

incorporate interactive feedback mechanisms perpetuates these inequalities, undermining its mandate to foster inclusion.

Discussion of Findings

This section interprets the results of the study in relation to its objectives, situating them within existing scholarship and the theoretical frameworks of the Social Model of Disability and Participatory Communication Theory.

Objective One: Assessing the Level of Awareness of NSDRC's Communication Strategies among PWSN in Nasarawa State

The study revealed a pronounced awareness deficit, with only 38.9 per cent of respondents reporting knowledge of NSDRC's communication strategies, while 61.1 per cent remained unaware. This disparity indicates that the Commission's communication initiatives have limited reach and fail to engage substantial sections of the disability community. The finding mirrors earlier observations by Adedokun and Alabi (2019), who reported low public awareness of disability commissions across Nigeria due to ineffective dissemination mechanisms. Similarly, Eze (2020) noted that communication barriers particularly the absence of accessible formats restrict the participation of PWSN in development programmes.

Interpreted through the Social Model of Disability, the lack of awareness reflects structural shortcomings rather than the personal failings of PWSN. Institutional dependence on inaccessible media platforms such as standard radio and television, without accommodations like sign language interpretation, audio narration, or braille materials, perpetuates this exclusion (Oliver, 1990; Shakespeare, 2018). Qualitative evidence from Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) corroborates this conclusion: a cluster leader in Lafia observed that "information rarely reaches the grassroots," suggesting that communication channels are hierarchical and fail to trickle down to local communities. This reinforces Ekeanyanwu and Okoro's (2013) argument that Nigerian public communication systems are often top-down and context-insensitive, thereby excluding marginalised populations. The finding ultimately underscores the need for decentralised, participatory communication that incorporates local languages, community networks, and disability-friendly media, as recommended by UNESCO (2015).

Objective Two: Evaluating the Accessibility and Inclusiveness of NSDRC's Communication Strategies

Accessibility emerged as the study's most critical challenge, with 54.1 per cent of respondents describing NSDRC's communication strategies as "hardly accessible." The data revealed that PWSN struggle to engage with Commission messages due to the

absence of sign language interpreters, braille publications, and audio materials. Structural barriers such as poor internet connectivity, high data costs, and low literacy further marginalise those in rural communities. These findings echo Oyedele and Adebayo (2021), who argued that welfare initiatives in Nigeria often fail due to the absence of disability-friendly communication systems, and Smith and Olowu (2023), who linked digital exclusion to infrastructural and socioeconomic constraints.

The Social Model of Disability interprets these accessibility gaps as products of institutional design, where communication systems are not constructed to accommodate diverse needs. Likewise, Participatory Communication Theory, as articulated by Freire (1970) and Thomas (2021), stresses that effective communication must involve co-creation with the target audience. NSDRC's reliance on conventional mass media and digital platforms, without active engagement of disability cluster representatives, has reinforced exclusion. This supports Asemah et al. (2013), who contend that non-participatory communication strategies fail to resonate with marginalised audiences. Thus, accessibility in disability communication should go beyond physical reach to include cultural and cognitive inclusion ensuring that messages are understandable, relevant, and adapted to the lived realities of PWSN.

Objective Three: Examining the Effectiveness of NSDRC's Communication Strategies in Enabling Participation

The study found that only 38.8 per cent of respondents rated NSDRC's communication as *effective* or *very effective* in promoting participation, while 33.8 per cent considered it *ineffective* or *very ineffective*. A further 27.4 per cent adopted a neutral stance, reflecting ambivalence or limited exposure to NSDRC's outreach efforts. This moderate effectiveness suggests that the Commission's messages do not translate into active engagement or empowerment among PWSN. Qualitative findings support this interpretation; one cluster leader in Akwanga lamented that "even when the Commission communicates, the information does not always reach the grassroots."

