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MEDIA ADVOCACY FOR WOMEN LEADERSHIP: A CASE STUDY OF THE MS PRESIDENT TV SHOW IN KENYA

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ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

A DISSERTATION PRESENTED TO THE SCHOOL OF COMMUNICATION AND COMPUTER STUDIES IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF MASTER OF ARTS IN COMMUNICATION DEGREE OF ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY.

OCTOBER, 2026

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DECLARATION

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ISERC	Institutional Scientific Ethics Review Committee
MFA	Media Focus on Africa
NACOSTI	National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
SCT	Social Cognitive Theory
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal(s)
TV	Television
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

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ABSTRACT

This study examined media advocacy for women's leadership using The Ms President TV Show in Kenya as a case study. Despite policies promoting gender equality, women remain underrepresented in political and decision-making positions, while limited research has examined reality television as a strategic media advocacy tool for advancing women's leadership. The study therefore addressed the limited empirical understanding of how an advocacy-oriented reality television programme constructs women's leadership and how audiences interpret those representations in Kenya. It was guided by three objectives: to examine the role of reality television in media advocacy; to explore how mainstream media and related platforms are used for advocacy and leadership; and to examine how reality television champions gender representation. Framing Theory and Social Cognitive Theory guided the study. A qualitative descriptive case study design was adopted. Data were collected between April and July 2026 following ethical approval by St. Paul's University and issuance of a NACOSTI research permit. Informed consent, confidentiality and anonymisation were observed. Data was generated from 45 programme episodes, semi-structured interviews with five former contestants and three producers, and an online audience questionnaire that received 48 submissions, of which 33 eligible viewers were retained for substantive analysis. Episode, interview and open-ended audience data was analysed through thematic, content and discourse analysis, while frequencies and percentages from selected closed-ended questionnaire items were used only to describe audience response patterns. Findings showed that The Ms President positively framed women as capable leaders, increased their visibility and challenged gender stereotypes. Audience responses also indicated largely positive self-reported perceptions of women's leadership. The study concludes that reality television can serve as a valuable development communication tool for promoting women's leadership and recommends sustained investment in advocacy-oriented media programmes, alongside stronger collaboration among media organisations, policymakers and development partners.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Chapter one presents the background of the study, outlines the statement of the problem, purpose of the study and presents the research questions, objectives, justification, and significance of the study. It also defines the scope, limitations, and delimitations of the research, setting the stage for an in-depth exploration of reality TV as a tool for advocacy communication in promoting gender equality.

1.2 Background to the study

Advocacy, in its essence, embodies the collective pursuit of change and improvement in societal systems and structures. It encompasses a diverse array of approaches, each tailored to address specific issues and advance particular causes (Weston, 2021). From advocating for social justice to shaping public policies, advocacy manifests in various forms, reflecting the multifaceted nature of the challenges we face (RegisCollege, 2023). This diversity is exemplified through distinct types of advocacies, each with its unique focus and methodology.

Communication Advocacy has long been recognized as a vital tool for influencing attitudes, behaviours, and social change (John & Bassey, 2020). Over the years, various strategies have been employed to promote advocacy goals, ranging from traditional methods such as public campaigns and community organizing to more contemporary approaches utilizing digital media platforms. These strategies have evolved in response to changes in technology, society, and communication dynamics.

Media, in its various forms, has played a significant role as an advocacy communication channel, offering powerful platforms to reach and engage audiences on social, political, and cultural issues (Sen, 2011; Smischney, 2020). While traditional mainstream media outlets have historically served as key channels for advocacy messaging, the rise of social media and streaming platforms has transformed the advocacy communication landscape (Topsümer et al., 2023; Yin, 2023). Social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram have

democratized communication, allowing individuals and organizations to amplify their advocacy messages and mobilize support on a global scale. According to Boulianne et al. (2020), social media platforms have become instrumental in advocacy efforts, allowing advocates to reach wider audiences and foster engagement with their causes. The emergence of hashtag movements, such as #MyDressMyChoice and #LipaKamaTender in Kenya, demonstrated the transformative power of social media in mobilizing collective action and raising awareness about pressing social issues (Regev, 2014; Mwololo, 2020). The hashtag #MyDressMyChoice advocated for women's rights and protested against gender-based violence, with a specific focus on street harassment and attacks on women for their choice of clothing. The hashtag #MyDressMyChoice went viral, sparking a national conversation and leading to public demonstrations and increased awareness about gender equality and women's rights (Regev, 2014; Omoera & Ryanga, 2016; Mwaura, 2018; Mbogo, 2021). However, despite the rising uptake of social media as an advocacy tool, its decentralised nature also presents challenges, including issues of misinformation, echo chambers, and algorithmic biases, as noted by Gupta and Bansal (2024).

In contrast, mainstream media outlets and media streaming platforms such as Netflix, HBO, Hulu, and Disney+ are characterized by centralized control and gatekeeping mechanisms (Maasø & Spilker, 2022). This is not to say there is no gatekeeping in the social media space, as with advances in technology and growth in its use, there exists some form of gatekeeping in that space as well (Pałka-Suchojad, 2021). This centralized control in mainstream media outlets, while providing opportunities for reaching mass audiences, also poses challenges in terms of censorship and agenda-setting. The intense gatekeeping and agenda control in these spaces can limit the diversity of voices and perspectives represented, affecting the effectiveness of advocacy efforts (Wong & Jiachen, 2021).

In the realm of television programming, there have been notable examples of shows aimed at women's empowerment, challenging gender norms, and promoting female leadership. Programs such as "The West Wing," "Madam Secretary," and "Scandal" depicted women in powerful political roles traditionally dominated by men, contributing to discussions about gender equality and representation in leadership (Naumann, 2025). However, the emergence of reality television as a potential media advocacy strategy is particularly relevant to this study. Chan and Jekinson (2015) define Reality Television as "a genre of television programming that documents

purportedly real-life situations, often starring unknown individuals rather than professional actors". Reality shows can have positive effects on confidence and mental health for both the viewers and the participants, but they can also harm self-esteem and present an inaccurate depiction of reality. Audience identification with television personalities may contribute to observational learning and influence how viewers interpret particular attitudes and behaviours (Nwafor et al., 2015). The abundance of reality shows today is evidence of their influence, although their degree of influence may differ among generations (Bhandari, 2013).

Reality television, however, encompasses different programme formats. Observational programmes such as *Keeping Up with the Kardashians* and *The Real Housewives* derive much of their appeal from following personalities, relationships and everyday lifestyles (Barton, 2016; Brochocka, 2024). Although these formats demonstrate the capacity of reality television to generate audience identification and shape popular culture, they differ structurally from competition-based reality television, where participants undertake tasks or challenges, are evaluated over time and may be progressively eliminated until a winner emerges. For the present study, competitive reality television provides a closer point of comparison with *The Ms President TV Show* because competition, performance, evaluation and progression were central to its format.

Competitive reality television uses performance, judgement, suspense and elimination as important entertainment mechanisms (Beck et al., 2012). Programmes such as *The Apprentice* and the *Big Brother* franchise illustrate how participants are placed within structured environments in which their behaviour and performance are continuously observed and evaluated (Nwafor et al., 2015; Tincknell & Raghuram, 2002). Couldry and Littler (2011), in their analysis of *The Apprentice*, show how the programme constructs competition around tasks, teamwork, individual ambition and performance. Research on reality-competition formats further suggests that part of their appeal lies in enabling audiences to observe participants demonstrating competence and expertise within competitive settings (Luckman & Tower, 2022). In *Big Brother*, audience interest has similarly been linked to the social and performative behaviour of ordinary people placed within an artificial competitive environment (Hill et al., 2019; Tincknell & Raghuram, 2002). These characteristics help explain how competition itself functions as

entertainment by creating uncertainty, emotional investment and continued interest in participants' progression.

The competitive format can also carry an educational or behaviour-oriented dimension. *The Biggest Loser*, for example, combines competition, personal transformation, challenges and elimination with recurring messages concerning exercise and health behaviour. Siegenthaler et al. (2023) examined the programme as a health-related entertainment-education setting in which audiences observed contestants attempting to change their exercise and health behaviours. Their longitudinal study found that exposure and parasocial relationships with contestants did not independently produce increases in self-efficacy or exercise behaviour. This is particularly relevant to the present study because it demonstrates both the educational potential and the limitations of competitive reality television: embedding developmental messages within entertainment does not automatically establish behavioural effects among viewers.

Within the African context, competitive reality television has similarly attracted substantial audiences. *Big Brother Africa*, an adaptation of the international *Big Brother* format, combined social interaction, competition, surveillance, audience participation and elimination. Its popularity across the continent demonstrated the capacity of competitive reality formats to generate sustained audience interest around ordinary participants placed within structured and highly visible social environments (Nwafor et al., 2015). The programme is relevant to the evolution of African reality television because it illustrates how competition, personality, public evaluation and audience participation can operate as central entertainment devices within the genre.

Within East Africa, and particularly in Kenya, competitive reality television was further popularised through programmes such as *Tusker Project Fame*. First aired in 2006, the music competition sought to discover and nurture musical talent across East Africa, bringing together contestants from Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda, and South Sudan. Over several seasons, Tusker Project Fame provided a platform for aspiring musicians to showcase their skills, receive professional training, and compete for a recording contract and cash prize (Angalia, 2017). The show not only entertained audiences with its high-energy performances and dramatic

eliminations but also contributed to the development of the East African music industry by launching the careers of numerous artists.

Beyond their entertainment value, some media formats have also been deliberately designed to combine audience engagement with educational and social-change objectives. Entertainment-education therefore provides an important conceptual bridge between popular media and communication for social change. Singhal (2004) describe entertainment-education as the deliberate integration of educational and social-change messages into entertainment formats in order to increase knowledge, influence attitudes and encourage socially desirable action. Rather than separating education from entertainment, the approach uses stories, characters and relatable situations to engage audiences with social issues in ways that conventional didactic communication may not achieve. Moyer-Gusé and Nabi (2010) further argues that entertainment narratives can facilitate persuasion through audience involvement, identification and connection with characters, thereby potentially reducing resistance to explicitly persuasive messages. More recent scholarship has, however, cautioned against viewing entertainment-education simply as a mechanism for transmitting messages. Navarro and Adriano (2024) argue that communication interventions aimed at women and gender equality should also consider participation, power relations and the social conditions within which audiences interpret media messages.

This approach has continued to be applied within African development communication. Le Port et al. (2022), for example, examined the television drama C'est la Vie! as part of a community edutainment intervention addressing gender-based violence, sexual and reproductive health and related social norms among women and young people in rural Senegal. Their findings demonstrate the importance not only of the media content itself but also of contextual adaptation, audience engagement and complementary discussion activities. Similarly, Pukallus and Brouwers, (2024), examining the Kenyan soap opera Team Kenya, argue that combining education and entertainment may create opportunities for social learning, but that transformative communication also depends on whether the programme resonates credibly with audiences and reinforces relevant social norms. More recently, Hutchinson et al. (2024) found that MTV Shuga Naija, an entertainment-education television drama in Nigeria, provided a platform for addressing gender equality and norms surrounding sexual violence among young audiences. Collectively, these studies demonstrate that entertainment formats can function as deliberate

development communication interventions when educational objectives, relatable narratives, audience engagement and social context are integrated into programme design.

Against this background, The Ms President TV Show can be understood as occupying the intersection between competitive reality television and entertainment-education. Structurally, it adopted conventions associated with competitive reality television: contestants undertook tasks, received expert evaluation, progressed through different stages and faced elimination before a final winner was selected. However, the substance of the competition extended beyond entertainment. Contestants received leadership training, addressed governance and policy issues, participated in debates and public-engagement activities, and competed through demonstrations of leadership capability (Thatiah, 2020). The programme therefore combined the entertainment mechanisms of reality competition performance, suspense, evaluation and elimination with explicit educational and advocacy objectives centred on women's leadership. This hybrid structure is particularly relevant to development communication because it illustrates how the audience-engagement features of popular entertainment can be deliberately combined with leadership education, gender advocacy and civic engagement.

Recent research also confirms that media representation remains consequential for women's political leadership. Rohrbach et al. (2022), in a meta-analysis of experimental studies on political candidate evaluations, found that gender-stereotypical coverage involving traits, appearance and family can disproportionately disadvantage women candidates. In the Kenyan context, Ireri and Ochieng (2024) show that the visibility of women legislators in national newspapers continues to be shaped by political and news-value factors within a male-dominated political environment. This suggests that the contemporary concern is not only whether women are visible in media, but also how their leadership is made visible and interpreted.

1.2.1 Ms. President Reality TV Show

The Miss President reality television show is a Kenyan-produced leadership and advocacy programme that first aired in 2019 (season one) and 2022 (season two) on national television (KTN) and digital platforms like YouTube. According to Thatiah (2020), the programme was conceptualized as an entertainment–education initiative aimed at promoting women's leadership, political participation, and civic engagement by placing women contestants

in simulated leadership and presidential roles (UN Women, 2021). The European Commission funded the program through UN Women, and Media Focus on Africa implemented it. It was primarily broadcast on free-to-air television on KTN Home, with supplementary content disseminated through social media platforms, thereby extending its reach beyond traditional television audiences. While the programme explicitly targeted women and youth as its intended audience, its national broadcast and online circulation suggest a broader and more heterogeneous viewership that includes male audiences, policymakers, and the general public.

The Ms President show was an empowering and competitive reality TV program that captured the hearts and minds of viewers across Kenya. With a primary focus on promoting women's leadership, the show aimed to challenge gender stereotypes and inspire a new generation of female leaders (Thatiah, 2020). Throughout the series, contestants, all of whom were women, competed in a series of tasks and challenges that showcased their intelligence, articulation, and leadership capacity. The contestants were then judged based on their performances by a team of specialised judges. Eliminations were done weekly until the final episodes, where the public would get a chance to vote on their preferred contestant. The show delivered powerful messages about the importance of women's participation in decision-making roles. Endorsed by esteemed leaders such as the former President of Kenya H.E. Uhuru Kenyatta the show garnered significant support and media coverage both nationally and internationally (MEDIA FOCUS ON AFRICA, 2019). The TV show Ms President not only captivated audiences with its compelling narrative of women vying for leadership roles but also brought to light several critical issues surrounding women's leadership in Kenya such as stereotyping, exclusion from the decision-making tables, and being shunned by the media (SDE, 2019; MFA, 2020). Throughout its journey, the show addressed these aspects that hinder women's progress in leadership positions and emphasized the importance of inclusivity, mentorship, and breaking down gender stereotypes (MFA, 2020; Thatiah, 2020). Through training, challenges, and field trips, the contestants grew and transformed, becoming strong leaders ready to make a difference in Kenya's future. The show's emphasis on critical topics, from governance and communication strategies to environmental conservation (summarised in Figure 1), ensured that the audience gained valuable insights into the complexities of leadership in a diverse and ever-changing world.

One of the show's significant impacts was challenging prevailing gender stereotypes about women's leadership (Bukenya, 2019; Thatiah, 2020). It shattered one-dimensional portrayals of women leaders by showcasing contestants with diverse leadership styles and qualities. The success of Ms President extended beyond the TV screen. It garnered recognition and endorsement from top government officials like the then President H.E. Uhuru Kenyatta thus providing support for women's leadership and equal opportunities in various sectors (Media Focus On Africa, 2019).

Figure 1 Summary of topics covered in the Ms President Reality TV Show



(Author, 2026)

The Ms President programme is particularly appropriate for this study because media advocacy was built into its format rather than added as a secondary message. It combined a nationally broadcast reality-television competition with leadership training, governance assignments, expert evaluation, public voting, digital circulation and community engagement. The programme therefore provided a bounded case through which the study could examine the advocacy process across message construction, visible leadership performance and audience interpretation within the Kenyan context.

1.3 Statement of the problem

The need for this study was highlighted by the persistent underrepresentation of women in leadership positions globally, including in Kenya (Kamau, 2010; Nzomo, 2014). Despite efforts to promote gender equality, societal norms and systemic barriers continue to hinder women's advancement in leadership roles. Traditional media and digital platforms have been utilized for advocacy; however, significant challenges such as gatekeeping, censorship, and limited diversity of voices impede their effectiveness (Maasø & Spilker, 2022). 'Ms. President', a reality TV show in Kenya, represented a significant departure from traditional media strategies by directly engaging viewers with the lived experiences of women vying for leadership positions, specifically the highest seat in the country. Unlike other reality shows that focus on entertainment or personal drama, Ms. President provided a platform for women to showcase their leadership skills and engage in public discourse on gender equality (Thatiah, 2020). Reality television, with its widespread appeal and capacity for storytelling, offers a promising yet underexplored avenue for media advocacy aimed at gender equality. TV entertainment shows like have depicted women in powerful roles, contributing to discussions about gender norms (Seluman et al., 2026). However, these are scripted shows and their impact on real-world perceptions and behaviours can be limited. The potential of reality TV, which involves real-life situations and characters, remains inadequately researched in the context of advocacy for women's leadership. Ideally, advocacy-oriented media should not merely increase the visibility of women; it should communicate women's leadership in ways that challenge restrictive gender norms and create space for informed public engagement. Yet recent Kenyan evidence shows that women legislators' media visibility continues to be shaped by the political and news environments in which they operate (Ireri & Ochieng, 2024). This raises a specific communication question about whether an intentionally designed entertainment programme can construct alternative representations of women's leadership and how those representations are interpreted.

Although Miss President was explicitly designed as an empowerment initiative according to the show's producers, the existence of advocacy-oriented content does not automatically translate into social or attitudinal change. Communication scholars caution against assuming linear effects between media exposure and empowerment outcomes, noting that audiences

actively interpret, negotiate, and sometimes resist media messages based on prior beliefs, social contexts, and cultural norms (Corner et al., 2004; Nkangi et al., 2024). Consequently, the critical issue is not whether Miss President promotes women's leadership, but how its advocacy messages are framed, how leadership is represented, and how audiences perceive and respond to these representations. The absence of systematic empirical research examining these processes within the Kenyan context constitutes a significant gap that this study seeks to address. For Development Communication, this gap is important because the existence of advocacy content cannot itself be treated as evidence of communication impact. Understanding how messages are constructed, experienced and interpreted within their social setting is necessary for designing media interventions that move beyond visibility towards meaningful social dialogue and norm change.

