be explained exclusively by individual willingness. It may also depend on whether the wider communication environment supports or discourages their expression. Psychological concerns, including fear of judgment, embarrassment, criticism, and possible social repercussions, are also relevant to understanding women's participation. Such concerns may be connected to cultural expectations and the perceived risks of public disclosure. However, the existence and relative importance of these psychological barriers should be established through appropriate empirical investigation rather than assumed from individual examples. In the context of phone-in programs, it is particularly important to examine how women understand the potential consequences of speaking on air and whether presenters' and other callers' practices influence their decisions to participate.

**Gender, Health Communication and Development**

The relevance of women's participation in radio extends beyond individual expression to broader questions of health communication, gender equality, and community development. Ademolu, Jonathan, Biobaku, and Mabel (2023) discuss the need for effective communication

strategies that incorporate women's perspectives in addressing health challenges, including Nigeria's high maternal mortality ratio. Their work underscores the broader importance of including women in communication processes that affect their well-being. However, the need to include women's perspectives in health communication does not, by itself, establish the extent to which women participate in phone-in radio programs or the specific barriers they encounter when doing so.

Similarly, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) represents an international framework for recognizing and advancing women's rights. The work by Abdul, Zainab, Fatima, Sa'adu, and Nasiru (2018) highlights the relationship between the recognition of women's rights and the limitations that may arise during local implementation. This perspective reinforces the importance of considering the social and institutional conditions that encourage or restrict women's participation. However, the precise bibliographic details of this source and its specific relationship to participatory media should be verified before the work is submitted.

The discussion of gender equality and development also highlights the importance of examining whether radio programmes provide meaningful opportunities for women's expression. Ademolu et al. (2023) suggest that some radio programs intended to promote gender equality may lack sufficient depth in their treatment of significant gender issues, thereby limiting engagement. This observation raises questions about the relationship between program content, the representation of women's concerns, and opportunities for audience participation.

The health and development perspectives complement the earlier discussions of cultural norms, technological access, and socio-economic conditions by explaining why women's participation matters beyond simply calling a radio station. Women's contributions can introduce perspectives relevant to health, education, governance, family welfare, and community development. Nevertheless, the existence of gender-related programming or a stated commitment to equality does not necessarily guarantee that women can participate freely or that their contributions will be treated fairly. Understanding the conditions that facilitate or constrain participation is therefore essential to assessing radio's potential as an inclusive platform for public dialogue.

The literature reviewed identifies several interconnected factors that may influence women's participation in public discourse and phone-in radio programs. Studies by Gustafsson (2018) draw attention to cultural expectations and gendered restrictions, while Oyesomi and Okorie (2013) highlight the relationship between radio's potential for political mobilization and the influence of community constraints. Together, these studies suggest that women's participation is shaped partly by the social environment in which communication occurs.

Research on technological access provides a complementary explanation. Danjuma et al. (2015), and Sobowale et al. (2016) highlight the significance of access to communication technologies, digital skills, and socio-economic resources. Meanwhile, Varriale et al. (2021) draw attention to the potential of mobile technology to facilitate interaction and challenge existing gender expectations. Read together, these studies indicate that technology can create opportunities for participation while existing inequalities constrain the extent to which women can benefit from them. Didiugwu et al. (2014) further demonstrate radio's potential to increase women's political consciousness, although political awareness and active participation in phone-in programs are distinct outcomes.

Studies addressing education, economic independence, social networks, and the institutional environment add further dimensions to the discussion. These perspectives collectively suggest that women's participation is unlikely to be explained adequately by a single factor. Rather, it may reflect the interaction of personal circumstances, social expectations, material resources, institutional conditions, and the practices of individual broadcasting programs.