These findings align with Thomas (2021), who argues that one-way communication models hinder participatory governance and social inclusion. The NSDRC's dependence on broadcast media and social platforms without feedback loops or community consultations illustrates the persistence of a top-down communication culture. Adaja (2023) similarly criticises such non-interactive strategies for their inability to foster ownership or sustained engagement among diverse audiences.

Viewed through the Social Model of Disability, these shortcomings reflect institutional barriers that restrict participation rather than inherent incapacity among PWSN (Shakespeare, 2018). For example, hearing-impaired individuals are excluded from radio

programmes, while visually impaired persons cannot engage with text-based digital content. From the Participatory Communication perspective, this lack of dialogue and feedback violates Freire's (1970) principle of communicative equality where all participants should act as co-creators of meaning.

The study, therefore, reveals a critical disconnect between policy intent and communicative practice. NSDRC's strategies remain largely unidirectional, with limited adaptation to disability diversity and minimal grassroots involvement. To improve effectiveness, the Commission must embrace multimodal communication, incorporating accessible technologies such as voice-assisted messaging, community radio with sign-language inserts, and simplified digital content. Engaging disability clusters in message co-design and delivery would not only enhance participation but also embody the participatory ideals that underpin inclusive development communication.

Conclusion

This study examined the perceptions of people with special needs (PWSN) regarding the communication strategies of the Nasarawa State Disability Rights Commission (NSDRC), framed by the Social Model of Disability and Participatory Communication Theory. The findings revealed persistent communication gaps that undermine the inclusion and empowerment of PWSN, despite the existence of progressive legal frameworks such as the *Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act* of 2018 and the establishment of the NSDRC. These gaps manifest through low awareness, limited accessibility, and modest effectiveness of communication strategies. The results demonstrate that exclusion arises not from individual impairments but from structural and institutional shortcomings including the absence of accessible formats such as braille, sign language interpretation, and audio descriptions, as well as poor digital and rural outreach. These systemic barriers validate the Social Model's assertion that disability is socially constructed through organisational neglect and inadequate public engagement, underscoring the need for more inclusive and adaptive communication policies to bridge these divides.

Furthermore, the study identified the NSDRC's overreliance on one-way, top-down communication models particularly radio, television, and social media as a major impediment to participation. This approach neglects the dialogic, participatory principles of Freire's (1970) communication model, which emphasises co-creation and feedback between institutions and beneficiaries. The absence of consultative platforms and feedback mechanisms has hindered effective engagement with disability clusters, leaving communication fragmented and unresponsive to the lived realities of PWSN. The study therefore concludes that effective disability communication must transcend the mere

transmission of information to become a process of empowerment, equity, and social justice. By adopting participatory, multimodal, and disability-sensitive communication approaches that involve PWSN in planning, implementation, and evaluation, the NSDRC can transform awareness into meaningful inclusion. Such reforms would enable PWSN in Nasarawa State to access welfare opportunities, assert their rights, and participate fully in the development process, advancing the broader goal of sustainable and inclusive social transformation.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and in line with the three objectives of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Strengthening the Effectiveness of Communication through Participation

The most transformative yet moderately demanding recommendation is to shift NSDRC's communication model from a top-down approach to a participatory framework. The Commission should institutionalise regular engagement with disability clusters, leaders, and advocacy groups to co-create, implement, and evaluate communication initiatives. This participatory design ensures that messages are relevant, accessible, and reflective of lived realities. NSDRC can hold quarterly consultative forums, introduce community feedback surveys, and develop a Communication Advisory Committee comprising representatives of different disability groups.

2. Enhancing Accessibility of Communication Channels

Accessibility remains a core barrier, with over half of respondents identifying communication as "hardly accessible." NSDRC should prioritise multimodal inclusive communication, producing information in braille, sign language, audio description, and easy-to-read formats. Additionally, leveraging digital inclusion tools such as *USSD codes*, *voice-enabled platforms*, and *accessible mobile apps* can reduce barriers created by cost and literacy. Partnerships with telecom providers, community-based organisations, and disability NGOs will enhance reach and sustainability.