1.4 Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to examine how The Ms President TV Show functions as a media advocacy platform for women's leadership in Kenya, with attention to its communication strategies, representation of women leaders and audience interpretations. The study was grounded in development communication and is concerned primarily with communication processes rather than gender outcomes in isolation. Specifically, the study focused on how women's leadership is constructed through media narratives, how advocacy messages are communicated using reality television formats, and how audiences interpret these messages. Issues such as stereotypes and gender norms were examined not as standalone sociological phenomena, but as media-mediated representations and audience perceptions shaped through communication advocacy strategies.

1.5 Objectives of the Study

i. To examine the role of reality television in strategic media advocacy.
ii. To explore how mainstream media and platforms are used for advocacy and leadership efforts.
iii. To examine how reality television champions gender representation.

1.6 Research Questions

i. How does reality television serve as a tool to advance women leadership within the evolving landscape of contemporary media?
ii. What specific constraints and opportunities are inherent in utilizing mainstream media and media streaming platforms to advocate for gender equality and women's leadership?
iii. In what ways does Kenyan reality television challenge or reinforce gender norms in a programme aimed at promoting women's leadership?

1.7 Justification of the Study

Reality television, with its wide reach and ability to engage diverse audiences, presents a unique and underexplored opportunity for advocacy communication. Shows like Ms. President in Kenya demonstrate the potential of reality TV to go beyond entertainment and serve as a powerful medium for promoting women's empowerment and leadership. As explained by Chan and Jekinson (2015) and Nwafor et al. (2015) through providing real-life scenarios and relatable characters, reality TV can influence public perceptions and challenge entrenched gender norms more effectively than traditional scripted programming. This study was justified by the necessity to explore innovative and effective strategies for advocacy in the context of gender equality. Understanding how reality TV can be leveraged to promote women's leadership filled a critical gap in the literature on media and advocacy. It will also provide practical insights for media practitioners, advocacy organizations, and policymakers on harnessing the potential of reality TV to drive social change. Moreover, the findings of this study contribute to the academic discourse on media strategies for social change, particularly in the Global South, where Kenya falls. By examining the specific case of Ms. President TV Show, this research will offer valuable lessons on the intersection of media, culture, and gender in advocacy efforts.

1.8 Significance of the Study

This study offers value to media practitioners, advocacy organisations, scholars and policymakers. Media professionals, including producers, directors and content creators, can draw on the findings to understand how reality television may be designed around social issues while retaining audience engagement. Organisations working on gender equality and women's rights

can use the findings to identify communication strategies and platforms that strengthen advocacy. Scholars of media influence, gender and social change may also find the study's methodology and analysis useful for further research. In addition, policymakers can draw on the findings when considering how popular media can support public discussion and awareness around women's leadership and gender-related policy priorities.

1.9 Scope of the Study

The study was limited to Kenya and focused specifically on The Ms President TV Show. It drew evidence from former contestants, production personnel, eligible viewers and programme episodes. Contestants and producers provided perspectives on the design, implementation and experience of the programme, while viewers contributed interpretations of its themes, messages and portrayals of women's leadership. In addition, programme episodes were analysed to examine representation, framing and advocacy strategies. The audience component was intended to provide contextual insight into how exposed viewers interpreted the programme rather than to establish statistically generalisable effects on beliefs or behaviour. Conceptually, the study was limited to literature on media advocacy, development communication, women's leadership, gender representation, reality television, framing and observational learning. Methodologically, it was bounded as a qualitative descriptive case study of The Ms President TV Show and drew evidence from programme episodes, former contestants, production personnel and eligible viewers. The study did not seek to statistically generalise to all Kenyan television viewers or establish causal long-term changes in voting behaviour; rather, it sought an in-depth understanding of the programme's advocacy processes and audience interpretations within the Kenyan context.

1.10 Limitation and Delimitations of the Study

The achieved sample of contestants, production personnel and viewers was limited by practical access constraints, which reduced the range of perspectives available. To address this limitation, purposive sampling prioritised participants with direct experience of the programme, while the interviews provided detailed accounts that added depth to the smaller sample. Secondly, the findings have limited generalisability beyond the Kenyan context because political, social and cultural conditions may shape how audiences interpret women's leadership and reality

television. The study therefore contextualised its findings within Kenya rather than treating them as representative of other settings. Nevertheless, the insights generated may inform comparable media-advocacy initiatives that are subsequently examined within their own contexts. In addition, participants may have been influenced by social desirability, particularly when discussing gender and leadership. Anonymous questionnaires and carefully structured interview protocols were used to encourage candid responses. Triangulation across participant groups and programme content also helped to identify areas of convergence and difference rather than relying on a single source of evidence. The case study timeframe also limited the study's ability to examine long-term effects, including whether reported shifts in perception were sustained after the programme ended. Secondary sources, including media coverage and programme records, were therefore used only to provide contextual evidence of post-programme visibility; they were not treated as proof of long-term impact. Lastly, by focusing on Ms President, the study did not examine the wider range of media influences that may also shape public perceptions of women's leadership. This delimitation was intentional and allowed an in-depth examination of the programme's communication strategies, representations and audience interpretations as a bounded case.

1.11 Definition of Terms

Advocacy communication. Broadly defined, this refers to the strategic use of media, messaging, and storytelling to influence public opinion, mobilize resources, and advocate for social change (Coffman, 2002; Chib et al., 2013). This study considers advocacy communication as the use of targeted media strategies especially through reality TV like Ms. President to reshape societal attitudes toward women in leadership. The study will use this definition synonymously with Media Advocacy.

Mainstream Media. Harcup (2005), broadly defines mainstream media refers to the more commercially dominant media be it local, national or global forming part of a capitalized and incorporated media industry that serves mass audiences and represents established journalistic institutions and practices. This study considers mainstream media following this context and narrows it to the geographical context of the study by using national broadcast channels such as KTN, Citizen, NTV, and K24.

Media Representation. Media representation refers to the way media institutions construct, shape, and disseminate images, symbols, narratives, and meanings about social identities such as race and gender that influence how audiences understand themselves, others, and social reality (Brooks & Hébert, 2006).

Reality TV. Chan and Jekinson (2015), define Reality TV as "a genre of television programming that documents purportedly real-life situation often starring unknown individuals rather than professional actors". According to Reiss and Wiltz (2004), people watch reality TV because it satisfies their desire for status, allowing viewers to feel important or superior by comparing themselves to the ordinary participants featured on the shows. Reality TV also appeals to viewers who are motivated by competition and conflict, as many of these programs centre on rivalry, elimination, and interpersonal tension, which align with desires related to vengeance and social dynamics (Reiss & Wiltz, 2004; Olley et al., 2024). In this study, reality TV is examined as a media advocacy tool, specifically analysing Ms. President for its role in promoting women's leadership by providing a platform for Kenyan women to showcase their skills and capacities in governance.

Stakeholders. In this research, stakeholders will include participants (contestants), show organizers, production crew, and the viewing public, which consists of a broad audience from various demographic backgrounds who regularly watch and engage with reality TV shows that advocate for women in leadership.

Women empowerment. This is the process by which women gain power, control over their lives, and equal opportunities in political, economic, and social spheres (Sultana, 2012; Cornwall & Rivas, 2015). This study focuses on empowerment through representation, where visibility in leadership roles, particularly on reality TV, aims to dismantle gender stereotypes and inspire women's engagement in governance and decision-making.

1.12 Summary

Chapter one introduces the study, highlights the background to the study and the statement of the problem. Further, the chapter covers the purpose of the study, objectives, and the

research questions. The justification of the study, its significance, and the scope are also covered in the chapter. Lastly, the chapter covers the limitations and delimitations of the study.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

Chapter Two examines the role of reality television in promoting women's empowerment, with a specific focus on its impact on public perceptions, the portrayal of female role models, and the potential for shifting gender norms in leadership. It begins with a comprehensive literature review that outlines the key communication strategies used in advocacy for women's empowerment. Theoretical foundations, including Framing Theory and Social Cognitive Theory, are discussed to contextualize the mechanisms through which reality TV influences societal norms.

2.2 Women Empowerment and Leadership

The empowerment of women in leadership roles has emerged as a critical focus in global development discourse, with a significant push from international organizations, policymakers, and grassroots advocates (Sharma & Mehta, 2021). The rising recognition of women's contributions to governance, economic growth, and community well-being has prompted societies to prioritize gender equity, moving beyond traditional confines that once limited women's roles in leadership (Eyben & Napier-Moore, 2009). According to Sharma and Mehta (2021), empowering women to lead and participate in decision-making processes is increasingly viewed not only as a matter of social justice but also as an essential step toward fostering inclusive and sustainable development outcomes. Women's perspectives and experiences, when integrated into leadership, have shown to positively impact policy priorities, organizational efficiency, and community resilience, affirming the value of inclusivity (Singh, 2018; Bukenya, 2019; Muzamil, 2021; Sharma & Mehta, 2021).

Historically, patriarchal systems and deeply rooted societal norms have created substantial barriers to women's advancement in leadership positions (Sultana, 2012). Many cultures and institutions have historically viewed leadership as inherently male, attributing qualities like assertiveness, resilience, and authority to men, while relegating women to

secondary roles. Sultana (2012) highlights that patriarchal structures have played a central role in subordinating women, enforcing gendered norms that limit their opportunities in various spheres of life, including leadership. This systemic marginalization has stunted women's potential across social, political, and economic domains, reinforcing cycles of inequality that are difficult to dismantle without intentional and sustained intervention (Sharma & Mehta, 2021). The need for transformative agendas that prioritize women's leadership is highlighted by Cornwall and Rivas (2015), who argue that empowering women in leadership is essential to challenge established power hierarchies and combat the ingrained gender-based discrimination that restricts their agency. Empowerment, in this context, goes beyond providing women with resources or skills; it encompasses dismantling the structural inequalities that restrict women's rights and freedom to lead. As Cornwall and Rivas (2015) observe, the empowerment of women in leadership represents a pathway to broader societal transformation, benefiting entire communities by fostering policies and practices that are inclusive, equitable, and forward-looking. The pursuit of gender equality in leadership also addresses crucial socio-economic dimensions. According to a study conducted by UNESCO (2019), when women hold leadership roles in governments, corporations, and community organizations, they advocate for policies that promote education, healthcare, family welfare, and environmental sustainability; issues that often resonate with their lived experiences and have long-term benefits for society. Sharma and Mehta (2021) point out that gender diversity in leadership has been linked to improved organizational performance and heightened innovation, highlighting that inclusive leadership is both ethically and strategically beneficial. Global efforts to empower women in leadership are now focusing on both policy reform and community-based initiatives (Arnfred, 2004). Policy interventions, such as gender quotas in parliaments and executive roles, have contributed to a gradual increase in women's representation in decision-making spaces (Barnes & Holman, 2020). Barnes and Holman further note that achieving gender parity requires more than legislative support; it necessitates shifting cultural attitudes that undervalue women's capabilities and redefining leadership in ways that are inclusive of diverse leadership styles.

2.3 Advocacy Communication in the Context of Women Empowerment

Advocacy Communication has become an increasingly prominent tool for advancing social change and addressing inequalities, particularly in the realm of women's empowerment and leadership (John & Bassey, 2020). Broadly defined, advocacy communication is the strategic use of messaging, storytelling, and media engagement to shape public opinion, influence policies, and mobilize resources in support of a cause. This definition combines ideas from the works of Coffman (2002) and Fraser and Estrada (2006) on the role of strategic communication and media engagement in advocacy efforts, as well as concepts from Melkote and Steeves (2015) regarding storytelling and mobilization in social justice and development contexts. When applied to gender equity in leadership, advocacy communication serves as a powerful mechanism to challenge entrenched stereotypes, highlight the achievements of women leaders, and inspire wider societal support for gender inclusivity (Odera et al., 2024). The role of advocacy communication in shifting societal norms and catalysing change is significant. Coffman (2002) noted that public communication campaigns, whether through media, community outreach, or online platforms, can be instrumental in shaping social perceptions. They not only influence what people think but can also spark behavioural changes, ultimately leading to policy reform and broader social acceptance of women in leadership roles. Through carefully crafted messages, advocacy communication aims to reach and resonate with diverse audiences, creating a collective sense of urgency around the need for gender equity (Wilkins & Kim, 2021). Public awareness campaigns thus become a vehicle for sparking conversations that challenge long-standing gender biases and contribute to creating environments where women's leadership is not only accepted but valued.

In the context of women's empowerment, advocacy communication often combines grassroots engagement, media campaigns, and public relations to maximize its reach and impact. Grassroots movements, for example, mobilize communities from the ground up, fostering local engagement and collective action, which can be particularly effective in addressing cultural norms that resist change (Mofizur, 2012; Burnside-Lawry et al., 2017). By amplifying women's voices through accessible and relatable narratives, these campaigns can inspire other women to pursue leadership roles and encourage communities to support them in their journey (Lazuka-Nicoulaud et al., 2022). In addition to traditional media outlets, advocacy campaigns leverage

online platforms to expand their reach and engage broader, often global audiences. Chib, Wilkin, and Lang (2013) argue that in the digital age, communication strategies are essential for raising awareness and fostering dialogue, particularly among marginalized groups, including women aspiring for leadership positions. The advent of social media and digital communication has transformed the landscape of advocacy, enabling campaigns to reach audiences far beyond the limitations of traditional media (Wilkins & Kim, 2021). Platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram allow advocates to connect with audiences across geographical boundaries, creating virtual communities of support and sharing information with unprecedented speed and ease (Gupta & Bansal, 2024). This shift to digital communication has empowered women to participate in advocacy efforts without the constraints of time and location, thus broadening the scope of women's voices and increasing the visibility of gender equality issues (Chib, Wilking & Lang, 2013).

Recent scholarship in communication for social change also emphasises the need to assess not only the reach of communication interventions but the social, political and gendered conditions within which voice and participation occur. Noske-Turner (2023) calls for critical attention to the values and institutional logics that shape contemporary communication-for-social-change practice, while Wilkins et al. (2019) argues for a feminist lens that centres power, voice, dialogue and contextual inequalities in the design and evaluation of communication interventions. These perspectives are relevant to the present study because The Ms President operated within wider cultural and political structures that could enable or constrain the meanings audiences attached to women's leadership.

2.4 Communication Strategies Tailored to Empowering Women in Leadership

Advocating for women's leadership requires communication strategies that are comprehensive and attuned to the unique challenges women face on the path to leadership. These strategies typically integrate capacity-building, strategic messaging, and media training, aiming to provide women with the skills, tools, and confidence to pursue and excel in leadership roles (Mahoney & Tang, 2020; Košir, 2024; Omowale et al., 2024). Such tailored approaches are essential in breaking down the social, cultural, and structural barriers that often hinder women from accessing leadership opportunities. One of the most impactful methods for empowering

women is through capacity-building initiatives, which include workshops, mentorship programs, and leadership training (Wakahiu & Keller, 2017; Ngalesoni et al., 2024). These programs are designed to enhance women's confidence and skill sets, providing essential tools like public speaking, negotiation, and decision-making skills critical for leadership in various sectors, from politics to community organizations. Mentorship programs are especially valuable as they connect emerging female leaders with experienced mentors, offering not only skill development but also exposure to role models who have successfully navigated similar challenges (Ngalesoni et al., 2024). Community-based media represents another powerful communication strategy for empowering women, especially in regions where access to mainstream media is limited. As Fraser and Estrada (2006) highlight, media formats like community radio can effectively reach marginalized women, particularly in rural areas where traditional gender roles may be more pronounced and digital access limited. Community radio, for example, provides a platform for discussing topics such as gender equality, women's rights, and leadership, making it accessible to women who might not have access to other media forms (Fraser & Estrada, 2006). By broadcasting in local languages and focusing on issues relevant to the community, these programs resonate deeply with their audience and can inspire women to become more involved in local governance, community decision-making, or even political leadership. Community-based media thus serves as both a tool for education and a source of inspiration, helping to normalize women's participation in public life and challenging traditional norms that discourage women from seeking leadership roles.

Strategic messaging is a critical element in advocacy communication as it shapes public understanding and builds support around issues (Gjylbegaj, 2024). Developing clear, consistent, and impactful messages is fundamental to mobilizing public opinion and creating awareness Cullerton et al. (2018). Strategic messaging aims to use language and storytelling techniques that resonate deeply with target audiences (Schiavo, 2014; Dallo et al., 2022; Gjylbegaj, 2024). This would help in framing women's leadership as a valuable and natural component of societal progress. Messaging campaigns that highlight the broader societal benefits of gender-diverse leadership often portray women's empowerment as not only a matter of fairness but also as beneficial for economic and social development (Sharma & Mehta, 2021). For instance, such campaigns frequently underline positive outcomes of women's leadership, including enhanced community well-being, economic growth, and social stability, thereby encouraging support for

gender equality initiatives among both men and women. Media training for women is another effective strategy that equips female leaders with the skills needed to navigate public scrutiny, media bias, and the challenges of being in the spotlight. Research highlights that media training programs not only help women develop confidence in engaging with the press but also enable them to handle interviews and effectively craft their narratives (Košir, 2024; Omowale et al., 2024). In societies where media coverage of women's leadership often reflects biases or is limited, this form of training becomes invaluable. Programs like the Ms. President show focused on equipping women with skills to articulate their visions, respond to criticism, and leverage media platforms to amplify their voices, empowering them to shape their public image assertively (Bukenya, 2019; Thatiah, 2020). Furthermore, such training helps women present themselves assertively and professionally, counteracting stereotypes that tend to depict women as less competent or authoritative than their male counterparts (Košir, 2024). Lastly, leveraging digital and social media platforms is essential for reaching younger audiences and building a movement for women's leadership. As was highlighted by Gupta and Bansal (2024), social media campaigns allow women to engage directly with the public, share their experiences, and advocate for gender equality in leadership roles. Hashtag movements like #MeToo and #MyDressMyChoice exemplify how social media can mobilize global support, create awareness, and encourage public conversations about gender equality and women's leadership (Regev, 2014; Omoera & Ryanga, 2016; Mwaura, 2018; Mbogo, 2021). For women in regions where traditional media may be less accessible or inclusive, social media offers an alternative platform to amplify their voices, connect with a broader audience, build solidarity, and foster a supportive network of allies (Ofei et al., 2024). In this way, social media becomes a dynamic tool for advocacy, community building, and empowerment.