Despite these contributions, the literature reviewed here does not sufficiently establish how these factors interact to influence women's participation in phone-in radio programs in the selected states of Northern Nigeria. Some of the cited studies address radio's general role in communication and political mobilization, while others examine gender norms, access to technology, digital inequality, education, or women's participation in public life more broadly. Although these studies provide useful conceptual and contextual insights, their findings cannot automatically be taken as explanations for women's participation in specific phone-in programs. The relationship between these broader factors and women's actual experiences of interactive broadcasting therefore requires further examination.

A further issue concerns the distinction between women's access to radio, their exposure to programs, their awareness of public issues, and their active participation as callers. These are related but different dimensions of media engagement. Evidence that radio increases political consciousness, for example, does not necessarily explain why women may refrain from calling a program. Similarly, evidence of a digital divide does not establish whether technology is the principal barrier to participation in a particular locality. A focused investigation is therefore necessary to establish which factors are relevant in the selected study contexts and how women experience them.

The reviewed literature also highlights the need to consider the role of broadcasting practices alongside broader social constraints. Cultural expectations and household dynamics may discourage women from speaking publicly, while the cost of airtime, limited access to phones, lack of privacy, insensitive moderation, and fear of audience judgment may create additional obstacles. However, the relative importance of these factors and the ways in which they reinforce one another should not be assumed without context-specific evidence.

This study therefore investigates the barriers affecting women's participation in phone-in radio programs in three selected states in Northern Nigeria. By examining cultural, social, educational, technological, economic, psychological, and program-related factors, the study seeks to establish a more context-specific understanding of women's participation in interactive broadcasting. Its contribution lies in examining the relationship between the broader constraints identified in the existing literature and the specific conditions under which women participate in, or refrain from participating in, phone-in radio programs. The findings are expected to contribute to scholarship on gender and media participation in Nigeria and provide evidence that may inform more inclusive broadcasting practices and policies that support women's participation in public discourse.

**Theoretical Framework**

The Spiral of Silence theory underpins this study. Developed by Elizabeth Noelle-Neumann (1974), it suggests that individuals are less likely to express their opinions publicly if they perceive that their views are not widely shared or they are in the minority. The theory was proposed based on two assumptions. People tend to sense the majority view of public opinion, and knowing that being in a minority may lead to isolation, they adjust their behavior accordingly. This adjustment of behavior is either to share in the majority

view openly, or to remain silent and appear to agree with the majority, when in reality they do not (Crandall and Ayres,2002).

McDevitt et al. (2003) identify and add three assumptions to the theory. That a human action is motivated by the climate of opinion; people can accurately assess the opinion climate, and people believe that the majority will impose negative sanctions on those who hold a minority view. They further showed in an experimental study that there was a moderating tendency for both those who held a majority and those who held a minority view. Besides the willingness to express one's opinion and opinion climate, attitude is also an important factor that influences whether individuals speak out or how strongly they feel about an issue (Krosnick and Petty 2014)

The Spiral of Silence Theory is relevant to this study because women's participation in phone-in radio programs in Northern Nigeria may be influenced by their perceptions of prevailing cultural and social expectations. Where women believe that expressing their opinions on the radio could attract criticism, ridicule, or disapproval from family members or the wider community, they may be less willing to call in, ask questions, or contribute to discussions. In this context, the theory's key concepts are reflected in women's perceptions of the prevailing climate of opinion, their fear of negative social reactions, and their willingness or reluctance to express their views publicly. Silence, however, should not automatically be interpreted as evidence of fear of isolation, as non-participation may also result from other constraints.

Although the Spiral of Silence Theory provides a useful explanation for self-censorship and reluctance to speak, it does not fully account for the structural and gender-related factors that may limit women's participation. These may include unequal household power relations, restricted access to mobile phones, financial constraints, educational differences and program-related barriers. A feminist communication perspective, therefore, complements the theory by highlighting how gendered social relations and unequal access to communication opportunities shape women's public expression. This perspective broadens the analysis beyond individual perceptions and fear of isolation to consider the social structures within which women make decisions about participation.