3. Improving Awareness of NSDRC Communication Strategies

With only 39% of respondents aware of NSDRC's activities, enhancing visibility is crucial. NSDRC should expand awareness campaigns using *community radio*, *town hall meetings*, *peer educators*, and *local disability networks*. Messages should be adapted into *local languages* and disseminated through *grassroots advocacy groups* to reach marginalised rural populations. Collaboration with traditional rulers, faith-based organisations, and local influencers would amplify visibility while fostering trust and community ownership.

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MEDIA REPRESENTATION AND SOCIAL PERCEPTION OF GROUP MARRIAGE AS A COST-EFFECTIVE APPROACH TO CONTEMPORARY WEDDING PRACTICES.”

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Abstract

This study examines group marriage as a strategic social communication approach for addressing the rising costs of marriage ceremonies and the accompanying socioeconomic barriers facing youth in Islamic and African societies. Using qualitative case analysis, the paper explores two distinct contexts: Saudi Arabia and Kano State, Nigeria. Drawing from documentary evidence, observation, and existing reports, the study situates group marriage within the broader discourse of social mobilization, cultural communication, and faith-based intervention. Findings reveal that organized group weddings—spearheaded by NGOs, religious councils, and state agencies serve not only as cost-reduction mechanisms but also as platforms for promoting moral values, community participation, and collective responsibility. The paper concludes that group marriage represents an innovative communication practice that blends cultural tradition with modern social welfare approaches. It recommends sustained public communication strategies, policy support, and media advocacy to enhance social acceptance and sustainability.

Keywords: Group marriage, social communication, cultural mobilization, community development, Saudi Arabia, Kano-Nigeria.

Introduction

Marriage is a universal social institution that signifies legal, emotional, and cultural union between individuals and families. Across societies, it functions as both a biological and social necessity, ensuring procreation, companionship, and societal continuity. However, contemporary realities reveal an increasing difficulty for many young people to marry due

to the escalating costs associated with marriage ceremonies, dowries, housing, and post-marital responsibilities. This financial pressure has contributed to social problems including delayed marriages, moral decay, and growing frustration among youth.

Marriage is generally defined as the lawful union between a man and a woman as husband and wife, forming a socially and legally recognized relationship. According to *Encarta Encyclopedia* (2009), marriage is “a legally recognized relationship, established through a civil or religious ceremony, between two people who intend to live together as sexual and domestic partners.” Beyond this legal definition, marriage is widely viewed as an essential institution for the continuity of the human species, supported by nearly all cultures and the major world religions, particularly Christianity and Islam.

In most societies, marriage is not only regarded as a personal milestone but also as a social responsibility. Married individuals are often perceived as more stable, responsible, and respected members of their communities compared to their unmarried counterparts. Conversely, adults who remain single, divorced, or widowed may face subtle or overt social stigmatization, reflected in labels that carry negative connotations.

In West Africa, as in many other regions, marriage remains a cornerstone of social and cultural life. It symbolizes maturity, respectability, and commitment to family and communal values. Children born within a legally recognized marriage are considered legitimate, while those born outside wedlock are often viewed through a lens of moral disapproval, particularly in religiously inclined societies. Culturally, marriage in the region is marked by the payment of dowry or bride price, symbolizing respect and agreement between the families involved.

Both Islam and Christianity, the two dominant religions in West Africa, uphold the sanctity of marriage. In Islam, the *Qur'an* emphasizes the divine origin and purpose of marriage. In *Surat an-Nisā'* (4:1), it states that “O mankind! Be careful of your duty to your Lord Who created you from a single soul and from it created its mate and from them twain hath spread abroad a multitude of men and women.”