2.4.1 The Role of Media in Women's Empowerment

The role of the media is to inform, entertain, and educate society on what is going on around the world (Sen, 2011). The media has long held a dual role in the realm of women's empowerment, acting as both an enabler and a potential obstacle to advancing gender equality (Košir, 2024). According to Gulzar (2023), media in all forms such as print, broadcast, and digital media are powerful forces in shaping public perception and can either reinforce traditional gender roles or challenge them by depicting women in leadership. Košir (2024) noted that

through highlighting the achievements, voices, and struggles of women leaders, media narratives have the potential to disrupt deeply ingrained stereotypes that position leadership as a predominantly male domain. Through strategic and inclusive portrayal, the media can be a vehicle for social change, promoting a culture that values diversity in leadership and encourages women to take on influential roles. The representation of women in media has evolved significantly over the past decades, shifting from stereotypical portrayals to more diverse and empowering images. In the early 20th century, media often depicted women in traditional, domestic roles, reinforcing narrow gender norms that aligned with societal expectations (Ross & Carter, 2011). The feminist movements of the 1960s and 1970s sparked changes, encouraging the media to start showcasing women in more active, independent roles (Tuchman, 1979). As the decades progressed, studies highlighted the gradual inclusion of women in leadership roles and as professionals in various media formats, although these portrayals were often limited to specific industries and roles (Gill, 2007). Today, while there are more representations of women in positions of power and influence, issues of media bias and unequal representation persist, with portrayals sometimes continuing to reinforce stereotypes (Annenberg et al., 2018). They mention that 'Females are more likely to be sexualized, young, or shown as parents or caregivers. These findings suggest a problematic binary for female actors, frequently being cast as either the object of interest or a motherly figure' (Annenberg et al., 2018).

Media has a profound impact on public consciousness, and when it portrays women in leadership roles, it actively counters traditional gender biases. Media narratives play a crucial role in fostering gender equality by increasing visibility for women in leadership and normalizing their roles across sectors (Kassova, 2020). By showcasing stories of women's achievements and featuring them as leaders, media challenges social norms that have historically relegated women to supportive roles. The impact of such portrayals is significant, as they not only inspire young women by providing visible role models but also encourage society to view women's leadership as both natural and beneficial for societal progress (Chanda & Ngulube, 2024; Košir, 2024). In Kenya, media has played a dual role in the journey toward gender equality, at times promoting women's empowerment and at other times reinforcing harmful stereotypes. Certain media campaigns have helped challenge biases, bringing attention to women's contributions in politics, business, and social activism. These campaigns help reshape public perceptions, making gender inclusivity more widely accepted (Kamau, 2010). However,

Kamau notes that Kenyan media, much like media in other regions, often falls into stereotypical portrayals, focusing disproportionately on female leaders' personal lives or appearances rather than their professional capabilities. This portrayal can hinder women's aspirations by reinforcing stereotypes that discourage potential female leaders who may fear scrutiny or judgment (Kamau, 2010; Nzomo, 2014).

2.4.2 Social Media and Digital Advocacy for Women in Leadership

The rapid rise of social media has redefined advocacy, providing a powerful platform for individuals and organizations to mobilize large audiences, engage directly with diverse publics, and foster global solidarity (Karki, 2024). Unlike traditional forms of media, which are often limited by gatekeeping and geographical constraints, social media enables real-time communication, instant access to vast networks, and an unfiltered space for underrepresented voices (Kuang, 2018). Kuang notes that there is less control over social media censorship as compared to media censorship as control over news media is considered to be tighter due to the stronger and wider influence of press information compared to the internet posts. As previously discussed, hashtag campaigns such as #MeToo exemplify how social media has become a critical tool for digital advocacy, leveraging the immediacy and reach of platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram to shed light on issues of gender inequality and sexual harassment (Karki, 2024). These campaigns highlight the power of digital advocacy to raise awareness on a global scale, mobilizing people across cultures and societies in a shared commitment to gender equity. Jackson, Bailey and Welles (2020) analyse how social media has enabled movements that not only raise awareness but also demand accountability from powerful figures and institutions, challenging traditional power structures that have long marginalized women. By providing a space where women can collectively voice their experiences and find solidarity, these campaigns foster a sense of community and support that traditional media often fails to provide. In Kenya, social media platforms have also emerged as instrumental tools for women-led campaigns, offering a direct and accessible avenue for women to share their stories, advocate for leadership roles, and rally public support for gender equality. The hashtag #MyDressMyChoice in Kenya, advocated for women's rights and protested against gender-based violence, with a specific focus on street harassment and attacks on women for their choice of clothing (Regev, 2014; Mwololo, 2020). The hashtag #MyDressMyChoice brought women together towards a common goal. It is

also through the use of social media, women leaders and advocates are able to establish networks that foster mentorship, resource sharing, and moral support; elements that are vital for overcoming the challenges posed by gender biases in leadership (Ofei et al., 2024). But even though social media is becoming more popular as a tool for advocacy, its decentralized structure also has drawbacks, such as algorithmic biases, echo chambers, and disinformation as noted by Gupta and Bansal (2024).

2.4.3 Television and Reality TV as Communication Strategies for Women Empowerment

Television has long been a significant medium for shaping public perception, influencing societal norms, and providing a platform for diverse voices (Etayo et al., 2023). In recent years, reality TV has emerged as a particularly impactful genre that not only entertains but also serves as a tool for advocacy and empowerment (Das et al., 2021). By portraying the lives, struggles, and triumphs of women in various contexts, television and reality TV can challenge stereotypes and promote discussions around gender equality (Lauzen et al., 2008). In the field of reality television, gender representation and language use reveal both enduring stereotypes and evolving portrayals of empowerment. Much like in soap operas, women on reality TV are frequently depicted through narrow stereotypes, often framed as reliant on or subservient to men (Alam & Haque, 2021). However, reality TV also presents men and women as autonomous players, albeit with lingering societal stigmas attached to female behaviour that men's actions do not face to the same extent. Alam and Haque (2021) emphasize that language plays a critical role in reinforcing these biases, as it transmits cultural norms and ideologies tied to gender. For instance, gendered language can subtly perpetuate stereotypes and shape viewers' perceptions, as Dutta (2020), highlights making viewers more likely to interpret behaviours through a gendered lens that aligns with traditional power dynamics.

Furthermore, reality TV has a dual approach to female empowerment, mixing sexual empowerment narratives with traditional feminine virtues (Cato & Carpentier, 2010). For instance, shows like The Girls Next Door reinforce ideas of "sex-as-power," appealing to audiences who see empowerment through a lens of sexual freedom, yet they do not always engage with broader forms of autonomous empowerment as noted by (Cato & Carpentier 2010). One of the core strengths of television as a communication strategy for women's empowerment lies in its ability to reach a broad audience and present narratives that resonate with viewers

(Etayo et al., 2023). By showcasing the stories of women from diverse backgrounds, television can highlight the unique challenges they face and the resilience they exhibit in overcoming these obstacles. Programs that feature women leaders, entrepreneurs, and change-makers can serve as role models for viewers, demonstrating that leadership is attainable regardless of gender. For example, shows like Ms. President in Kenya depict women in positions of power, normalizing their roles in governance and public life (Thatiah, 2020).

On a different angle, reality TV shows have a complex influence on viewers' moral development, offering both opportunities for positive modelling and potential risks of promoting morally ambiguous behaviours. Chan and Jekinson (2017) argue that reality TV can shape moral perspectives by presenting viewers with real-life scenarios that engage audiences emotionally and cognitively, often prompting them to reflect on ethical dilemmas and personal values. They suggest that reality shows featuring relatable challenges, teamwork, and personal growth narratives can foster empathy, resilience, and moral reasoning, especially among young audiences. However, Chan and Jekinson (2017) also caution that some reality shows may depict sensationalized conflicts, superficial fame, or problematic social behaviours, which could inadvertently reinforce negative values such as aggression or self-centeredness. However, it is essential to recognize that the portrayal of women in television and reality TV is not without its challenges. While many programs strive to empower women, others can perpetuate stereotypes or reinforce negative narratives. As pointed out by Bhandari (2013), reality shows are not always completely real, as they may include fictional elements. Watching these shows may cause people to have a distorted perception of reality, which could lead to actions or beliefs that are not ideal. This is further explained by Nwaozuzu (2012) who mention that reality TV has a lure on young people to glamourize deviant fads such as divorce, indecent exposure, sexually suggestive activities all in the name of trying to play reality.

2.4.4 Barriers to Effective Advocacy for Women's Leadership

While advocacy communication has made significant strides in advancing women's leadership, various barriers continue to hinder its effectiveness. These challenges range from cultural biases and gender stereotypes to limited access to resources and media biases (Sharma & Mehta, 2021). Together, they create structural and societal obstacles that restrict women's access to leadership roles and dilute the impact of advocacy campaigns aimed at fostering gender

equality. One of the primary obstacles to effective advocacy communication for women's leadership is cultural bias (Sultana, 2012). In many societies, deeply entrenched norms view leadership as inherently masculine, leading to the perception that women are less suited for roles involving authority and decision-making. These cultural attitudes manifest in various ways, from the expectations placed on women to prioritize family roles over professional ambitions to the pressure to conform to submissive stereotypes. Gill and Orgad (2018) argue that these structural obstacles limit the effectiveness of advocacy campaigns, as societal expectations often reinforce traditional gender roles rather than challenge them. Gender stereotypes also play a significant role in undermining advocacy communication efforts. The portrayal of women in media and popular culture frequently reinforces traditional gender roles, depicting women as caregivers and homemakers rather than as leaders and change-makers, as depicted in Figure 2. Additionally, cultural norms and societal expectations often dictate traditional roles for women, hindering their access to leadership opportunities (Kiplimo & Amunga, 2021). According to Kiplimo and Amunga (2021), women from different backgrounds may face unique challenges and opportunities based on factors such as ethnicity, race, socio-economic status, and age.

Figure 2 Image depicting gender stereotyping by Kamau (2010)



Such stereotypes are not only limiting but also discourage young women from aspiring to leadership roles, as they are rarely exposed to positive representations of female leaders in media. When advocacy campaigns attempt to challenge these stereotypes, they often encounter resistance, as audiences may be reluctant to accept images of women that deviate from

conventional portrayals. Gill and Orgad (2018) emphasize that restrictive media portrayals and gender stereotypes reinforce structural inequalities, making it difficult for advocacy campaigns to reshape public opinion on women's leadership effectively. Media bias presents another major barrier to effective advocacy communication. Traditional media outlets often perpetuate stereotypes by focusing disproportionately on male leaders and minimizing women's achievements (Košir, 2024). When women are covered, they are frequently subject to scrutiny regarding their appearance, personal lives, or perceived "feminine" qualities, rather than their professional qualifications and contributions (Annenberg et al., 2018). In Kenya, this media bias is evident in the portrayal of female politicians and leaders, who are often trivialized or subjected to harsh criticism that their male counterparts do not face (Kamau, 2010). This biased representation not only diminishes the achievements of women leaders but also discourages potential female leaders who fear similar treatment. Kamau, (2010) suggests that media portrayal has a powerful impact on young women's aspirations, as negative or biased portrayals can deter them from pursuing leadership roles, believing they will not be respected or valued.

2.5 Empirical Literature Review

2.5.1 Media Influence on Gender Norms and Leadership Perceptions

Empirical studies demonstrate that media significantly impacts societal perceptions of gender roles and leadership potential, often reinforcing stereotypes or, in some cases, challenging them. Research by Wood (2001) highlights that traditional media, including television, frequently portrays men in leadership roles while relegating women to supportive or domestic positions. These portrayals reinforce societal stereotypes, which in turn influence public perceptions about gender suitability for leadership (Wood, 2001). This skewed portrayal influences audiences to view leadership as predominantly a male domain, reducing perceptions of women's suitability for these roles. Santoniccolo et al. (2023) delve into these dynamics, discussing how media not only objectifies and sexualizes women but also reinforces limited, stereotypical roles for them. This objectification contributes to a perception of women as less authoritative or capable in leadership contexts, hindering progress in gender equality. Their review identifies a pattern in which women's roles are often framed around domesticity or appearance rather than professional achievement, which affects public opinion on their capacity for leadership roles and reinforces a cycle of underrepresentation (Santoniccolo et al., 2023).

Furthermore, the portrayal of women in media as less capable or as figures of beauty rather than authority has tangible effects on leadership perceptions. For instance, Wood (2001) finds that media images create expectations that men are better suited for public and decision-making roles, while women should focus on personal and familial spaces. These portrayals contribute to a public mindset that undervalues women's potential as leaders. According to social cognitive theory, this consistent exposure to gendered portrayals can result in audiences internalizing these biased views, further embedding stereotypes in society (Bandura, 2001).

However, research on reality TV presents an alternative potential, as it occasionally disrupts traditional gender norms. While typical media often reinforces stereotypes, shows that feature women in strong, leadership-oriented roles have been found to positively influence viewers' perceptions (Hoewe & Sherrill, 2019). For instance, Hoewe and Sherrill (2019) note that regular viewers of the TV Shows Scandal, The Good Wife, and Madam Secretary reported feeling transported by the stories and parasocial connections with the main characters (i.e., women in political leadership), according to a survey. Yet, as Santoniccolo et al. (2023) argue, even in progressive portrayals, reality TV still sometimes frames women within restrictive, relational stereotypes, which can dilute the empowerment message.

2.5.2 Representation of Women in TV and Reality Television and Its Impact on Viewership

Empirical evidence shows that representation of women in reality television can influence viewers' self-perceptions, aspirations, and confidence. Studies indicate that seeing women in leadership roles on reality TV has a measurable impact on female viewers' self-efficacy and career aspirations. For instance, Simon and Hoyt (2013) found that young women who watched reality shows featuring female leaders reported increased aspirations toward leadership roles. These studies suggest that women in visible, competent roles on reality television can positively impact female viewers' confidence, reinforcing the role of media as a tool for empowerment. This impact, however, varies with the authenticity and relatability of the characters. For example, Lucas and Lazarus (2024) noted that when people in reality TV represented diverse backgrounds and competencies, audiences reported a stronger connection, which in turn influenced their confidence and ambitions in real-world settings. As noted by Simon and Hoyt (2013) portrayal of persons in various non-traditional roles disrupts gender

norms and broadens viewers' perceptions of what women can achieve in leadership. If media images displaying counter stereotypical roles can put into effect less stereotypical gender role beliefs (i.e., beliefs that make the female gender role more congruent with the leadership role), they should also be able to buffer women from negative stereotypes about women in leadership situations Simon and Hoyt (2013). Recent empirical evidence further demonstrates that television can contribute to women's empowerment when women-centred content is combined with relatable examples and learning opportunities. Ahmmad et al., (2026), analysing 66 episodes of leading television morning shows and surveying 260 women viewers in Lahore, found that women perceived televised success stories and empowerment-related content as influencing learning about mobility, social networks, financial matters, careers and household decision-making. Although the context and format differ from reality television, the study provides contemporary evidence that television-based representation and learning remain relevant to women's empowerment.

Audience perception studies reveal that viewers' reception of empowerment messages in reality TV is influenced by factors like relatability and perceived authenticity (Hall, 2009). Hall conducted a study that looked into the relationship between viewer perceptions of reality show authenticity and perceived learning, enjoyment, and involvement. The findings were that cast eccentricity, representativeness, candidness, and producer manipulation were the four dimensions of perceived authenticity (Hall, 2009). Taken together, the empirical literature converges on three points: media visibility influences who is recognised as a legitimate public actor; gendered frames can constrain women even where their visibility increases; and entertainment formats can support social learning when advocacy messages are embedded in credible and relatable narratives. However, the literature differs in method and emphasis. Research on women politicians remains dominated by news-content and electoral studies, while entertainment-education research has concentrated largely on health, peacebuilding and scripted drama. This pattern points to a substantive and methodological gap regarding how an unscripted reality-television intervention intentionally constructs women's leadership and how that construction is understood by producers, participants and viewers in Kenya, a gap that is examined more specifically in Section 2.6.

2.6 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study was based on the Framing Theory and the Social Cognitive Theory.

2.6.1 Social Cognitive Theory

Social Cognitive Theory, developed by Bandura (1989) emphasizes the role of observational learning, imitation, and modelling in shaping behaviours and attitudes. A central assumption of this theory is observational learning, where individuals acquire new behaviours and knowledge by observing others, especially role models (Pajares et al., 2009; Melkote & Singhal, 2021). This process involves attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation. The theory also emphasizes the importance of self-efficacy, or one's belief in their ability to succeed in specific situations, as a critical factor in determining behaviour (Pajares et al., 2009). Additionally, the theory highlights reciprocal determinism, the concept that personal factors, environmental influences, and behaviour continuously interact and influence each other. These foundational assumptions bring to light the theory's applicability to various domains, including education, health promotion, and media studies, where the portrayal of behaviours and outcomes in media can significantly shape audience attitudes and actions.

Despite its widespread application and contributions to understanding behaviour, Social Cognitive Theory has faced several criticisms. One major critique is its perceived overemphasis on the individual's cognitive processes and underestimation of biological and unconscious influences on behaviour. Critics argue that the theory may not fully account for innate biological factors and unconscious motivations that also play significant roles in shaping behaviour (Jahoda, 1988; Miller & Dollard, 1941). Furthermore, while the theory recognizes the impact of environmental and social factors, some critics believe it does not sufficiently address broader structural and systemic issues, such as socioeconomic status and cultural norms, that constrain individual agency (Maddux, 1995; Critcher & Gilovich, 2008). Additionally, the theory's reliance on the concept of self-efficacy has been questioned for potentially oversimplifying complex human motivations and overlooking other critical determinants of behaviour, such as emotional and affective factors (Zimmerman, 2000). Despite these criticisms, Social Cognitive Theory

remains a valuable framework for exploring the complex interactions between individuals and their environments in various contexts (Bandura, 2001).