The study consequently applies the Spiral of Silence Theory to understand how perceived social expectations and anticipated negative reactions may discourage women from participating in phone-in radio programs, while the feminist communication perspective

provides a complementary lens for examining broader gender and structural constraints. Together, these perspectives provide a basis for understanding women's participation as a process shaped by both individual perceptions and the social conditions in which communication takes place.

## METHODS

Based on the study's objectives, a mixed-methods approach was adopted, combining quantitative data from questionnaires with qualitative data from an in-depth interview to examine women's participation in radio phone-in programs in Northern Nigeria. The study employed a convergent mixed-methods design, in which quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed separately and brought together to provide a broader understanding of the research problem.

The study population comprised women aged 18 years and above in Northern Nigeria who listened to radio, particularly phone-in programs. Given the absence of a readily available, specific population figure for this category of listeners, a total of 600 respondents were purposively selected from three states representing the Northern Nigeria geographical sub-regions: Borno State in the Northeast, Kano State in the Northwest, and Niger State in the North Central region. Two hundred respondents were selected from each state. The purposive sampling technique enabled the researchers to select women who met the study's eligibility criteria and had relevant experience of listening to radio phone-in programs. However, the non-probability sampling approach limits the generalisability of the findings to all women in Northern Nigeria. The results are therefore interpreted in relation to the selected respondents and study locations rather than as statistically representative of the entire female population of the region.

Data were collected using a closed-ended questionnaire administered by female research assistants in selected areas of the state capitals of the three states. A total of 600 questionnaires were administered, and all were retrieved. The questionnaire was designed to obtain respondents' views on the factors influencing women's participation in radio phone-in programs and to address the first four research objectives. The instrument was subjected to

peer review by colleagues to assess its validity and suitability for addressing the research objectives.

The reliability procedure involved administering the instrument to 10 percent of the sample and reporting an 80 percent inter-coder agreement using Holsti's formula. However, Holsti's coefficient is primarily intended to assess agreement among coders analyzing content and is not, on its own, an appropriate measure of a questionnaire's reliability. Consequently, the reported coefficient should not be presented as evidence of questionnaire reliability unless the study also included a coding procedure with appropriate inter-coder agreement. If the questionnaire contained multi-item scales measuring the same constructs, an appropriate internal consistency measure, such as Cronbach's alpha, could be used, provided the relevant data are available. Otherwise, the reliability procedure should be reported in accordance with the test actually conducted.

Quantitative data were organized, presented in tables and analyzed using simple percentages, followed by interpretation in relation to the research objectives. In-depth interviews were conducted to address the fifth objective and provide further insight into the issues examined through the questionnaire. The interview responses were transcribed, reviewed, and organized thematically according to recurring patterns relevant to the study objectives. The qualitative findings were then considered alongside the questionnaire results to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing women's participation in radio phone-in programs.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents data obtained for the research. Six research assistants, 2 per state, were employed to administer the questionnaires across the 3 states/regions. Each assistant is responsible for purposively administering 100 questionnaires based on the criteria of willingness to participate, active radio listenership, being women aged 18 and above, and having attended at least primary school. Hence, a total of 600 respondents participated in the research. Table one represents the demographic data of respondents

**Table 1.**

| Age | Frequency | % | Occupation | Frequency | % | Marital Status | Frequency | | Educ Qualification | Frequency | % |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 18-30 | 27 | 4.5 % | Student | 36 | 6% | Single | 31 | 5.2 % | Primary | 91 | 15.2% |
| 31-40 | 96 | 16 % | Full time House wife | 113 | 18.8 % | Married | 387 | 64.5 % | Secondary | 178 | 29.7% |
| 41-50 | 209 | 34.8 % | Civil servant | 208 | 34.7 % | Divorced | 32 | 5.3 % | Diploma | 194 | 32.3% |
| 51 - 60 | 102 | 17 % | Business woman | 189 | 31.5 % | Separated | 8 | 1.3 % | Degree | 109 | 18.2% |
| 61 and above | 166 | 27.7 % | Self employed | 54 | 9% | Widowed | 142 | 23.7 % | Postgraduate | 28 | 4.7% |
| Total | 600 | 100 % | Total | 600 | 100 % | Total | 600 | 100 % | Total | 600 | 100% |