This verse underscores marriage as the means through which human life continues and societies flourish. Furthermore, *Surat an-Nisā'* (4:3) provides ethical guidance regarding marital justice:

“And if you fear that you will not deal justly with the orphan girls, then marry those that please you of [other] women, two or three or four. But if you fear that you will not be just, then [marry only] one... that is more suitable that you may not incline [to injustice]”.

Similarly, the Bible upholds the sacredness of marriage. In *Deuteronomy 7:3*, believers are cautioned that, “Neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son.”

And similarly, in *Hebrews 13:4*, it is further affirmed that, “Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge.”

These scriptural references reflect the shared understanding among major faiths that marriage is a divinely ordained institution, central to social stability, moral order, and human continuity.

This paper therefore explores the phenomenon of group marriage as a form of social communication as an organized, symbolic, and participatory process through which communities negotiate shared values, mutual aid, and collective identity. It focuses on two case studies: the mass wedding programs in Saudi Arabia and those organized by the Hisbah Board in Kano State, Nigeria. The study aims to highlight how these initiatives function as communicative and social mechanisms for addressing socioeconomic barriers to marriage.

Background of the Paper

In recent years, the cost of marriage ceremonies in many parts of Africa, including Nigeria, has risen significantly. Lavish spending on traditional rites, dowries, wedding receptions, and post-wedding celebrations has turned marriage into a financially demanding venture. For many young men and women, particularly those from low- and middle-income backgrounds, the financial pressure associated with marriage preparations has led to long delays in starting families, emotional stress, and in some cases, the abandonment of marriage plans altogether.

Marriage, which was once a simple and community-centered event, has increasingly become an avenue for social display and competition. The cultural emphasis on flamboyance, status, and material showmanship often overshadows the spiritual and moral essence of the union. Families are compelled to borrow money or sell properties to meet societal expectations regarding the “ideal wedding.” Consequently, this materialization of marriage has created a widening gap between cultural values and economic realities.

In response to these challenges, group marriage ceremonies, where several couples are wedded at the same time in a single event, have emerged as a socially innovative and economically viable alternative. The concept allows couples to share expenses associated with venue, decoration, catering, photography, and entertainment, thereby drastically reducing the financial burden on individuals.

This model has been successfully practiced in some Muslim communities, faith-based organizations, and humanitarian groups in Nigeria, Ghana, and other parts of West Africa.

Beyond its economic benefits, group marriage also promotes a sense of community, unity, and shared responsibility. It reaffirms the communal values that have long characterized African societies—where life events such as weddings, naming ceremonies, and funerals were collective affairs rather than individual spectacles. Group marriages can also help discourage the increasing commercialization of marriage rites and redirect attention toward the moral, spiritual, and social significance of marital unions.

From a media and communication perspective, the way group marriages are portrayed in the media significantly influences public perception. When covered positively, such ceremonies are often seen as symbols of solidarity, modesty, and moral reform. However, in some cases, negative framing by the media has contributed to misconceptions—portraying group marriages as inferior or unconventional. Thus, the media play a critical role in shaping public attitudes toward this practice and in promoting its acceptance as a legitimate and dignified social innovation.

Given these dynamics, there is a need to examine group marriage as a potential solution to the rising cost of marriage ceremonies and as a social communication strategy that supports couples while strengthening communal bonds. Understanding the motivations, media representations, and social impacts of group marriage can provide valuable insights for policymakers, religious leaders, and cultural stakeholders seeking to promote more sustainable marital practices.

Literature Review

Marriage has long been understood as a communicative act involving rituals, symbols, and cultural performances (Littlejohn & Foss, 2010). In traditional societies, marital ceremonies convey messages of legitimacy, social cohesion, and inter-family alliances. However, the commercialization and modernization of wedding practices have redefined marriage into a public spectacle often driven by social comparison and media influence (Ojedokun, 2020).