In the context of this study, Social Cognitive Theory was particularly relevant because it explains how reality television functions as a social environment in which audiences observe, evaluate, and potentially model behaviours (Stefanone et al., 2010). Bandura (2001) argues that individuals are more likely to adopt behaviours that are demonstrated by role models perceived as similar, credible, and successful. Ms. President creates such an environment by showcasing women from diverse backgrounds engaging in leadership tasks, decision-making processes, and public debate. These mediated experiences provide viewers with symbolic role models who challenge traditional gender norms and demonstrate that leadership is attainable for women. Through repeated exposure, audiences, especially female viewers, may develop enhanced self-efficacy and aspirations toward leadership, making Social Cognitive Theory well suited for examining how advocacy-oriented reality television influences attitudes and behavioural intentions related to women's empowerment (Stefanone et al., 2010, 2019).

From a development communication perspective, Social Cognitive Theory was valuable because it moves beyond awareness-raising to explain how communication interventions can foster attitudinal and behavioural change. Development communication often seeks to transform deeply embedded social norms, and Bandura's emphasis on reciprocal determinism highlights how media representations interact with existing cultural beliefs and individual agency. In this study, Ms. President does not operate in isolation; rather, its influence emerges through interaction with viewers' prior experiences, social contexts, and exposure to dominant gender narratives. This made Social Cognitive Theory particularly appropriate for analysing how entertainment-based advocacy initiatives contribute to social change by reinforcing new norms through modelling and reinforcement.

2.6.2 Framing Theory

Complementing Social Cognitive Theory, Framing Theory draws on Goffman's (1974) sociological work on frames as interpretive structures. In communication research, Entman (1993) provided one of the most influential formulations of media framing. Entman conceptualised framing as a process through which certain aspects of perceived reality are

selected and made more salient in a communication text, thereby promoting particular problem definitions, causal interpretations, moral evaluations and/or treatment recommendations. This formulation is particularly relevant to media advocacy because it draws attention to both selection and salience: media communication can emphasise particular aspects of an issue while making others less prominent (Entman, 1993). Subsequent framing scholarship has expanded and debated this formulation, particularly in relation to frame construction, audience interpretation and operationalisation (D'Angelo, 2019; Persson, 2018).

Framing Theory operates on several assumptions. First, it assumes that frames do not merely exist in isolated messages; they are embedded in broader societal discourses and cultural symbols, meaning frames are influenced by existing social narratives and ideologies (Persson, 2018). Second, it assumes that the audience actively interprets frames but often in predictable ways due to cognitive biases and social conditioning, making them susceptible to specific patterns of thought (Brantner et al., 2012). Finally, Framing Theory assumes a reciprocal influence between media and society, where media shapes and reflects cultural norms through frame selection (Brantner et al., 2012).

Despite its utility, Framing Theory faces criticism, particularly regarding its empirical testing and operationalization. One critique is its lack of specificity in defining frames, which has led to inconsistent applications and challenges in identifying frames with precision (Brantner et al., 2012). Critics argue that frames are often too broadly defined, making it difficult to measure them effectively and uniformly across studies. Another significant critique pertains to the overemphasis on cognitive interpretation at the expense of emotional and affective responses, which also play crucial roles in shaping public opinion (D'Angelo, 2019).

Framing Theory was central to this study because it explains how Ms. President structures meanings around women's leadership and empowerment. Through narrative construction, visual emphasis, and thematic focus, the programme frames leadership as a skill that can be learned, refined, and exercised by women (Moorosi, 2020). By highlighting competence, resilience, and strategic thinking among female contestants, the show actively challenges dominant frames that associate leadership with masculinity. Entman's (1993) framing logic helps explain how such portrayals shape audience interpretation by privileging certain

attributes of leadership while downplaying stereotypical representations of women as passive or subordinate. This made Framing Theory particularly useful for analysing how advocacy messages are embedded within entertainment content. In advocacy communication, framing is a strategic tool used to shape public discourse and influence social norms. Framing Theory allowed this study to interrogate how reality television not only reflects but also reconstructs societal narratives about gender and power. The frames employed in Ms. President are embedded within broader cultural discourses about leadership, governance, and gender equality in Kenya. While audiences are active interpreters of media content, research suggests that consistent framing can gradually normalise alternative viewpoints and influence public attitudes (Brantner et al., 2012). By applying Framing Theory, this study examines how entertainment media can reorient audience perceptions and contribute to normative shifts in the acceptance of women in leadership roles.

The two theories were applied to different but complementary parts of the communication process. Framing Theory served as the principal lens for examining how The Ms President constructed women's leadership through selection, emphasis, repetition, language, tasks and narrative organisation. It was applied through a gender-sensitive perspective that considered women's agency and competence, gender stereotypes, structural and patriarchal barriers, and representations of power and decision-making. Social Cognitive Theory complemented this analysis by informing interpretation of role modelling, observational learning, self-efficacy and viewers' reported responses to women performing leadership. In this sense, Framing Theory primarily addressed message construction, while Social Cognitive Theory addressed the learning and interpretive processes associated with exposure to those representations. In applying Framing Theory, the study did not treat 'gendered media framing' as a separate theory; rather, gender was used as an analytical lens within framing to examine which aspects of women's leadership, barriers, competence and political agency were made salient. These theoretical lenses informed the episode analysis matrix, interview questions on representation and role modelling, audience questions on perception, and the interpretation of findings in Chapters Four and Five.

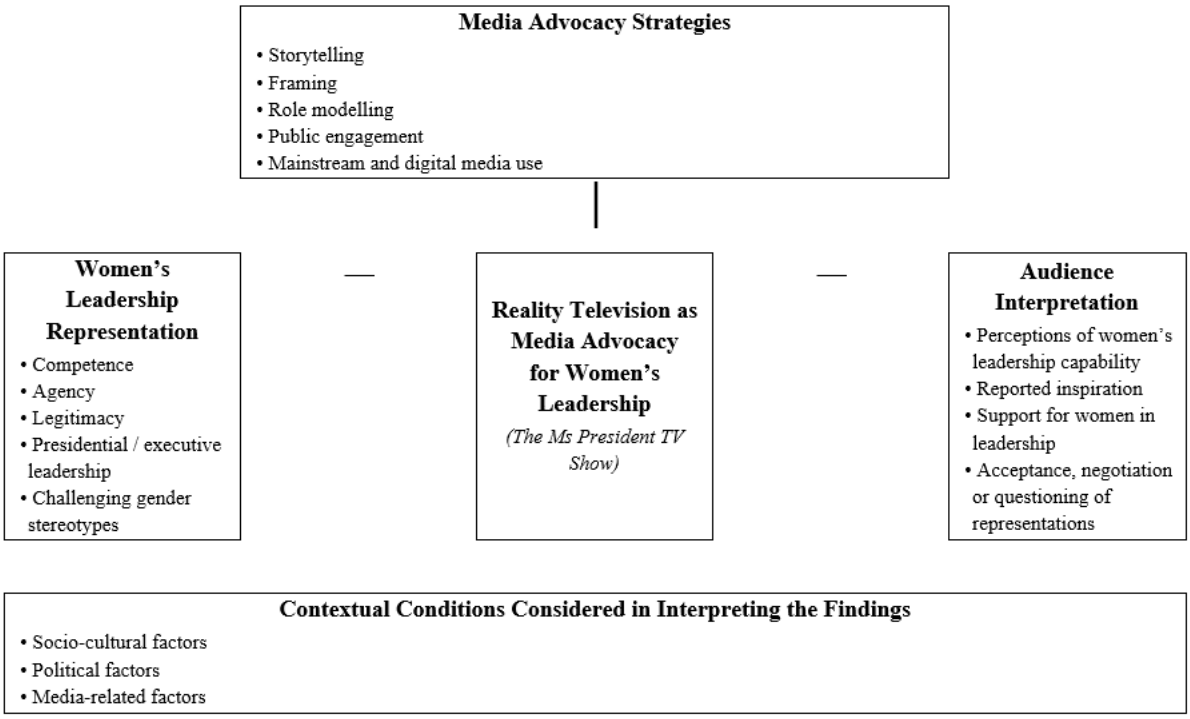
2.6.3 Alternative Theoretical Perspectives

While several media and communication theories such as Agenda Setting Theory, Cultivation Theory, and Feminist Media Theory offer valuable perspectives on media influence, they were limited in their capacity to explain the deliberate and strategic use of entertainment media as a development-oriented advocacy intervention. Agenda Setting Theory, for instance, is primarily concerned with how media shape issue salience in public discourse, but it does not adequately account for how audiences internalize values, model behaviours, or translate mediated messages into social action (Einarsson et al., 2025). Similarly, Cultivation Theory focuses on the long-term effects of media exposure on audience perceptions of social reality; however, it has been critiqued for its deterministic assumptions and limited explanatory power regarding intentional message design and audience agency within advocacy contexts (Mosharafa, 2015). Feminist Media Theory provides important critiques of gender representation and power relations in media texts, yet it is largely analytical and normative, offering limited guidance on how media content functions as a behaviour change or empowerment tool within development communication practice (Krijnen, 2017).

2.7 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study presents the main dimensions through which The Ms President TV Show was examined as a media advocacy intervention for women's leadership. In qualitative research, conceptual frameworks may be used to organise and connect the main concepts guiding inquiry without necessarily presenting these concepts as variables for statistical testing (Gregory, 2020; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Consistent with the qualitative descriptive case-study design adopted in this study, the framework as illustrated in Figure 3 therefore does not classify the study concepts as independent, dependent or moderating variables. Instead, it identifies the central phenomenon under investigation and the interconnected communication dimensions that guided data collection, analysis and interpretation.

Figure 3: Conceptual Framework



Source: Author (2026)

At the centre of the framework is reality television as media advocacy for women's leadership. The first analytical dimension concerns the media advocacy strategies employed by the programme, including storytelling, framing, role modelling, public engagement and the use of mainstream and digital media. These strategies provided the means through which leadership advocacy was incorporated into the reality television format. Qualitative frameworks can provide a structured means of organising such interconnected concepts while remaining open to meanings and patterns that emerge from the data (Klingberg et al., 2024). Framing Theory informed examination of how particular attributes of women's leadership were selected and emphasised, while Social Cognitive Theory informed the interpretation of role modelling and observational learning. The second dimension concerns women's leadership representation. The study examined how contestants were portrayed in relation to competence, agency, legitimacy, executive and presidential leadership, and gender stereotypes. Gender representation was therefore approached as a communication process concerned with how women's capacity to lead was made visible and meaningful through programme narratives, tasks, language and recurring

frames. In qualitative case-study research, themes and conceptual categories are used to capture participants' experiences, meanings and interpretations rather than to function as statistically measurable variables (Mishra & Dey, 2022). The third dimension concerns audience interpretation. Rather than treating audience perceptions as measurable effects attributable to programme exposure, the study explored how participating viewers interpreted the representations presented to them. Particular attention was given to perceptions of women's leadership capability, reported inspiration, support for women in leadership and the ways viewers accepted, negotiated or questioned the programme's messages.

The framework therefore served as an analytical guide rather than a causal model. It enabled the study to connect what the programme communicated, how women's leadership was represented and how those representations were interpreted by viewers. Socio-cultural, political and media-related factors that emerged from participants' accounts were treated as contextual conditions within the analysis rather than as formal moderating variables. This approach is consistent with qualitative case-study research, where conceptual frameworks can be used to organise inquiry while remaining responsive to context and emergent meaning (Klingberg et al., 2024).

2.8 Research Gap Analysis

Research on media, gender and women's leadership has expanded considerably at the national, regional and international levels. In Kenya, several postgraduate studies have examined how mainstream media represents women leaders and the implications of such representations for women's political participation. For example, Barasa (2011) investigated the factors influencing the utilisation of media by women parliamentarians in Kenya and found that media bias, stereotypes and limited visibility constrained women's effective engagement with the media. Similarly, Thuo (2012) examined the framing of women Members of Parliament in Kenyan print media and concluded that women politicians were frequently rendered invisible through limited coverage and stereotypical framing. More recently Gatwiri (2024), Koin (2023), Mwathi (2017) and Nduva (2016) examined the portrayal of women politicians in newspapers and television, consistently demonstrating that although women receive increasing media attention, coverage remains influenced by gendered frames and unequal standards of representation.

At the regional level, research has similarly concentrated on the representation of women within news media rather than on media advocacy interventions. For instance, Amutuhaire (2018) examined gendered experiences of women working in Uganda's broadcasting industry and found that structural inequalities and gender stereotypes continued to shape women's participation within media institutions. More recently, Owilla et al. (2025) from the Aga Khan University conducted a regional study across Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania, which reported that women remain underrepresented in media content and are frequently portrayed through traditional gender roles rather than as political and public leaders.

International scholarship has similarly concentrated on media representation, political communication and digital media as mechanisms influencing perceptions of women's leadership. For example, Debray et al. (2024) demonstrated that even apparently positive media portrayals of women Heads of State continued to reinforce masculine norms of political leadership, while Elliott and Stead (2024) observed that media representations remain central to the persistence of stereotypes surrounding women leaders. In addition, international evidence from the Reuters Institute written by Eddy et al. (2023) indicates that women continue to be underrepresented in leadership positions within news organisations across multiple countries. Although these studies provide valuable insights into media influence on gender equality and leadership, they predominantly examine news media, political communication and organisational leadership. Comparatively little attention has been given to reality television as an intentional media advocacy intervention capable of promoting women's leadership through entertainment-education and observational learning.

These studies reveal several research gaps. Empirically, previous studies have primarily examined how media portrays women politicians rather than how reality television can intentionally promote women's leadership through advocacy. Contextually, no identified postgraduate study has examined *The Ms. President* TV Show despite its explicit focus on developing and promoting women leaders within the Kenyan context. Theoretically, most existing studies have relied on Agenda-Setting Theory, Feminist Media Theory or Framing Theory independently, with limited integration of Framing Theory and Social Cognitive Theory to explain both the construction of leadership narratives and audience learning through observation. Methodologically, previous studies have largely employed content analysis,

interviews or audience surveys in isolation. In contrast, this study adopted a qualitative case study approach that triangulated multiple sources of evidence: content and discourse analysis of forty-five episodes, interviews with contestants and producers, and audience questionnaire responses. This multi-source design enabled the study to examine message construction, participant experience, production intentions and audience interpretation within the same bounded case.

2.9 Summary

The chapter covers the general and empirical literature review. It also covers the theoretical and conceptual framework for this study. Lastly, the chapter highlights the gaps in literature such as the limited empirical research on the challenges of using mainstream media for advocacy in Kenya's unique cultural context, including cultural biases and gender stereotypes.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the qualitative methodological approach adopted in the study. A qualitative descriptive case study design was used to facilitate an in-depth examination of The Ms President TV Show as a media advocacy intervention promoting women's leadership in Kenya. This approach was appropriate because the study sought to understand how leadership and gender were represented through the programme, how advocacy strategies were constructed, how contestants and producers experienced the intervention, and how audiences interpreted its messages. The study drew on multiple sources of evidence: qualitative content and discourse analysis of programme episodes, semi-structured interviews with contestants and production staff, and questionnaire responses from viewers. The proposed sample comprised 10 former contestants, five production staff members and 50 viewers, while the final study included five former contestants, three production staff members and 33 eligible viewers who had watched at least one episode. In addition, 45 episodes were analysed. Purposive and snowball sampling were used to identify participants with direct knowledge or experience of the programme. Data were analysed primarily through thematic, content and discourse analysis. Frequencies and percentages from selected closed-ended questionnaire items were retained only as descriptive context for audience response patterns and were not treated as an independent quantitative component. Credibility was strengthened through triangulation, systematic coding and consistent application of the research instruments. The chapter also outlines the ethical considerations observed throughout the study.

3.2 Research Designs

The study adopted a qualitative descriptive case study design to examine The Ms President TV Show as a media advocacy intervention promoting women's leadership in Kenya. Qualitative descriptive research is appropriate where a study seeks to provide a comprehensive account of a phenomenon while remaining close to participants' experiences and the meanings emerging from the data (Doyle et al., 2020; Hall & Liebenberg, 2024). A qualitative design was

therefore appropriate because the study sought to understand meanings, experiences, representations and audience interpretations rather than to test causal relationships between variables. The study was particularly concerned with how women's leadership was constructed through programme narratives, how advocacy strategies were embedded within the reality television format and how these messages were experienced and interpreted by contestants, producers and viewers. The case study approach enabled an in-depth and contextualised examination of Ms President as a single bounded media intervention. Case studies are particularly appropriate where a phenomenon needs to be examined in depth and within the real-life context in which it occurs (Crowe et al., 2011; Younas & Inayat, 2024). This made it possible to study the programme within its actual production, broadcast and audience context while drawing evidence from different actors involved in the communication process. The design therefore facilitated examination of the programme from four complementary perspectives: the content that was broadcast, the intentions of the producers, the experiences of contestants and the interpretations of viewers. Case study research also allows the use of multiple sources of evidence to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Crowe et al., 2011; Younas & Inayat, 2024). The study used multiple qualitative sources of evidence to strengthen the depth and credibility of the findings. Although selected questionnaire responses were summarised using frequencies and percentages, these numerical summaries served only to describe response patterns among the participating viewers.

3.3 Population

A study population is the group of people or entities that the study is interested in (Hossan et al., 2023 p. 211). The population for this study comprised stakeholders involved in reality TV shows within Kenya, specifically focusing on shows that promote women empowerment and leadership. This population is appropriate for the present study because it directly aligns with the study's objectives of examining reality television as an advocacy communication tool for women's empowerment and leadership. By focusing on stakeholders involved in a reality television programme explicitly designed to foreground women's leadership, the study situated its inquiry within a clearly defined media advocacy context. This ensured that the population reflects both the producers and recipients of advocacy messages

embedded within entertainment media, thereby strengthening the relevance and analytical focus of the study.