*Demographic Data of the Respondents*

From the table above, the largest age group is 41–50 years (34.8%), followed by those aged 60 and above (27.7%). The Young women (18–30) are significantly underrepresented, with 27 women (4.5%) participating. This data suggests that middle-aged and older women dominate participation, while younger women may face more restrictions or lack interest in or access to radio programming. The occupation of the respondents shows that civil servants (34.7%) and businesswomen (31.5%) constitute the majority who participate in radio programs. Full-time housewives make up 18.8% of respondents, showing moderate representation. Students are only 36, representing 6% of respondents. This again confirms low involvement of youths in radio participation. The dominance of employed women suggests that economic empowerment may increase the likelihood of participation.

Married women accounted for 64.5% of respondents, followed by widows (23.7%); single women represented 5.2%. These figures describe the composition of the sample but cannot establish that unmarried women face greater cultural restrictions or that widowhood increases autonomy, because marital status was not cross-tabulated with participation and no inferential test was reported. Educationally, respondents with diplomas formed the largest group (32.3%), followed by those with secondary education (29.7%); 4.7% had postgraduate qualifications. The sample therefore includes more women with secondary and diploma-level education than women with postgraduate qualifications. Without cross-tabulations or

inferential analysis, it is not possible to conclude that education, age, marital status or occupation explain differences in participation. These demographic patterns provide context for interpreting the findings, while the reported barriers and interview accounts offer more direct evidence of the challenges respondents identified.

**Participation in Phone-in Radio Programs**

The first objective of this research is to examine the level of women's participation in phone-in radio programs in Northern Nigeria. Tables 2 and 3 attempt to provide data that will meet this objective. First, the data in Table 2 present the frequency of listenership and how respondents access phone-in programs. Then, Table 3 addresses the issue of participation of respondents in phone-in programs

**Table 2.**

| **Frequency of Listenership** | | | **Ways of Accessing Programmes** | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Response** | **Frequency** | **Percentage** | **Response** | **Frequency** | **Percentage** |
| Very often | 220 | **36.7%** | Radio set | 308 | **51.3%** |
| Often | 144 | **24.0%** | My car | 135 | **22.5%** |
| Occasionally | 139 | 23.2% | Handset | 124 | **20.7%** |
| Rarely | 97 | 16.2% | Others | 03 | **0.5%** |
| Total | 600 | 100% | Total | 600 | 100% |

*Respondents' Listenership to Phone-in Radio Programs*

The data shows that a combined 60.7% (Very often + Often) of respondents listen to phone-in radio programs regularly. Only 16.2% listen rarely. This indicates a high level of engagement with phone-in radio programs. The majority of respondents are active listeners, suggesting that such programs remain a relevant and influential platform for public participation, information sharing, and community dialogue. The relatively small percentage of listeners who are rare implies that phone-in programs maintain consistent audience interest.

On ways of Accessing Programmes, the distribution shows that most listeners access programs on radio sets with 308 (51.3%) responses, which means traditional radio sets remain the primary access point, probably because they don't require much financial investment. Others use car radios (22.5%) and handsets (20.7%). Only 0.5% use other means

(possibly tablets or computers). The prevalence of radio sets suggests that conventional radio technology remains widely used and accessible. However, the substantial use of car radios and mobile handsets indicates a shift toward mobile and on-the-go listening habits, reflecting modern lifestyle patterns. The presence of handset users also suggests increasing integration of radio with digital devices, which may influence future programming and broadcasting strategies.