The cost of marriage is a central theme in sociological and communication studies. Scholars have argued that expensive marriage customs create structural inequalities and delay family formation (Makama, 2013). This is particularly evident in Islamic societies where high dowries and elaborate ceremonies pose moral and economic challenges (Hassan, 2018). In response, group marriage has emerged as a faith-based and civic innovation aimed at promoting social welfare and moral renewal (Rahman, 2015).

Group marriage programs—especially in Muslim-majority contexts—often function as symbolic public communication campaigns that foster solidarity, reduce individual financial burdens, and strengthen collective moral responsibility (Al-Ghamdi, 2019). Media coverage of these events frequently emphasizes themes of unity, generosity, and religious compliance. In Nigeria, local communication networks such as mosques, community radio, and social groups play key roles in mobilizing participation (Usman & Abdullahi, 2023). Thus, group marriage can be analyzed as both a social development tool and a communicative ritual that mediates between tradition, faith, and modern economic realities.

Methodology

The qualitative approach was chosen because it emphasizes contextual understanding, interpretive depth, and the subjective meanings individuals and communities attach to social phenomena. According to Merriam (2009), qualitative inquiry is most appropriate when the researcher seeks to understand social action within natural settings and through participants' perspectives. In this study, marriage ceremonies, religious organizations, and community events are interpreted as communicative performances that express shared social values.

Based on the above therefore, this study employed a qualitative comparative case study design to explore how group marriage functions as a social communication mechanism in two culturally distinct but religiously aligned contexts, that is, Saudi Arabia and Kano State- Nigeria. The comparative approach was adopted to highlight how similar religious frameworks can generate different institutional and communicative strategies for addressing the rising cost of marriage and its attendant social challenges (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2018).

The case study method was particularly suitable for investigating real-life social events in detail and within their specific contexts (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2018). The study's dual focus on Saudi Arabia and Kano State allows for comparative insight into how faith-based communication practices adapt to socioeconomic realities in different Islamic environments.

Data Sources and Collection

The data were collected through documentary analysis, participant observation, and secondary literature review. Documentary sources included public records, news reports, organizational bulletins, and previous academic studies on group marriage initiatives. These documents provided rich descriptive information about the organization, financing, and communication strategies involved in the programs (Bowen, 2009).

Participant observation was applied in part through attendance at marriage ceremonies **and** first-hand accounts shared by one of the researchers, who had previously observed events organized by the Usraty Centre in Madina, Saudi Arabia, while the other researcher witnessed the group marriage activities of the Hisbah Board in Kano State-Nigeria. Observation notes and photographs were used to interpret the communicative symbolism of rituals, speeches, and media representations associated with the group weddings.

Secondary literature on Islamic social welfare, development communication, and cultural studies of marriage was reviewed to provide a theoretical lens through which to interpret findings (Melkote & Steeves, 2015; Servaes, 2008). The triangulation of these data sources enhanced the study's credibility and allowed for a more nuanced understanding of the social meanings embedded in collective marriage practices.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using thematic content analysis, which involves systematically identifying recurring patterns and meanings (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The data were coded around three major themes:

1. Communicative practices (e.g., speeches, sermons, and symbolic acts);
2. Institutional organization (e.g., government, NGO, and religious involvement); and
3. Community perception and impact (e.g., empowerment, moral renewal, and cohesion).

The comparative analysis followed the logic of cross-case synthesis as recommended by Yin (2018), allowing patterns to emerge both within and between the Saudi and Nigerian contexts. Attention was paid to how media framing, religious discourse, and social mobilization intersect to make group marriage a viable communicative strategy for social development.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Group Marriage in Saudi Arabia

Group marriage in Saudi Arabia has evolved into a structured national program supported by charitable foundations and civic organizations. Despite the country's wealth, many young Saudis struggle with high marriage costs, particularly dowries that can reach up to 100,000 riyals. In response, non-governmental organizations such as the Usraty Centre in Madina and the Mawaddah Foundation in Jeddah organize mass weddings that combine financial assistance, distribution of needed furniture, moral education, and symbolic unity.