3.4 Target Population

The target population was limited to those whom the researcher could reach to represent the whole group (Hossan et al., 2023). The target population for this study was specifically drawn from:

1. The contestants of the Ms. President reality TV show.
2. Key production staff involved in the conceptualization, organization, development and dissemination of the show.
3. Viewers of the Ms. President show, including both male and female viewers aged 18 years and above, who actively watch and engage with the show's content.

3.5 Sampling Techniques

The study employed a combination of purposive sampling and snowball sampling techniques. Purposive sampling is chosen on the basis of the convenience of the investigator and usually the respondents are selected because they are at the right place at the right time (Acharya et al., 2013). Purposive sampling was used to select participants who are directly involved in the Ms. President show, such as contestants, organizers, and production staff, due to their specific insights and experiences relevant to the study. In snowball sampling, the first respondents are selected using either probability or non-probability techniques, and subsequent information supplied by the original respondents is used to obtain respondents (Acharya et al., 2013). This was used to reach viewers who are actively engaged in the show and who may refer to others within their networks who share similar engagement levels. Although non-probability sampling techniques can introduce selection bias, they were appropriate for this qualitative study because the priority was to obtain information-rich accounts from individuals with direct experience of the phenomenon under investigation rather than to achieve statistical representation (Zrineh et al., 2026). Purposive sampling ensured that contestants and production staff possessed relevant experiential and institutional knowledge of the programme, while snowball sampling facilitated

access to viewers who had actually watched and engaged with Ms President. The combination of these techniques strengthened the contextual relevance and depth of the data collected.

3.6 Sample Size

According to Lakens (2022), sample size can be justified by measuring the entire population, resource constraints, accuracy, priori power analysis, heuristics, as well as no justification. For this study, due to the need for accuracy as well as resource constraints, the sample size consisted of 5 former contestants, 3 production staff members, and 33 viewers who had watched at least one episode of the programme. For the qualitative component, recruitment continued until data saturation was achieved. Although 12 former contestants were initially contacted, only 5 completed the interviews, as some prospective participants did not respond to interview requests while others cancelled scheduled interviews due to personal commitments. Interviews with production staff concluded after the third participant because no substantially new information or themes were emerging from subsequent interviews. According to Guest et al. (2006) and Moore et al. (2024), data saturation occurs when additional interviews no longer yield new insights or themes relevant to the research questions.

Therefore, the final qualitative sample was considered adequate for achieving the objectives of this case study. The 33 eligible audience respondents were considered appropriate for the qualitative case study because each had direct exposure to the programme and could provide relevant interpretations of its advocacy messages; their responses were not treated as statistically representative of all Kenyan viewers. Drawing from Lakens (2022), the selected sample size ensures a balance between obtaining meaningful insights and working within practical limitations. For instance, given the logistical challenges of reaching a larger audience, the study adopted a manageable yet representative sample. Interviewing and analyzing responses from a smaller but well-targeted group ensured depth in data collection while maintaining feasibility (Fayehun et al., 2023). As a qualitative case study, adequacy was assessed primarily in relation to information richness, relevance to the research questions and the convergence of evidence across the different data sources rather than statistical representativeness. According to Lakens (2022), qualitative research does not require large sample sizes but rather ensures data saturation, where additional respondents would not significantly alter the findings.

3.7 Data Collection Instruments

The study used three principal data collection instruments: semi-structured interview guides for both participants and producers of the show, an online viewer questionnaire and an episode analysis matrix. These instruments were selected to generate evidence from different positions within the communication process, namely message production, participant experience, programme content and audience interpretation. The use of multiple sources of evidence is appropriate in case-study research because it enables a phenomenon to be examined from different perspectives and supports the development of a more contextualised understanding of the case (Crowe et al., 2011).

Semi-structured interview guides were used with former contestants and members of the production team. Semi-structured interviews are appropriate in qualitative research where the researcher requires consistency around key areas of inquiry while retaining sufficient flexibility for participants to explain experiences, meanings and perspectives in depth (Rasak et al., 2022). The contestant interviews therefore explored experiences of the Leadership Academy, leadership development, media visibility, programme representation, advocacy strategies and post-programme experiences. Producer interviews focused on programme conceptualisation, communication objectives, editorial decisions, media strategies, audience engagement and production constraints. An online questionnaire was administered to viewers who had watched The Ms President TV Show. The questionnaire contained both closed-ended and open-ended questions relating to viewers' perceptions of women's leadership, programme representation, advocacy strategies, mainstream television and perceived programme influence. Online surveys can be used within qualitative research to generate participant accounts and interpretations, particularly where open-ended questions provide respondents with opportunities to articulate experiences and meanings in their own words (Braun & Clarke, 2023). In the present study, analytical emphasis was placed on respondents' explanations and interpretations. Selected closed-ended responses were summarised through frequencies and percentages only to provide descriptive context and were not treated as a separate quantitative strand.

Finally, an episode analysis matrix was developed to support the systematic collection and organisation of evidence from programme episodes. Forty-five available episodes from the

two seasons were collected from official and verified programme sources. The matrix recorded relevant material concerning leadership representation, advocacy strategies, framing and narrative construction, audience-engagement mechanisms and structural media constraints. The matrix functioned as a data-recording instrument; the programme material collected through it was subsequently examined through qualitative content and discourse analysis as described in Section 3.11.

3.8 Validity

Validity, which essentially means "measure what is intended to be measured," describes how well the data gathered covers the actual field of study (Taherdoost, 2016). Validity in research is threatened by the obtrusive nature of the inquiry, the reliance on verbal testimony over direct observations, the largely hearsay nature of the gathered testimony, and the inherent ambiguity of participant language (Leung, 2015; Pandey & Patnaik, 2014). To further enhance validity, the study employed triangulation by comparing data obtained from different respondent groups and instruments. Triangulation in qualitative research involves examining a phenomenon through multiple sources, methods or perspectives in order to develop a more comprehensive interpretation and strengthen the credibility of the findings (Ahmed, 2024; H. Morgan, 2024). Triangulation operated across four evidence positions: programme content (what was broadcast), producers (what was intended), contestants (how the intervention was experienced) and viewers (how messages were interpreted). Convergence across these sources strengthened credibility, while differences were retained as analytically meaningful rather than forced into agreement.

3.9 Reliability

Reliability involves the accuracy of your research methods and techniques (Andersson et al., 2024). To ensure the reliability of this study, consistency measures were applied throughout data collection and analysis. The research instruments, such as the questionnaires and interview guides, were designed and tested among peers to maintain stability over time and across diverse samples. Reliability was also enhanced through the use of clear documentation of data collection and analysis procedures. Interview guides and questionnaires followed a consistent structure across respondents, and thematic coding was conducted systematically to ensure transparency and replicability.

3.10 Data Collection Procedures

Data collection was conducted in phases, beginning with interviews with show participants and organizers, followed by the distribution of questionnaires. Interviews were conducted virtually due to participant's preference and availability, and audio-recorded with participants' consent for transcription and analysis. Questionnaires were administered online to the show's viewers due to resource constraints. Several data collection activities were conducted concurrently. In particular, the content and discourse analysis of programme episodes overlapped with questionnaire administration and interview data collection. This concurrent approach enabled triangulation of findings while maximising the available research period. A data collection schedule had been appended and a Gantt chart showing the overlap of activities is appended. An episode analysis matrix was developed to guide systematic review of the episodes of Ms. President. The matrix captures leadership representation, advocacy strategies, framing patterns, audience engagement cues, and structural media constraints.

3.11 Data Analysis Plan

Interview transcripts and open-ended audience responses were analysed using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis approach. The analysis proceeded through familiarisation with the data, generation of initial codes, grouping of related codes, development and review of candidate themes, definition and naming of themes, and production of the analytic narrative (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2023). Coding was guided by the research questions while remaining open to meanings emerging from participants' accounts. Framing Theory sensitised the interpretation to how leadership, competence, barriers and gender were constructed, while Social Cognitive Theory informed interpretation of role modelling, observational learning and reported perception change. Thematic analysis was guided by the study's theoretical framework and research objectives, enabling the identification of themes related to advocacy communication strategies, role modelling, framing, and audience interpretation. The show's episodes were analysed using qualitative content and discourse analysis techniques to identify recurring themes, narrative patterns, and framing strategies related to women's leadership and empowerment (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2023). The analysis focused on key elements such as storytelling approaches, role modelling, language use, visual representation, and the framing of leadership challenges and

achievements. Episodes were coded thematically following a structured process of familiarisation, initial coding, categorisation, and theme development. Particular attention was paid to how women were portrayed in leadership roles, how challenges and successes were framed, and how advocacy messages were embedded within entertainment narratives. This analysis was triangulated with findings from interviews and questionnaires to assess consistency between the show's intended advocacy messages and audience interpretations, and in response to the research objectives of the study.

3.12 Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to ethical research standards, including obtaining informed consent from all participants, ensuring confidentiality of their responses. Informed consent was obtained prior to data collection to ensure that participants fully understand the purpose of the study, their voluntary involvement, and their rights as research participants, in line with ethical research principles of autonomy and respect for persons (Subramani & Biller-Andorno, 2022). At the analysis stage, data collected was anonymized using unique identification codes instead of participant's real names. All collected data, including interview transcripts and questionnaire responses, were securely stored in password-protected files, restricted to the researcher consistent with recommended data protection practices in social science research (Okoli et al., 2024 ; Zhang et al., 2025). Participants were also informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without penalty. Special care will be taken to protect participants who may be publicly identifiable, such as reality TV contestants and producers, by anonymising data and reporting findings in aggregate form where necessary. Additionally, ethical approval was sought from relevant institutional review boards including the St Paul's Institutional Scientific Ethics Review Committee (ISERC), and the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI).

3.13 Summary

The chapter outlines the research methodology that will be used in the study, the population of the study, target population, sampling techniques and sampling size of the study. Further, it covers the data collection instruments, validity and reliability of the data in the study.

The chapter also highlights the data collection procedure, the data analysis plan, and the ethical considerations of the study.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS, AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents, analyses and interprets findings on media advocacy for women's leadership through the Ms President reality television programme in Kenya. The findings are organised in relation to the study objectives and draw on four sources of evidence: qualitative content and discourse analysis of 45 episodes (26 from Season One and 19 available episodes from Season Two), semi-structured interviews with five former contestants, interviews with three members of the production team, and questionnaire responses from 33 eligible viewers. Bringing these sources together enabled the study to examine what the programme broadcasted, what producers intended, how contestants experienced the intervention and how viewers interpreted its messages.

4.2 Presentation, Analysis and Interpretation

The findings from the study are organised according to the data collection methods and are presented through descriptive statistics, qualitative thematic analysis, and content and discourse analysis. The presentation begins with the demographic characteristics of the study participants, followed by findings from the content and discourse analysis of *Ms. President* Seasons One and Two, the contestant and producer interviews, and the audience questionnaire. The section concludes with a triangulated presentation of the findings organised according to the study's research objectives.

4.2.1 Response Rate and Participant Profile

The study adopted a qualitative descriptive case-study design and collected data from three categories of human participants: contestants who participated in the *Ms. President* reality television programme, members of the production team involved in conceptualising and producing the programme, and members of the public who had watched at least one episode of the programme. The study also conducted qualitative content and discourse analysis of episodes from Seasons One and Two. The selection of contestants, production staff and viewers was intended to capture perspectives across the full communication advocacy chain. Producers

represented the message-creation perspective, contestants represented the message-embodiment perspective, and viewers represented the message-reception perspective. The programme episodes provided direct evidence of the leadership portrayals, narratives, communication strategies and advocacy messages that were transmitted to audiences. This combination made it possible to compare what the programme communicated, what its producers intended, how contestants experienced the programme, and how viewers interpreted its messages. The study proposal targeted 10 contestants drawn from the two seasons, five key organisers or production staff, and 50 viewers. The achieved sample consisted of five contestants, three producers and 48 members of the public who submitted the online questionnaire. These respondents were gotten purposively through establishing contact with the Media Focus on Africa, as they were responsible for the show's production. The questionnaire included a screening question asking whether the respondent had watched at least one episode of *Ms. President*. Of the 48 public respondents, 33 indicated that they had watched at least one episode, while 15 had not. Since the substantive questionnaire questions concerned perceptions arising from exposure to the programme, the 15 non-viewers were excluded from the main audience analysis. The final eligible viewer sample was therefore 33 respondents.

Overall response rate

Table 1 presents the proposed and achieved sample for each category.

Table 1: Proposed and Achieved Study Sample

Participant category	**Proposed sample**	**Responses obtained**	**Usable responses**	**Submission response rate**	**Usable response rate**
Contestants	10	5	5	50.0%	50.0%
Producers and key production staff	5	3	3	60.0%	60.0%
Viewers/general public	50	48	33	96.0%	66.0%
Total	**65**	**56**	**41**	**86.2%**	**63.1%**

As shown in Table 1, five of the targeted 10 contestants participated in the interviews, representing a response rate of 50.0%. Three of the five targeted organisers and production staff participated, giving a response rate of 60.0%. A total of 48 questionnaire responses were received against a proposed audience sample of 50, producing a questionnaire submission response rate of 96.0%. Following eligibility screening, 33 respondents were retained for substantive audience analysis. The usable audience response rate was therefore 66.0% of the proposed sample. The study obtained responses from 56 human participants against the proposed total of 65, producing an overall submission response rate of 86.2%. After the 15 non-viewers were excluded from the substantive audience analysis, the final usable human participant sample consisted of 41 respondents: five contestants, three producers and 33 viewers. This represented 63.1% of the total proposed sample. The achieved sample was below the proposed target for contestants and producers. The smaller number of interviews reduced the range of individual experiences available from the two participant categories. However, the interviews generated detailed accounts from participants who had direct knowledge of the programme's training, production and advocacy processes. The public questionnaire achieved a high submission rate, although not every respondent met the programme-exposure criterion. The exclusion of non-viewers was necessary because individuals who had never watched the programme could not reliably evaluate its portrayal of women, communication advocacy strategies or influence on attitudes. The study used purposive and network-based sampling because no complete sampling frame existed for contestants, producers or members of the public who had watched and engaged with the programme. The achieved sample should therefore not be interpreted as statistically representative of all *Ms. President* viewers or of the Kenyan population. The data instead provide descriptive and qualitative insights from respondents with direct experience of the programme.

Episode coverage

In addition to data from human participants, the study reviewed episodes from both seasons of *Ms. President*. Season One consisted of 26 episodes, all of which were available and included in the analysis. Season Two consisted of 20 episodes. However, one Season Two episode was unavailable (episode 19) on the official and verified online platforms consulted during the study. The analysis therefore covered 19 Season Two episodes.

Table 2: Episode Coverage by Season

Season	Total episodes	Episodes analysed	Episodes unavailable	Coverage rate
Season One	26	26	0	100.0%
Season Two	20	19	1	95.0%
Total	**46**	**45**	**1**	**97.8%**

The content and discourse analysis covered 45 of the 46 episodes produced across the two seasons, representing 97.8% of the complete programme corpus. This high coverage enabled the study to examine recurring leadership portrayals, narrative patterns, communication advocacy strategies and structural media constraints across almost the entire programme. The full Season One corpus was analysed. The Season Two findings are based on 95.0% of the season and should therefore be interpreted with the recognition that one episode was missing. No attempt was made to reconstruct or infer the content of the unavailable episode. The episodes were analysed using the episode analysis matrix developed for the study. The matrix captured representation of women in leadership, communication advocacy strategies, framing and narrative construction, audience-engagement cues, and structural or media constraints. Its consistent application across the two seasons supported systematic comparison and subsequent triangulation with interviews and audience responses.

Profile of contestant participants

Five contestants were interviewed. To protect their identities and maintain consistency in reporting, they were assigned the codes Participant 1, Participant 2, Participant 3, Participant 4 and Participant 5. The participants were drawn from the two seasons, although the achieved sample was weighted towards Season Two. Their inclusion made it possible to examine both continuity and difference in contestants' experiences of the programme. The contestants had varied professional and leadership backgrounds, including public administration, community mobilisation, youth leadership, political participation, policy work, gender advocacy and civil-society engagement. Several had already exercised leadership before joining the programme, while others described *Ms. President* as a significant opportunity to refine and publicly articulate their leadership identity. The interviews explored motivation for joining the programme,

experience of the Academy and competition, portrayal of women in the programme, effectiveness in challenging gender stereotypes, and changes in confidence and leadership skills. It also looked at communication strategies used by the programme, leadership and professional opportunities arising from participation, programme constraints, and recommendations for subsequent seasons. The contestants provided first-hand information on both the televised and non-televised aspects of the programme. Their accounts helped distinguish between what viewers saw in the edited episodes and what contestants experienced during training, filming, judging, networking and post-programme engagement. The purposive sample of five participants is not statistically representative of all contestants. Its value lies in the depth of the participants' direct experiences and their ability to explain how the programme influenced their confidence, knowledge, visibility and leadership aspirations.

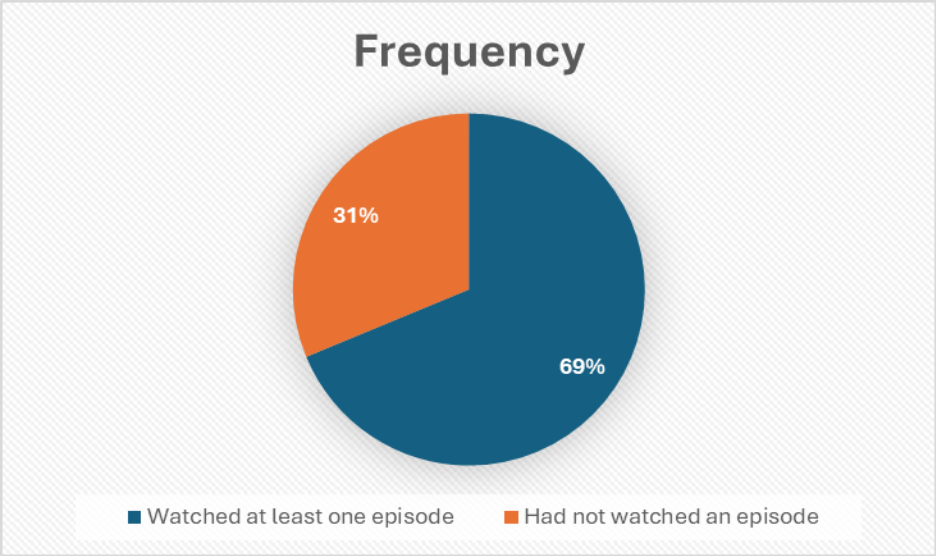
Profile of producer participants

Three members of the programme's production and development team were interviewed and assigned the identification codes Producer 1, Producer 2 and Producer 3. The producers had knowledge of the conceptualisation, organisation, production, dissemination and community-engagement components of *Ms. President*. The producer interviews were important because the study examined communication advocacy strategies rather than only viewers' impressions. Their accounts provided evidence of the programme's intended messages and the reasoning behind its format, leadership tasks, public engagement and editorial construction. Only three of the proposed five production respondents participated. Their accounts may therefore not represent every production, donor, broadcaster or programme-management perspective. Nevertheless, they provided detailed institutional knowledge concerning both seasons.