**Table 3.**

| **Frequency of Calls in Programs** | | | **Success of calls in Programs** | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Response** | **Frequency** | **Percentage** | **Response** | **Frequency** | **Percentage** |
| Very often | 88 | 14,7% | Very often | 316 | 52.7% |
| Often | 61 | 10.2% | Often | 139 | 23.2% |
| Occasionally | 73 | 12.2% | Occasionally | 117 | 19.5% |
| Rarely | 378 | 63% | Rarely | 28 | 4.7% |
| Total | 600 | 100% | Total | 600 | 100% |

*Respondents' Participation in Radio Phone-in Programs*

From Table 3 above, the data show that respondents don't call often, but when they do, the success rate of getting through is high. The data shows that only 14.7% of respondents call very often, with a small 10.2% calling often. There is also a 12.2% calling occasionally, while the majority of the respondents (60%) rarely participate in call-in programs

This indicates that most listeners do not frequently participate by calling in phone-in programs. Over half of the respondents rarely call, suggesting certain barriers which will be explored in subsequent objectives. The data, however, show respondents' preference for listening rather than participating, as supported by Table 2 above. The relatively low "very often" and "often" categories imply that active participation is limited, even though listenership is high.

On the success rate of the calls, Results show that the majority of calls- 52.7% and 23.2% of respondents- are very often and often successful, while 19.5% say their calls are occasionally successful. Only 4.7% rarely get through. This suggests that when people attempt to call, they generally succeed. More than half report very frequent success, indicating efficient call-handling systems, adequate phone lines and good networks. The low percentage of "rarely successful" callers shows that technical or operational barriers are minimal.

The second objective is to identify the reasons that motivate women to participate in phone-in programs.

**Table 3.**

| Response | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Value Addition | 141 | 6.18% |
| Gender Representation | 136 | 5.96% |
| Education Reason | 110 | 4.82% |
| Share Opinion | 203 | 8.91% |
| Community Development | 156 | 6.84% |
| Emotional Connection | 371 | 16.27% |
| Convenience | 461 | 20.22% |
| Enlightenment | 33 | 1.45% |
| Expertise | 106 | 4.65% |
| Interest in Topic | 495 | 21.71% |
| Response to Issue | 68 | 2.98% |
| Total | 2,280 | 100% |

*Respondents' Inspiration to Participate in Call-in Radio Program*

Here, respondents are asked to pick as many options as are applicable to them. Data shows that the dominant motivation for participation in phone-in programs is interest in the topic presented (21.71%). This is the strongest motivator, which shows that people engage primarily because the topic itself appeals to them. This is followed by convenience (20.22%), which may mean ease of access, simplicity, proper timing, or low effort strongly influence participation, suggesting that reducing barriers increases engagement.

Emotional connection (16.27%) is the next motivator for engagement, suggesting that respondents are driven by personal feelings, identity, or emotional resonance. Hence, emotional appeal is a powerful tool for engagement.

These three motivators account for nearly 60% of all responses, showing that interest, ease, and emotional relevance are the core engagement factors that inspire women to participate in phone-in programs.

Other reasons identified are sharing of opinions (8.91%), community development (6.84%), value addition (6.18%), and gender representation (5.96%). Many respondents

are motivated by the desire to express themselves. This indicates a participatory or expressive culture that shows a sense of social responsibility or collective progress. Respondents also express wanting to contribute meaningfully in order to add value. Gender-related motivations are also recorded but not dominant motivators.

Other motivators, though low, include educational reasons (4.82%), providing expertise (4.65%), responding to a raised issue (2.98%), or enlightenment purposes (1.45%). These findings mean that learning and expertise are present but not major drivers; issue-based responses are relatively low, meaning engagement is not primarily reactive. Enlightenment is the least common motivator, suggesting that seeking new knowledge or effort to enlighten others is not a primary reason for participation.

Hence, participation is primarily intrinsic and emotional. High scores in interest in the topic and emotional connection show that people participate because they care about the subject and feel personally connected. Similarly, convenience is a major factor in participation. As the second-highest category, this indicates that reducing friction (simple processes, timing, easy access, low effort) significantly boosts participation because social and expressive motivations matter. Categories such as sharing opinions and community development highlight that people value voice, identity, and collective progress.

Knowledge-seeking motivations are weaker, with lower percentages in educational reasons, expertise, and enlightenment, suggesting that respondents are not primarily driven by learning, but by interest, convenience, and emotion.

Gender Representation is present but not dominant. It matters to some respondents, but it is not a major driver of participation for many others.

**Topics of Interest**

The third objective is to determine the topics that women most frequently call in to discuss during phone-in radio programs. Tables 4 and 5 provide data that attempts to meet this objective.

**Table 4.**

| Response | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Politics | 28 | 4.67% |
| Current affairs | 87 | 14.50% |
| Women issues | 314 | 52.33% |
| Education | 30 | 5.00% |
| Health | 139 | 23.17% |
| Others | 2 | 0.33% |
| Total | 600 | 100% |

*Respondents' Topics of Interest in Radio Phone-in Programs*

For the topics that respondents frequently call to discuss during programs, a quick look at the distribution shows a highly uneven pattern of interest across the categories. Women's issues dominate the responses, accounting for over half (52.33%) of all responses. Health is the second-most frequent category at 23.17%, indicating strong public concern. Current affairs follow with 14.50%, indicating moderate engagement with ongoing events, while politics (4.67%), Education (5%), and Others (0.33%) are comparatively low.

What this suggests is a strong focus on women's issues because the overwhelming majority indicates that respondents are highly concerned about matters affecting women—possibly gender equality, rights, safety, empowerment, or social challenges. This could reflect ongoing societal conversations or pressing local issues. Health is a major priority for respondents, as nearly a quarter of responses indicate that health-related topics are clearly important. This may relate to healthcare access, disease prevention, maternal health, or public health awareness.

There is also moderate interest in current affairs, meaning people are somewhat engaged with national or global events but not as intensely as with social issues. Data also indicate low interest in politics, with a small percentage suggesting political fatigue, distrust, or simply that politics is not the respondents' primary concern. Similarly, education is surprisingly low, with only 5% indicating that educational programs are not currently a top-of-mind issue for respondents, or that other issues overshadow it. Other issues that cut across categories are negligible, recording only 0.33% of responses. This shows that the categories provided captured almost all relevant responses.

## Barriers to Participation

The fourth objective of this research is to identify the barriers that contribute to women's reluctance to participate in phone-in radio programs in Northern Nigeria. Table 6 provides answers to this objective.

**Table 6.**

| Response | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Cultural norms | 271 | 45.17% |
| Religion | 49 | 8.17% |
| Lack of Confidence | 36 | 6.00% |
| Limited access to Technology | 22 | 3.67% |
| Time Factor | 61 | 10.17% |
| Alternative Media | 34 | 5.67% |
| Male Host | 12 | 2.00% |
| Lack of Interest | 38 | 6.33% |
| Poor finance | 13 | 2.17% |
| Language Barrier | 64 | 10.67% |
| Total | 600 | 100% |

*Respondents' Barriers to Participation in Phone-in Programs*

The distribution shows a strong concentration around cultural norms, with several mid-level barriers also appearing significant. Cultural norms (45.17%) are by far the most dominant barrier — almost half of all responses. Language barrier (10.67%) and time factor (10.17%) form the second major constraints. While religion (8.17%), lack of interest (6.33%), lack of confidence (6%), and alternative media (5.67%) represent moderate barriers. Limited access to technology (3.67%), poor finances (2.17%), and male host (2%) are relatively low.

The data suggest that cultural norms are the biggest obstacle, with nearly half of respondents citing them. This suggests that deeply rooted societal expectations, gender roles, or traditional beliefs strongly influence behavior and limit participation or engagement. Language and time constraints are significant practical barriers, indicating communication challenges, possibly due to multilingual environments or lack of mastery of the language of presentation. The time factor suggests that respondents may be too busy, overburdened, or unable to allocate time due to work, family, or domestic responsibilities.