Eligibility screening of public respondents

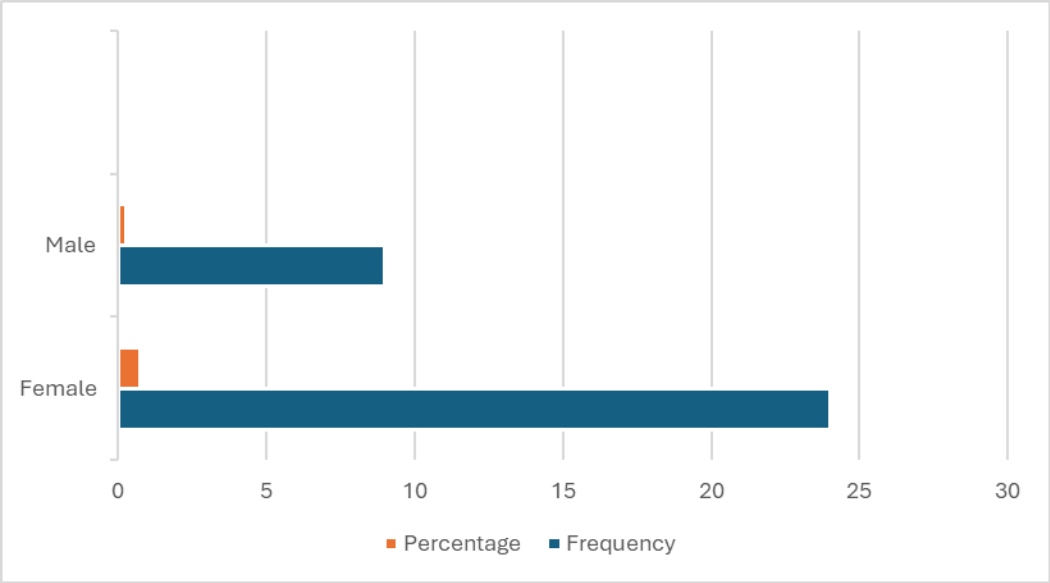
Forty-eight members of the public completed the questionnaire. Thirty-three respondents indicated that they had watched at least one episode of *Ms. President*, while 15 indicated that they had not.

Figure 4 : Viewer eligibility status



The 15 respondents who had not watched the programme completed the demographic and eligibility sections but did not answer the substantive questions about the programme. Their submissions were retained for response-rate reporting but excluded from all analyses of programme portrayal, advocacy strategies, credibility, attitude change and recommendations. Unless otherwise stated, the audience statistics in the remainder of this Chapter therefore use **n = 33**. Among the 33 eligible viewers, 24 were women and 9 were men. Women constituted almost three-quarters of the eligible viewer sample, while men accounted for slightly more than one-quarter. The audience data therefore contain perspectives from both women and men, although female viewers are more strongly represented. The inclusion of nine male viewers provides a broader basis for examining male perceptions than was available in the earlier, incorrect dataset. However, the gender groups remain unequal in size. Comparisons between female and male responses should consequently be interpreted descriptively rather than treated as representative estimates of gender differences in the wider population. The predominance of women may partly be associated with the programme's focus on women's empowerment and leadership. Women who were already interested in gender equality or who identified with the contestants may have been more willing to participate in the questionnaire.

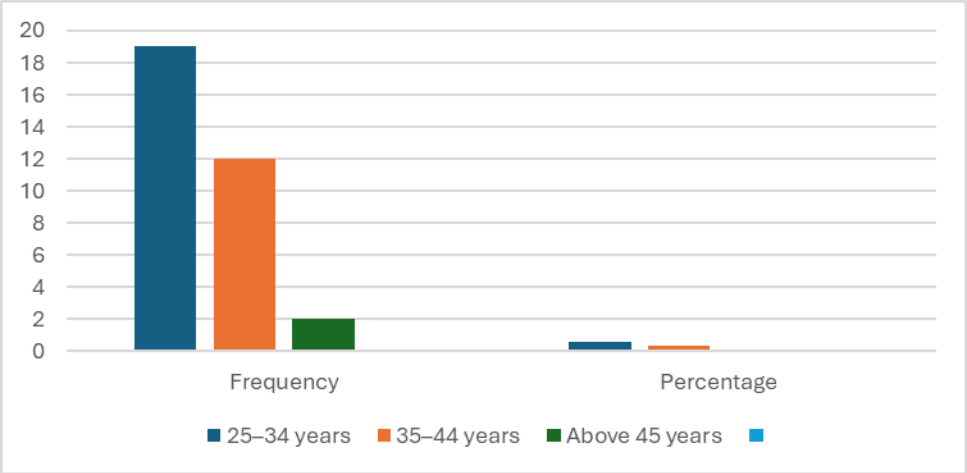
Figure 5: Gender distribution of eligible viewers



Age distribution of eligible viewers

The eligible viewers were distributed across three age categories. The largest category consisted of respondents aged 25–34 years, who represented 57.6% of the eligible viewer sample. Respondents aged 35–44 years accounted for 36.4%, while two respondents, or 6.1%, were aged above 45 years. No eligible viewer was aged 18–24 years, although several respondents in this age group submitted questionnaires and indicated that they had not watched the programme. The viewer sample was therefore concentrated among adults aged 25–44 years. These respondents were likely to have encountered the programme as working-age adults involved in employment, voting, community affairs or professional leadership. The small number of respondents above 45 and the absence of eligible viewers aged 18–24 limit meaningful generational comparison.

Figure 6: Age distribution of eligible viewers



Occupational profile of eligible viewers

The 33 eligible viewers reported a diverse range of occupations. These included communication research, public relations, marketing, advocacy, journalism, teaching, religious leadership, programme coordination, consultancy, accounting, development work, business, diplomacy, civil service, informal work, and unemployment.

Geographic distribution of eligible viewers

While the study initially identified Nairobi County as the location for viewer recruitment. The online questionnaire, however, circulated through social networks got responses beyond Nairobi and two locations outside Kenya as summarised in Table 3.

Table 3: Geographic Distribution of Eligible Viewers

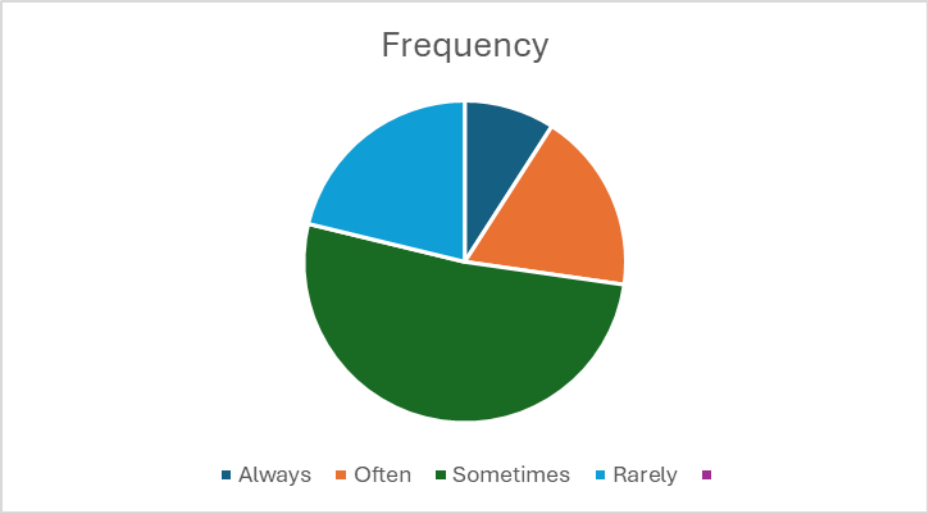
Reported location category	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Nairobi only	17	51.5%
Kisumu only	3	9.1%
Kiambu only	3	9.1%
Mixed residence including Nairobi	3	9.1%
Other Kenyan counties	5	15.2%
Outside Kenya	2	6.1%
Total	**33**	**100.0%**

The other Kenyan counties category comprised Uasin Gishu, Siaya, Kisii, Kwale and Nakuru, while responses from outside Kenya came from South Africa and Fulton County. A slight majority of the eligible sample, 51.5%, reported Nairobi as their sole place of residence. If mixed residences involving Nairobi are included, 20 respondents, or 60.6%, had some connection to Nairobi. All these responses were retained because the individuals had watched the programme and provided relevant information.

Frequency of programme viewership

Respondents were asked how often they watched *Ms. President*. The largest proportion of respondents watched the programme "Sometimes," representing 51.5% of the sample. Seven respondents, or 21.2%, watched it rarely, while six, or 18.2%, watched it often. Only three respondents, representing 9.1%, reported always watching the programme. Combining the "Always" and "Often" categories shows that nine respondents, or 27.3%, were relatively regular viewers. The remaining 24 respondents, or 72.7%, watched sometimes or rarely. The audience sample was therefore not dominated by highly consistent viewers. This has implications for recall. Respondents who watched irregularly may have remembered prominent moments such as final debates, campaigns, eliminations or heavily promoted episodes more clearly than the full leadership-development progression. The frequency distribution also provides context for responses in which participants stated that they could not remember particular aspects of the programme. Limited recall should not automatically be interpreted as rejection of the programme's advocacy message; it may reflect intermittent exposure and the time that had passed since broadcast.

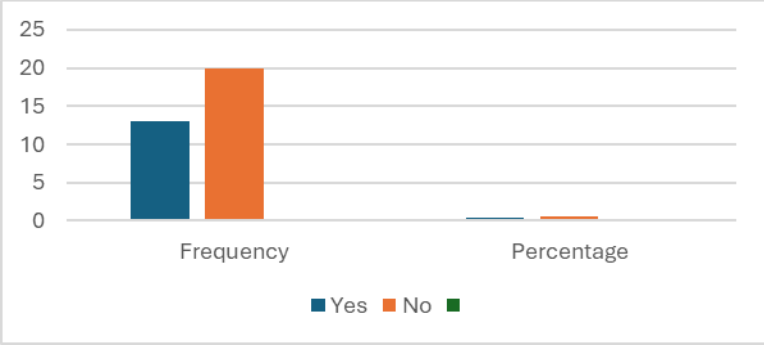
Figure 7: Frequency of Watching The Programme



Social media engagement

Thirteen of the 33 eligible viewers followed the programme on social media, while 20 did not. The majority of eligible respondents did not follow *Ms. President* on social media. Television therefore remained the principal or only contact point for many viewers in the sample.

Figure 8: Social Media Engagement with the Programme



Seasons watched by eligible viewers

Fourteen respondents reported watching both seasons, nine reported watching Season Two only, eight reported watching Season One only, and two did not specify the season watched.

Table 4: Season Watched by Eligible Viewers

Season watched	Frequency	Percentage
Both seasons	14	42.4%
Season Two only	9	27.3%
Season One only	8	24.2%
Season not specified	2	6.1%
Total	**33**	**100.0%**

Data completeness and suitability for statistical analysis

All 33 eligible respondents answered the main closed-ended questions concerning the positive portrayal of women in leadership, changes in perception, inspiration to support women's leadership, influence of mainstream television and television-production constraints. Open-ended responses varied in completeness. Some respondents gave detailed explanations, while others provided brief answers, indicated uncertainty or stated that they could not remember enough of the programme to respond.

4.2.2 Content and Discourse Analysis

The analysis covered all 26 episodes of Season One and 19 of the 20 episodes produced for Season Two. One episode (episode 19) from Season Two was unavailable on the official and verified platforms consulted during the study and was therefore excluded. In total, 45 of the 46 episodes produced across the two seasons were analysed, representing 97.8% of the programme's complete episode corpus. The analysis was guided by the episode analysis matrix developed for the study. The matrix examined the representation of women in leadership, communication advocacy strategies, framing and narrative construction, audience-engagement mechanisms, structural and media limitations, and the overall advocacy strength of each episode. Content analysis was used to identify recurring subjects, leadership tasks, portrayals, communication strategies and audience-engagement elements across the episodes. Discourse analysis was used to examine how meaning was constructed through the programme's language, recurring questions, titles, descriptions of contestants, trainers' and judges' feedback, editing choices, competition structure and presentation of success and failure. This approach was consistent with

the study's data-analysis plan, which required attention to storytelling, role modelling, language, visual representation, framing and the embedding of advocacy messages within entertainment narratives. The analysis did not treat each episode as an isolated unit. After individual episode coding, related observations were grouped into broader patterns across each season and then compared between the two seasons. The dominant categories that emerged are summarised in Table 5.

Table 5: Main Dimensions Used in the Content and Discourse Analysis

Analytical dimension	**Main areas observed**
Representation of women in leadership	Competence, confidence, strategy, emotion, resilience, diversity, equality and stereotypes
Leadership competencies	Public speaking, policy analysis, teamwork, decision-making, negotiation, research, integrity, accountability and public engagement
Advocacy communication strategies	Storytelling, role modelling, framing, explicit advocacy, implicit advocacy, television visibility and entertainment–education
Narrative and discourse construction	Recurring leadership question, presidential language, judges' feedback, learner-to-leader progression, treatment of success and failure
Audience engagement	Voting, social media, community activities, campaign rallies, public questions and calls to action
Structural and media constraints	Airtime, editing, competition, elimination, simplification, unequal visibility, commercial influence and sustainability
Cross-season comparison	Continuities, changes in technical depth, individual leadership identity and public accountability

Overall structure and narrative progression of the programme

Across both seasons, *Ms. President* was structured as a reality television competition combined with a leadership academy. Contestants were recruited from different parts of the

country, trained on governance and leadership topics, assigned tasks, required to make presentations and evaluated by judges. As the competition progressed, contestants moved from group-based tasks to individual assignments, campaigns, public interaction and final debates. The programme's structure created two simultaneous narratives. The first was a competition narrative, in which contestants sought to avoid elimination and progress towards the title of Ms President. The second was a leadership-development narrative, in which women acquired knowledge, practised communication, received feedback and demonstrated increasing readiness for leadership. The interaction between these two narratives was central to the programme's advocacy function. The competition created suspense and audience interest, while the Academy provided the substantive leadership and civic-education content.

The programme therefore did not present women's empowerment only as an abstract principle. It turned empowerment into a visible process involving training, preparation, failure, correction, improvement and public recognition. The episodes repeatedly reminded viewers that contestants had been selected from a large national pool. This established the women as part of a broader population of aspiring female leaders rather than as isolated exceptions. The use of contestants from different counties further communicated that women's leadership existed across Kenya's ethnic, cultural, professional and geographic diversity. Season One had a longer progression because it contained 26 episodes. It provided more time for auditions, group formation, training, field visits, presentations and gradual elimination. Season Two compressed a similar process into 20 episodes, of which 19 were analysed. The reduction in episodes resulted in a faster movement from large-group competition to individual leadership tasks.

Representation of women as capable and knowledgeable leaders

The dominant representation across both seasons was positive. Women were predominantly portrayed as capable, knowledgeable, strategic, confident, and committed to public service. The programme placed contestants in situations that required them to understand national problems and propose responses rather than merely express opinions. The tasks covered subjects traditionally associated with political authority and senior public administration. These included the Constitution, public finance, international relations, diplomacy, national security, intergovernmental relations, devolution, agriculture, social welfare, environmental conservation, technological innovation, public appointments, political campaigns and national economic

issues. This subject range was important because women were not confined to areas conventionally treated as "women's issues." Although gender equality, social protection, education, health and period poverty were addressed, contestants also discussed security, foreign policy, public expenditure, constitutional responsibilities and international trade. The representation therefore challenged a division in which male leaders are associated with economics, security and state power while women leaders are associated only with family, care or social welfare. In Season Two's international relations episodes (Episode 14), for example, contestants assumed the role of President and explained the considerations they would use when appointing an ambassador to the United States and a high commissioner to Tanzania. They were expected to distinguish between the diplomatic interests associated with the two countries and to consider constitutional, economic, security and regional factors. The task positioned women as heads of state responsible for foreign policy rather than as observers of international affairs. It also required them to justify appointments according to national interest, professional competence and diplomatic requirements.

Similarly, the devolution episode (Episode 15) framed women as senior public administrators capable of strengthening relations between national and county governments. The episode featured a former Season One contestant who had subsequently entered a professional role within intergovernmental relations. She was introduced through a discourse of integrity, responsibility, transparency and accountability. The national security episode (Episode 16) extended this representation into another field commonly associated with masculine authority. Contestants proposed preventive security interventions involving research, youth empowerment, community policing, crime prevention, social enterprise and collaboration between government and civil society. Women were therefore shown as capable of addressing security through policy, prevention and community leadership. The campaign and finale episodes presented the strongest expression of executive leadership. Contestants developed political messages, formed campaign teams, engaged citizens and participated in a presidential-style debate. The debate covered national issues including food security, period poverty, cost of living, climate change and governance.

Women as strategic decision-makers

A second recurring representation was that of women as strategic decision-makers. Across the episodes, contestants were asked to select priorities, make appointments, allocate responsibilities, design programmes, defend policies and identify trade-offs. This was especially visible in tasks where contestants assumed formal public roles. They were not asked only what they believed; they were asked what they would do if entrusted with authority. The programme thus framed leadership as the ability to move from diagnosis to decision. Contestants who identified problems without explaining implementation were frequently criticised by judges. Those who gave specific and realistic proposals were praised. This evaluative pattern reinforced the idea that leadership credibility depended on practical judgement rather than symbolic presence alone. At the same time, the decision-making tasks were usually completed within limited periods. Contestants often received training and then had only several hours or days to research and prepare. This made quick thinking and performance under pressure central indicators of leadership within the programme.

Representation of women as public communicators

Public communication was one of the most consistently assessed leadership abilities across both seasons. Contestants were evaluated on clarity, confidence, articulation, organisation of ideas, tone, use of evidence, ability to simplify complex topics, eye contact, management of notes, audience connection and persuasiveness. Contestants who demonstrated strong knowledge but communicated unclearly were often challenged by judges. Conversely, contestants who communicated confidently but lacked depth were also criticised. The preferred model combined knowledge with clear and persuasive delivery. In an earlier Season One episode, judges explicitly stated that they were looking for contestants who were informed, presentable, purposeful and coherent in articulating leadership ideas. The campaign episodes further expanded this framing. Contestants were required to convert long policy agendas into concise campaign messages, memorable slogans and personal stories. They had to connect with citizens who had limited time to listen, demonstrating that leadership communication differs according to audience and context.

Representation of diversity among women leaders

Both seasons presented women from different counties, professions, ethnic communities, age groups and social backgrounds. The programme did not construct one uniform model of a woman leader. Contestants included public servants, community organisers, policy practitioners, educators, businesswomen, civil-society actors, youth leaders, activists, and women involved in political organising. Geographic identification was repeatedly used when introducing contestants. This encouraged audiences to associate leadership potential with different regions rather than only with Nairobi or national elites. The presence of women from marginalised communities challenged the assumption that national leaders must emerge from a narrow social or geographic background. The programme also included women with disabilities, which expanded the representation of leadership beyond able-bodied norms. However, despite the diversity, many contestants were already educated, professionally active and involved in community or political work. The programme therefore represented diversity mainly within a pool of women who already possessed some leadership experience or public engagement. The content provided less sustained visibility to women from informal employment, women with limited formal education, women who were not already active in public life and women facing extreme economic exclusion. The programme's diversity was therefore substantial in geographic, professional and cultural terms but less complete in relation to social class and educational background.

Challenging gender stereotypes

The content analysis demonstrated that the programme consistently challenged gender stereotypes. The central stereotype challenged was that the presidency and other senior leadership positions belong naturally to men. The title *Miss President* itself joined a gendered feminine title with the highest political office in the country. This pairing disrupted the conventional association of presidential authority with masculinity. The programme also challenged the stereotype that women are too emotional for leadership. Contestants sometimes expressed fear, disappointment, nervousness and sadness, particularly before difficult tasks or after elimination. However, these emotions were usually presented as part of the human experience of leadership rather than proof of incapacity. Women were shown recovering from criticism, improving their presentations and continuing to compete. Emotion was therefore frequently framed alongside resilience.

Nevertheless, the programme did not completely escape gendered expectations. Judges sometimes emphasised the need for women to appear strong, composed and controlled, even when facing personal or emotional difficulty. In some episodes, contestants were advised to manage emotion more effectively before the public. This created a subtle tension. The programme challenged the stereotype that emotional expression makes women unfit to lead, but it also reproduced the expectation that a credible woman leader must demonstrate exceptional emotional control. A further stereotype challenged was the assumption that women's attractiveness and intellectual ability are incompatible. The programme's format resembled the naming conventions of pageants, but contestants were evaluated through ideas, policy knowledge and leadership performance rather than physical appearance. However, contestants' dress and public image were still managed as part of professional presentation. The discourse therefore moved away from beauty as the primary criterion without completely removing the importance of appearance in public leadership.

Representation of women as equal to male leaders

The episodes generally treated the contestants as capable of meeting the same leadership standards expected of male politicians and senior public officials. The women were not given simplified versions of national issues. They were asked to discuss the same challenges that would confront actual presidents, ministers, diplomats, principal secretaries, governors or public administrators. The repeated question of whether Kenya was ready for a female president explicitly introduced gender into the programme. However, the tasks themselves generally evaluated contestants through criteria such as competence, integrity, policy depth and communication. This created a dual discourse 1) the programme acknowledged that women face gendered exclusion; and 2) it insisted that women should be assessed as leaders rather than as symbolic female participants. In the finale of Season One, the contestants were described as women who had been exposed to issues that the highest office in the land must address. The programme stated that viewers had also benefited from expert knowledge and that the contestants had demonstrated readiness to take on leadership challenges. Season Two strengthened this equality frame by placing finalists in a debate structured similarly to national presidential debates. The finalists were asked policy questions before a live audience and were required to respond without receiving all questions in advance.

Leadership as service, integrity and accountability

A recurring discourse across the two seasons defined leadership through service rather than personal status. Contestants, trainers and judges repeatedly associated leadership with responsibility, integrity, accountability, public interest, transparency, responsiveness, inclusion, courage; and commitment. The programme's emphasis on integrity was visible in episodes concerning appointments, public management and political leadership. Contestants were frequently expected to reject patronage, nepotism and personal reward in favour of merit and national interest. Leadership was also framed as responsibility for vulnerable or excluded groups. Contestants regularly incorporated youth, women, persons with disabilities, marginalised communities and low-income citizens into their policy proposals. This inclusive language served an advocacy function by associating women's leadership with attention to social needs and representation. However, the programme did not frame women only as caring or nurturing. Inclusion was combined with institutional reform, legal knowledge and strategic decision-making. The result was a hybrid leadership model in which women were represented as both empathetic and technically competent.

Leadership as learning and continuous improvement

A dominant narrative across both seasons was that leadership can be learnt and improved. The Academy format made this message explicit. Contestants received training, completed assignments, made mistakes, received feedback and applied lessons in later episodes. Failure was generally framed as an opportunity to learn, evidence of areas needing improvement, part of a wider leadership journey, and not the end of a contestant's public contribution. Even eliminated contestants were often reminded that they remained leaders and had gained knowledge, confidence and networks. In one Season One elimination segment, judges told departing contestants that they had strengths, leadership potential and roles to play even though they were leaving the competition. The episode then described eliminated contestants as having learnt lessons, formed networks and become bolder. This reduced the finality of elimination and preserved the programme's empowerment message. At the same time, elimination remained a strong dramatic feature. Women were repeatedly ranked, compared and removed from the competition. Therefore, failure operated simultaneously as a learning opportunity and an entertainment mechanism.

Storytelling as a communication advocacy strategy

Storytelling emerged as one of the strongest recurring advocacy strategies. Personal narratives made policy debates more relatable. Instead of presenting women as abstract political figures, the show showed how their leadership concerns arose from real experiences. The stories also provided moral explanations for contestants' agendas. A contestant advocating for girls' education, women's economic empowerment or community security could explain why the issue mattered through her own background. In Season Two's campaign and finalist-profile episodes, storytelling was more explicitly connected to political branding. Contestants were trained to develop personal stories that supported their manifestos. Their experiences were shaped into leadership narratives through which audiences could understand who they were, what they valued and how they might govern. This strategy constructed leadership authenticity. A policy position appeared more credible when it was linked to lived experience, professional work or community service. However, television time limited the depth of personal stories. Some contestants received more developed profiles than others, particularly as the competition moved towards finalists. Early-stage contestants were sometimes known mainly through brief presentations or group appearances.

Role modelling

Role modelling was another dominant advocacy strategy. Contestants were presented as visible examples of women who could speak publicly, understand governance, lead teams, compete politically, respond to pressure, formulate policy, campaign; and occupy executive office. Role modelling occurred at several levels. Contestants as role models. The contestants themselves were the primary models. Their visible performance allowed viewers to observe women exercising leadership rather than merely hearing arguments about gender equality. Trainers and judges as role models. Women trainers, judges, public officials, diplomats, policy experts and organisational leaders demonstrated that women already occupied positions of authority and expertise. Their presence communicated that contestants were joining an existing community of women leaders rather than entering an entirely male space. Former contestants as role models. Season Two strengthened the role-modelling strategy by featuring former Season One contestants who had moved into professional or public leadership roles. The appearance of a

former contestant as an expert on devolution was particularly significant because it linked participation in the programme to continuing leadership development.

Framing of women's leadership

Framing operated throughout the programme at the level of titles, tasks, editing, language and repetition. Across the 45 episodes analysed, the programme consistently employed positive leadership frames that positioned women as legitimate and capable leaders. This directly addressed the third research objective, which sought to examine how reality television champions gender representation. The dominant frames identified were women as competent, trainable and developing, resilient, ethical, community-oriented, nationally relevant, capable of technical leadership, presidential, and women as deserving of public evaluation and support.

These frames were communicated both explicitly and implicitly. An explicit frame occurred when the presenter consistently asked whether Kenya was ready for a female president as an introduction to all 26 episodes in Season One, reinforcing women's suitability for the highest political office. An implicit frame occurred when women confidently discussed foreign policy, security or public finance without the programme stopping to explain that women could understand those subjects. The implicit frame was often more powerful because competence was demonstrated rather than merely claimed. The show also framed leadership as difficult. The presidency was described as requiring knowledge, creativity, dedication, preparation and the ability to withstand pressure. This prevented women's empowerment from being represented as simple encouragement without responsibility. However, the difficulty frame sometimes contributed to a discourse of exceptionalism as was narrated by the show's participants. Contestants were expected to master broad and highly technical subjects within short periods. Women's readiness for leadership was therefore often demonstrated through extraordinary performance.

The programme rarely compared contestants directly with ordinary male political candidates. As a result, women were sometimes presented as needing to meet an unusually high standard to prove their legitimacy. Overall, the consistent recurrence of these frames across the analysed episodes demonstrates that positive portrayals of women were deliberately embedded throughout the programme rather than appearing as isolated instances. This finding aligns with the central proposition of Framing Theory, which suggests that the repeated emphasis of

particular attributes shapes how audiences understand social issues and public actors (Persson, 2018). Similar observations have been reported in studies examining media portrayals of women leaders in Kenya (Barasa, 2011; Mwathi, 2017; Thuo, 2012), although those studies focused primarily on news media rather than reality television.

Public engagement as an advocacy strategy

The programme used several public-engagement mechanisms. For a start, audience voting enabled viewers to move from observing women leaders to actively selecting among them. This simulated democratic choice and encouraged audiences to evaluate contestants' leadership identities. Secondly, episodes encouraged viewers to share opinions through social media and continue watching content online. Social media extended the programme beyond scheduled television broadcast. Additionally, uploading episodes or related content online enabled delayed and repeated viewing. Thirdly, contestants visited communities, institutions and projects. These activities connected the national programme to local realities. Season Two finalists conducted campaigns in public spaces and interacted directly with citizens. This moved public engagement from mediated observation to face-to-face communication. These mechanisms helped transform viewers from passive consumers into participants. However, participation remained structured by the programme. Audiences could vote, comment and ask selected questions, but they did not control the programme's topics, editing or contestant selection.

Content and discourse patterns in Season One

Season One primarily functioned as the programme's agenda-setting and legitimacy-building season. Its most prominent contribution was introducing the concept of a women-only reality competition centred on national leadership. The season had to establish that a programme about women, governance and the presidency could be credible and entertaining. The dominant Season One narrative was the discovery of women's leadership potential. Contestants were introduced through auditions, county identities, group activities and progressively difficult assignments. Viewers were invited to observe women emerging from different parts of the country and demonstrating capacities that may not have been visible in conventional political media. Season One strongly framed women as learners. The contestants often depended on trainers and group collaboration before making presentations. This did not diminish their

leadership; rather, it established that leadership development requires education and exposure. The season also emphasised geographic and social diversity. County identification encouraged communities to see women from their own areas as national leadership candidates.

Season One's topic range was broad. The programme included public management, innovation, emerging technologies, culture and heritage, social welfare, environmental conservation, food security, international relations, campaign strategy and a final presidential debate. The season's communication advocacy strength was therefore based on four main achievements that is placing many women in visible leadership roles, normalising discussion of a female presidency, using national television to associate women with governance knowledge; and developing a progression from ordinary citizen to presidential candidate. Season One's main content limitation was the large number of contestants. Group presentations allowed the programme to include many women but made it difficult to develop each participant's individual leadership identity. Some contestants appeared mainly as members of groups rather than as distinct public leaders. The audience may therefore have remembered finalists more clearly than women eliminated during early or middle stages. Season One also depended strongly on elimination for dramatic progression. This created energy but could overshadow the collective women's empowerment message.

Content and discourse patterns in Season Two

Season Two retained the core format but displayed a more consolidated advocacy identity. The primary narrative moved from the discovery of women's potential towards the demonstration of women's policy competence and leadership readiness. The contestants were repeatedly placed in technically demanding governance contexts and the women were expected to move beyond general statements and explain implementation. Season Two also developed individual leadership identities more clearly. As the number of contestants reduced, viewers saw more of the finalists' personal backgrounds, policy priorities, communication styles, strengths, weaknesses, community work, and political ambitions. The campaign episode was especially significant because finalists selected campaign teams, developed manifestos, and engaged citizens. Leadership moved from classroom performance to persuasion in public spaces. The finalist-profile episode (Episode 18) further strengthened authenticity by returning contestants to their home counties, workplaces, families and community initiatives. This allowed leadership

claims to be validated through visible relationships and testimonies. The finale represented the culmination of the season's advocacy narrative. Six women participated in a presidential-style debate before a live audience and responded to national policy questions. By this point, contestants were no longer framed primarily as Academy learners. They were framed as candidates ready to be judged by the public. Season Two also incorporated continuity from Season One. Former contestants appeared as trainers, experts, or campaign supporters (Episode 17). This gave the programme an intergenerational and longitudinal quality. The second season's principal limitation was compression. With fewer episodes, complex training and policy tasks were presented within limited airtime. This increased the risk that viewers would see conclusions without understanding the full research or consultation behind them.

Comparative analysis of Seasons One and Two

Table 6 summarises the main similarities and differences between the two seasons.

Table 6: Comparative Content and Discourse Analysis of Seasons One and Two

Dimension	**Season One**	**Season Two**
Episode coverage	26 of 26 episodes analysed	19 of 20 episodes analysed
Dominant narrative	Discovery and visibility of women's leadership potential	Demonstration of technical competence and leadership readiness
Central advocacy question	Can women credibly occupy presidential leadership?	How would women govern and respond to national challenges?
Contestant identity	Learners, team members, emerging leaders and competitors	Policy practitioners, individual candidates, campaigners and presidential contenders
Group versus individual focus	Greater emphasis on group tasks and collective presentations	Stronger progression towards individual policy and campaign performance

Policy depth	Broad introduction to governance and leadership sectors	More sustained treatment of specialised governance and public-policy subjects
Storytelling	Personal profiles and county identity established relatability	Personal stories more directly connected to manifestos, political branding and leadership identity
Role modelling	Contestants, trainers and judges introduced visible female leadership	Contestants, women experts and Season One alumni created layered and intergenerational role modelling
Public engagement	Voting, television, county support, social media and community exposure	Voting, campaigns, audience questions, social media, community profiles and presidential debate
Treatment of women	Women as capable and emerging national leaders	Women as technically prepared and publicly accountable executive leaders
Main entertainment mechanism	Group competition and frequent elimination	Individual competition, campaigns, public voting and finale debate
Main structural limitation	Too many contestants for sustained individual visibility	Time compression and limited depth in highly technical assignments
Overall advocacy contribution	Established visibility and symbolic legitimacy	Consolidated credibility, technical competence and public assessability

Dominant media advocacy strategies across the two seasons

The main advocacy strategies identified through the episode analysis are summarised in Table 7.

Table 7: Dominant Advocacy Communication Strategies in the Episodes

Strategy	**How it appeared in the programme**	**Advocacy function**

Storytelling	Personal backgrounds, struggles, community work, transformation and future ambitions	Humanised contestants and connected leadership agendas to lived experience
Role modelling	Contestants, trainers, judges, diplomats, public officials and former participants	Made women's leadership visible, observable and attainable
Framing	Women repeatedly positioned as presidents, policy leaders, campaigners and decision-makers	Challenged masculine ownership of political authority
Entertainment–education	Governance training combined with competition, suspense and elimination	Made civic and policy content accessible to wider audiences
Public engagement	Voting, social media, community visits, rallies and audience questions	Encouraged viewers to participate in evaluating and supporting women leaders
Expert validation	Judges and trainers assessed contestants using professional leadership criteria	Increased credibility and linked women's leadership to competence
Repetition	Recurring question about readiness for a female president	Reinforced the central advocacy message across episodes
Symbolic simulation	Presidential debates, podiums, campaign teams, official visits and appointments	Allowed audiences to imagine women occupying actual state authority
Constructive feedback	Judges identified strengths and weaknesses and encouraged improvement	Framed leadership as learnable and developmental
Community localisation	County identity, grassroots projects and community testimonies	Connected the national leadership message to local experience

No single strategy operated independently. Storytelling strengthened role modelling by making contestants relatable. Framing gave meaning to technical tasks. Expert validation increased the credibility of the role models. Public engagement encouraged audiences to act on the frames provided by the programme. The programme's advocacy effectiveness was therefore produced by the interaction of multiple communication strategies.

Structural and media constraints identified in the episodes

Although the programme predominantly offered a positive representation of women, the content analysis also identified structural and media limitations.

Table 8: Structural and Media Constraints Identified Through Episode Analysis

Constraint	**Manifestation in the programme**	**Effect on representation or advocacy**
Limited airtime	Long training and presentations reduced to short television segments	Restricted policy depth and audience understanding
Large contestant pool	Many contestants competed for visibility, especially in Season One	Some women received limited individual narrative development
Editing and selection	Producers selected highlights, mistakes and reactions	Televised identity was an edited construction rather than the complete performance
Competition	Contestants were ranked and eliminated	Created engagement but could shift attention from collective empowerment to rivalry
Dramatic elimination	Emotional departures and suspense were emphasised	Risked prioritising entertainment over leadership learning
Presentation bias	Strong speakers were more visible and memorable	Could disadvantage capable leaders with less polished media

		performance
Exceptionalism	Contestants were expected to master complex topics quickly	Risked implying that women must be extraordinary to qualify as credible leaders
Emotional-control expectations	Contestants were expected to remain composed under pressure	Could reproduce stricter standards for women's public emotion
Limited follow-through within episodes	Later achievements were not always documented during the season	Reduced evidence of sustained impact beyond the competition
Missing Season Two episode	One episode was unavailable for analysis	Prevented complete reconstruction of the season's content

The strongest limitation was the tension between television time and policy depth. A reality programme must maintain pace and audience interest. However, meaningful leadership and policy analysis often require extended explanation, consultation and reflection. The programme's format sometimes reduced complex national problems to short presentations. Judges attempted to correct oversimplification through feedback, but viewers still encountered edited versions of the contestants' ideas. A second limitation was the importance placed on performance. Leadership was frequently assessed through public speaking. Although communication is central to politics, it does not encompass every aspect of leadership.