Religion plays a noticeable but secondary role. Religious beliefs or restrictions influence participation but are less dominant than cultural norms. Similarly, psychological and motivational barriers exist, such as Lack of confidence (6%) and lack of interest (6.33%), pointing to internal factors that may require empowerment, awareness, or engagement strategies.

Access-related barriers are relatively low but still present. Data indicated limited access to technology (3.67%) and poor finances (2.17%) as factors. Though they may not be the biggest issues, economic and technological limitations still affect some respondents. Male host as a barrier is minimal but present, with only 2% indicating that the host's gender is not a major deterrent for most respondents.

The fifth objective is to identify the program-level features that hinder women's participation in phone-in programs. Responses are sifted, synthesized, transcribed and categorized thematically.

**Program-level features that hinder women's participation in phone-in programs.**

Interviews were conducted with 5 women per state across different demographies on program-level features that hinder women from participating in phone-in programs. These participants include one radio staff member with a degree, one civil servant with a postgraduate qualification, one civil servant with a diploma, one secondary school certificate holder who is self-employed, and one primary school certificate holder who is a housewife engaged in petty trading. Data synthesized and transcribed show that the responses fall into several structurally related categories. The issues identified include how programs are created, moderated, and delivered on the radio. Based on the responses of the majority of interviewees, they include the following:

**Lack of anonymity and privacy**

One of the key program-level factors hindering women's participation in many phone-in programs is that hosts usually ask callers to mention their names and locations. This lack of anonymity reveals women's identity and exposes them to backlash or judgment from their communities for expressing their opinions. A respondent also linked this to "conflicts with their spouses or in-laws." This program-level feature is a barrier identified by the majority of respondents across regions.

**Poor moderation**

Another issue identified by most respondents is that moderators sometimes fail to manage abusive or insensitive comments from other callers. Moderators at times appear unprofessional because they don't provide a safe, respectful environment that encourages balanced gender participation. In this regard, a respondent said that "it is the reason why women participate less in phone-in programs, and listen more. Because when you listen to talk shows, the majority of the callers are men and you don't want to join issues with them"

This reinforces the perception that phone-in spaces are "not for women," hence women's low participation

**Programme timing**

Again, the respondents identified the wrong timing of phone-in programs as a barrier to participation. According to the majority, people are busy with work or domestic responsibilities; that's why women sometimes don't participate in these programs. A respondent jokingly said that "women don't have the luxury of time for chitchat. Their 24 hours is mostly occupied attending to one issue or the other. Phone-in programs are the least of their problems. Not a priority, she added. She further stated that, "the programs are not aired at the convenience of a woman; they are aired at the convenience of the presenter or the radio station"

**Topics don't interest women**

The women interviewed unanimously identified a lack of interest in the topics selected for phone-in programs as a major barrier to listening or participating. They variously identified Politics, Security, and sports as topics sometimes featured, and the respondents showed a lack of interest in these topics, hence their lack of participation. One of them said that she is "not interested in sports," and sometimes the programs feature sports events she basically doesn't know about or have any interest in. These are topics, according to them, that are "male topics" about which they have little knowledge, consequently discouraging them from calling. They feel that the programs are not meant for them.

**Programme formats**

Program type is also another discouraging feature that hinders women from phoning in. Respondents identified some programs that encourage debates, arguments or other forms of "aggressive exchanges" as too confrontational and intimidating for them. A respondent said she prefers conversational and respectful programs that resonate with her ideals

**Language Barrier**

Again, phone-in programs use highly formal language and jargon that discourage women from participating. Respondents unanimously agree that, although some may be educated, they prefer programs in their local languages or in Hausa. One of the respondents, who holds a primary school certificate, opined that "immediately a program comes up in English language, I automatically feel excluded". Another added that though she listens to such programs, she doesn't participate "because I cannot afford to make mistakes on air"

**Male-dominated hosting and presentation**

Some interviewees also felt that male-dominated hosting could discourage women's participation, although this view was not shared by all participants. One respondent argued that male presenters' tone and interaction style could discourage women and said that female callers might be interrupted or their perspectives given less attention [insert verified respondent code]. Another described dismissive language from male hosts as discouraging [insert verified respondent code]. These are participants' perceptions and should not be read as independently verified observations of presenter behavior. Nonetheless, they highlight the importance of inclusive moderation and of assessing whether women callers receive respectful and equitable treatment.

Across the 15 interviews, recurring program-level concerns included limited anonymity, weak moderation, inconvenient timing, topics perceived as irrelevant, confrontational formats, language barriers and male-dominated hosting. The findings should be understood as qualitative insights from a small, purposively selected group rather than as evidence that all women share these views. They also help contextualize the quantitative results: cultural norms were the most frequently reported barrier in the questionnaire, while the interviews illustrate how program practices may interact with wider expectations

influence women's willingness to speak. This interpretation is consistent with the Spiral of Silence Theory, while recognizing that silence can also arise from practical constraints, program design and personal preference rather than fear of isolation alone.

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that women's participation in radio phone-in programs in Northern Nigeria is shaped by the interaction of cultural expectations, language barriers, program scheduling, religious considerations, psychological confidence, and program-level practices. The findings suggest that cultural expectations remain an important constraint on women's public expression, while financial and technological barriers appear less prominent among the respondents studied. Interpreted through the Spiral of Silence Theory, these findings suggest that women's willingness to contribute to public discussions may be influenced by their perceptions of socially acceptable behavior and the possible reactions of others. However, the findings do not establish that fear of isolation directly causes non-participation; rather, they indicate that the theory offers a useful framework for understanding how perceived social expectations may shape women's communication choices. The study's theoretical contribution lies in applying the Spiral of Silence framework to women's participation in radio phone-in programs in the sociocultural context of Northern Nigeria, while highlighting the roles of language accessibility, program design, and everyday social constraints. The findings should, however, be interpreted in light of the study's methodological limitations.

The study employed purposive rather than probability sampling to select 600 respondents from Borno, Kano, and Niger States. Consequently, the findings cannot be generalized statistically to all women in Northern Nigeria. In addition, the qualitative component involved only 15 interview participants, five from each state. Although their accounts provided useful insights into women's experiences and perceptions, they cannot represent the full diversity of women's views across the region. The analysis also relied primarily on descriptive percentages and qualitative responses; therefore, it does not establish statistically significant relationships or causal effects among the variables examined. Future research could employ larger, more diverse samples, probability-based sampling where feasible, and inferential analysis to investigate relationships between social expectations,

perceived fear of isolation, and participation. Further studies could also compare different program formats and examine whether women-only segments, local-language broadcasts, and alternative participation channels improve engagement.

**Recommendations**

Women's participation in phone-in programs can be strengthened by addressing cultural and social barriers through collaboration with community leaders, women's groups, and religious figures to promote the value of women's voices in public dialogue. Creating women-only phone-in segments and offering programs in local languages—delivered in simple, inclusive communication styles—would make participation more accessible. Similarly, adjusting program schedules to fit women's daily routines, alongside community-based training to build confidence, media literacy, and communication skills, would further enhance engagement, especially when more female callers, guests, and presenters are featured. Program-level improvements, such as better call handling, respectful interactions, and topics that reflect women's everyday concerns, are also essential. Since financial and technological barriers are less significant, broadcasters should prioritize low-cost, widely accessible channels like basic mobile phones and alternative formats such as SMS or WhatsApp voice notes. Finally, engaging men as allies by highlighting the benefits of women's participation for households and communities can help create a more supportive environment for women's involvement.

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### Declaration of AI

The content of this document is an original research work conducted by the authors. However, the authors declare that they used Microsoft Copilot to restructure the grammar and address editorial issues during the course of writing this paper. The authors therefore take full responsibility for the accuracy and integrity of this research document.

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