4.2.3 Contestant Interview Themes

The study conducted a thematic analysis of interviews conducted with five former contestants of the *Ms. President* reality television programme. The contestants are referred to as Participant 1, Participant 2, Participant 3, Participant 4 and Participant 5 to preserve confidentiality and maintain consistency throughout the study. The interview transcripts were analysed through familiarisation, initial coding, categorisation and theme development. The analysis focused on recurring patterns related to contestants' motivations for joining the

programme, their experiences of the Leadership Academy, perceptions of how women were represented, communication advocacy strategies, changes in confidence and leadership capacity, post-programme opportunities, challenges and recommendations. The themes were developed across the five interviews rather than presenting each participant's account separately. This approach enabled the study to identify areas of convergence (similar findings across participants), complementarity (findings that expanded or enriched one another), and difference (contrasting or divergent perspectives)**.** Examining these patterns across participants is consistent with thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Table 9 summarises the principal contestant themes and their occurrence across the five interviews.

Table 9:Summary of Themes Emerging from Contestant Interviews

Main theme	**Participants contributing to theme**	**General pattern**
Leadership development and learning	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5	Strong convergence
Positive portrayal of women leaders	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5	Strong convergence
Challenging gender stereotypes	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5	Strong convergence, with differences in perceived reach
Increased confidence and self-efficacy	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5	Strong convergence
Communication and public-speaking growth	P1, P2, P3, P5	Strong convergence
Storytelling and personal narratives	P1, P2, P3, P4	Broad convergence
Television and digital visibility	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5	Strong convergence
Community engagement and localisation	P3, P4, P5	Clear convergence

Mentorship and networks	P1, P2, P3, P4	Broad convergence
Leadership and professional opportunities	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5	Strong convergence but uneven outcomes
Entertainment versus advocacy	P1, P3, P4, P5	Recurring concern
Short preparation time	P1, P2, P3, P5	Strong convergence
Competition and elimination concerns	P2, P3, P5	Recurring concern
Weak post-programme continuity	P1, P2, P3, P4	Strong convergence
Need for structured alumni support	P1, P2, P3, P4	Strong convergence

The programme as a distinctive leadership-development opportunity

The first major theme concerned the contestants' understanding of *Ms. President* as a leadership-development initiative rather than an ordinary entertainment or beauty competition. Participants described the programme as different from conventional television contests because it focused on governance, public affairs, communication, national issues and women's leadership capacity. Participant 5 explained that she was motivated to join because the programme did not appear to be a conventional beauty contest. She understood it as an opportunity for "intellectual and leadership enhancement" and as a platform through which women could increase their capacity to participate in different forms of leadership. This distinction was important because the title *Miss President* could initially suggest a pageant. The contestants' accounts showed that the substance of the programme altered this interpretation. They encountered a demanding Academy involving training, research, public speaking, practical assignments and evaluation. Participant 3 joined Season Two partly because she had observed the influence of Season One on a former contestant who had mentored her. She believed the earlier participant had gained substantial

leadership capacity through the programme and expected a similar experience. She later described the Academy as one of the most informative leadership experiences she had encountered, noting that its governance and political content was unusually deep and intensive. The interviews showed that participation was motivated by a combination of factors, including interest in women's issues, desire to strengthen leadership capacity, aspiration to enter politics or public service, and interest in governance and national development. Participants did not generally describe themselves as entering the programme without prior leadership experience. Several were already involved in community work, organisational leadership, youth engagement, advocacy, public administration or political processes. The Academy therefore functioned less as the beginning of leadership and more as a platform for refining, broadening and publicly demonstrating existing leadership potential.

Positive portrayal and normalisation of women's leadership

All five participants believed that the programme generally portrayed women positively. The contestants described the women shown in the programme as intelligent, powerful, confident, articulate, capable, knowledgeable, resilient, innovative, community-oriented; and able to address difficult national issues. Participant 5 stated that the show "exposed women to the world as people who can lead." She contrasted this portrayal with the common assumption that women should serve as deputies or secondary candidates rather than principal leaders. According to her, the nature of the tasks allowed contestants to emerge as women capable of confronting difficult issues and demonstrated that leadership was not restricted to men. Participant 3 similarly described the contestants as brilliant and capable of discussing critical societal issues. She believed that broadcasting the debates on national television demonstrated that Kenya possessed women with sufficient intellectual depth to participate meaningfully in national leadership. The contestants' interpretation corresponded with the episode analysis, which found that women were repeatedly placed in technical and strategic leadership roles. Participant 4 observed that continued public use of the title "Miss President" altered the symbolic relationship between women and executive authority. Community members continued to refer to some contestants through the title even after the programme ended, making the idea of a woman president appear less distant or unusual.

Challenging gender stereotypes

The interviews indicated broad agreement that the programme challenged gender stereotypes, although participants differed in how widely or sustainably they believed this challenge reached. Participant 5 believed the programme challenged stereotypes within the counties and communities that actively followed contestants. She explained that her home county became highly interested in her participation and rallied behind her. This local support encouraged people to imagine a woman from their own county as a national leader. However, she also argued that the overall effect was limited by the novelty of the first season and by the fact that many people did not know about the programme. Her response introduced an important distinction between effectiveness among exposed audiences and national reach. Participant 3 believed the programme challenged several connected stereotypes. First, it challenged the perception that beauty and intelligence are unusual when combined in one woman. She criticised the phrase "beauty with brains" because it treats women's appearance and intellectual ability as if they are naturally separate. She argued that the programme showed women who could be physically presentable, powerful and capable of making a difference in their communities. Second, the programme challenged ethnic and geographic stereotypes. Participant 3 noted that contestants came from across the country and that women from places such as Turkana could express their concerns confidently on national television. In her view, the programme showed that a capable woman leader could emerge from any community or tribe. Third, the programme challenged stereotypes regarding disability. Participant 3 referred to the strong performance of a contestant with a hearing disability and argued that the contestant's progress demonstrated that women could lead even when facing multiple forms of exclusion. Participant 2 also interpreted the programme as a demonstration that women could analyse difficult issues and produce solutions under pressure. For her, contestants' performance challenged the assumption that women lacked the toughness or intellectual ability required for public leadership.

Confidence, self-efficacy and personal transformation

Increased confidence emerged as one of the most consistent themes across the five interviews. Participant 1 described confidence as one of the programme's largest outcomes. She explained that the training and repeated exposure to difficult tasks produced a level of confidence that affected how a contestant entered professional or leadership spaces. According to her, after repeatedly facing demanding situations, one became less fearful of what might happen and more

convinced of one's ability to manage challenges. Participant 2 reported that the programme sharpened her leadership vision and expanded the scale of her ambitions. She described her "vision" as becoming clearer and her "dream" as becoming bigger. She also stated that leadership was personal before becoming public and linked the programme to her aspiration to pursue leadership at a higher level. Participant 5 linked confidence to social recognition. When her county leadership and community rallied around her, she began to internalise their confidence in her. She reported becoming more confident in leadership matters and more eloquent in presenting her ideas.

Growth in leadership knowledge and communication competence

The contestants' confidence was closely connected to increased knowledge and communication ability. Participant 3 emphasised the depth of the Academy's curriculum and the expertise of trainers. She stated that the programme exposed participants to governance and politics in a way that prepared them for leadership beyond the show. Participant 1 identified active listening, clarity, attentiveness, preparation and verbal communication among the skills strengthened by the programme. She explained that contestants had to master subject matter and simplify it for presentation as leaders. Participant 2 described communication as central to leadership perception. She stated, *"Everything is perception. Leadership is perception. And perception stems from messaging."*. She further argued that a good leader could fail if communication was not inclusive, sensitive and appropriately packaged. In her view, effective messaging was a "deal-breaker" in leadership. Participant 5 reported that the programme improved her eloquence and helped her articulate issues in professional interviews. She associated this strengthened communication capacity with a later appointment as a commissioner.

Television visibility and the creation of a public leadership identity

National television exposure emerged as a major theme. Participants believed that broadcasting the programme on mainstream television gave women visibility, legitimacy, public recognition, access to wider audiences, a platform to express ideas, an identifiable leadership brand and a record that remained available after broadcast. Participant 3 considered national television one of the programme's most important communication strategies. She argued that broadcasting contestants' voices during prime time enabled audiences across the country to hear

women discuss leadership and national issues. She contrasted television exposure with a private training programme that might have developed contestants' skills without allowing the public to witness them. For Participant 5, television exposure was reinforced through county identity. Audiences did not only see an unknown contestant; they saw a woman representing a place and community. The programme therefore encouraged local emotional investment and collective identification. Television also created durable public identities. Participant 5 reported that people continued to call her "Miss President" after the programme and that her county organised a large welcome event attended by political leaders.

Storytelling and personal narratives

Storytelling emerged as an important but differently experienced communication strategy. Participants believed personal stories helped audiences understand where they had came from, what shaped their values, and what kind of leaders they might become. Participant 1 explained that the programme could draw together a contestant's diverse experiences and frame them from a leadership perspective. The aim was not merely to list achievements but to show how those experiences reflected decision-making capacity, community awareness and future leadership potential. She described the story as providing "a window" into what the contestant's leadership journey could look like. Participant 2 believed storytelling influenced viewers positively because leadership perception is created through messaging. Personal narratives allowed audiences to connect with contestants as identifiable human beings rather than as abstract policy presenters. Participant 3 saw storytelling as particularly effective when connected to community impact and national television visibility. However, not all participants believed the stories were given sufficient time. Participant 5 observed that several personal stories had to be fitted into short television segments. This reduced their depth and possibly limited their influence.

Community engagement and localisation of the advocacy message

Community engagement was another significant theme. Participant 5 described visits to contestants' homes, programmes, projects and communities as an important strategy because the message was not confined to the television studio. These visits provided evidence that contestants had existing community relationships and leadership experience. Participant 3 discussed post-broadcast community dialogues conducted in several counties. She believed these

dialogues helped move the programme's message from national media into local discussions about women's political participation.

Mentorship and peer networks

Mentorship and networking were repeatedly described as valuable outcomes. Participant 3 described relationships formed in the Academy as a cornerstone of her post-programme development. She referred to mentoring from another contestant, support in political campaigning and introduction to wider leadership platforms. The contestants also learnt through peer interaction. The diversity of participants exposed them to women from different counties, professions and political experiences. Participant 5 stated that sharing experiences with other women broadened her understanding of how leadership could be exercised in political and non-political spaces.

The tension between advocacy and entertainment

One of the strongest critical themes concerned the tension between the programme's advocacy purpose and its television entertainment requirements. Participant 3 argued that substantial portions of contestants' presentations were reduced during editing, while elimination and emotional departure scenes received greater attention. She explained that contestants sometimes wished more of their ideas had been shown rather than footage of them leaving the Academy in tears. She concluded that while the programme sought to communicate that women could lead, it also had to satisfy entertainment expectations and that, in some instances, "entertainment won." This concern did not mean that participants rejected the reality television format. Most accepted that editing was unavoidable and that competition helped maintain audience interest. The tension emerged when policy content was shortened, emotional reactions were emphasised, contestants' ideas were less visible than judges' reactions, and even complex leadership tasks were turned into brief performance moments. Participant 5 was less critical of the final portrayal. She believed the programme still represented women positively because it focused on real development issues rather than conventional contest activities. The interviews therefore revealed both acceptance and concern. Contestants recognised that entertainment enabled the programme to attract viewers, but several believed the balance could have favoured leadership content more strongly.

Short preparation time and the examination-like nature of assignments

Time pressure was a recurring concern. Participants described assignments in which they received a topic and were expected to research and present it within a very short period. Participant 5 stated that contestants might receive an assignment one day and present the following day, leaving insufficient time for substantial research. She identified this as one of her greatest challenges. Participant 2 similarly argued that the format sometimes felt like an examination. She recommended providing content earlier and allowing contestants to interact with the subject before being assessed. Participant 2 recommended a more participatory methodology that would allow contestants to engage communities or stakeholders rather than approaching every task as an individual examination. The data indicate that time pressure had both developmental and limiting effects. It strengthened rapid analysis and performance, but it could reduce policy quality and favour contestants already familiar with the subject.

Competition among women

The reality competition format created another tension: a programme promoting women collectively required contestants to compete against one another. Participant 3 described the Academy as bringing together strong women with strong personalities. She observed that participants were trying to prove themselves and win, which sometimes produced clashes and undermined collaboration. Participant 2 also described political environments as requiring women to be forceful, combative or simultaneously "crude and refined." She found some of these expectations inconsistent with her preferred way of functioning and leading.

Elimination-related concerns

Participants raised concerns about elimination. Participant 5 criticised an early method in which contestants participated in identifying fellow participants for removal. She felt that strong leaders may have been eliminated through a process influenced by peer judgement rather than only competence. Additionally, Participant 3 objected to the amount of broadcast attention given to elimination and emotional reactions. The concerns fell into three categories. First was fairness. Participants questioned whether every elimination accurately reflected leadership competence. Second was Representation. Eliminated contestants received less time to develop public identities or demonstrate growth. And lastly, Advocacy coherence. The repeated removal of

women appeared inconsistent with a programme seeking to expand women's leadership opportunities. At the same time, participants generally understood that elimination was necessary within the chosen reality television format. Their concern was primarily with how elimination was designed, presented and weighted against educational content.

Structural barriers beyond the programme

The interviews made clear that media visibility and training could not remove all barriers to women's leadership. Participants identified lack of campaign finance, difficulty accessing political parties, established party hierarchies, limited political networks, gendered expectations, pressure to display aggression, unequal access to leadership spaces, lack of sustained mentorship, insufficient institutional support and the gap between public recognition and formal opportunity. These were mainly in relation to after the show ended. Participant 2 explained that entering a political party late was difficult because those who had joined earlier possessed stronger networks and positioning. She also identified resources as a major obstacle to contesting political office. She described a tension in which women were expected to be strategic planners but political success also rewarded immediate risk-taking, combativeness and forceful presence. Participant 1 similarly distinguished between competence demonstrated during the programme and the support required to break political "glass ceilings." In continuation to that, the participants believed the programme generated substantial attention during broadcast, but the momentum declined after the season ended. Participant 1 also stated that people eventually forgot the programme existed. She believed that immediately after broadcast, the public was interested in what contestants would do next, but the absence of sustained support weakened the long-term impression. She argued that when visible women leaders returned to private life without continued opportunity, audiences could interpret this as confirmation that women eventually withdraw from leadership. Participant 2 expressed disappointment that some promised follow-up opportunities did not materialise. She referred to a short training and one embassy visit but felt that regular networking and leadership-development events were missing. This gap affected both contestant development and advocacy sustainability. The participants did not necessarily expect the programme to guarantee political office. They expected a structured

pathway through which finalists and other contestants could continue developing and applying their leadership.

4.2.4 Producer Interview Themes

The study findings highlighted here are from the thematic analysis of interviews conducted with three members of the *Ms. President* production and programme-development team. The respondents are identified as Producer 1, Producer 2 and Producer 3. The producer interviews provided evidence on the intentions, design choices, communication strategies, implementation processes and production constraints that shaped the programme. While the contestant interviews described how the programme was experienced by the women who participated in it, the producer interviews explained why particular communication and television techniques were selected and how the programme was expected to influence audiences. The interview transcripts were analysed through familiarisation, coding, categorisation and theme development. The main themes identified are summarised in table 10.

Table 10: Summary of Themes Emerging From Producer Interviews

Main theme	**Producers contributing to theme**	**General pattern**
Programme conceived as a women's leadership intervention	Prod 1, Prod 2, Prod 3	Strong convergence
Reality television as advocacy communication	Prod 1, Prod 2, Prod 3	Strong convergence
Deliberate positive portrayal of women	Prod 1, Prod 2, Prod 3	Strong convergence
"Show, do not tell" strategy	Prod 2, Prod 3	Clear convergence
Leadership Academy and technical training	Prod 1, Prod 2, Prod 3	Strong convergence
Storytelling and contestant profiling	Prod 1, Prod 2, Prod 3	Strong

		convergence
Role modelling and expert participation	Prod 1, Prod 2, Prod 3	Strong convergence
Multi-platform dissemination	Prod 1, Prod 2, Prod 3	Strong convergence
Community engagement	Prod 2, Prod 3	Strong convergence
Public voting and audience participation	Prod 1, Prod 2	Clear convergence
Editing and narrative construction	Prod 1, Prod 2, Prod 3	Strong convergence
Advocacy–entertainment balance	Prod 1, Prod 2, Prod 3	Strong convergence
Time and airtime limitations	Prod 1, Prod 2, Prod 3	Strong convergence
Funding limitations	Prod 1, Prod 2	Clear convergence
Unequal contestant visibility	Prod 1, Prod 3	Clear convergence
Need for stronger continuity and follow-up	Prod 1, Prod 2, Prod 3	Broad convergence

Evolution of the programme concept

Producer 1 explained that the programme did not begin solely as a television competition about the presidency. The initial concept was connected to concerns about youth radicalisation and violent extremism, particularly in marginalised communities. The original thinking

examined how women and mothers at grassroots level could contribute to addressing the recruitment of young people into violent extremism. During the development process, the concept expanded from a narrow focus on community prevention into a broader consideration of women's leadership and its effect on society. Producer 1 explained that the programme gradually evolved into a women's leadership show centred on the question of whether Kenya was ready for a female president. This development showed that the presidency was selected as a highly visible symbol of leadership rather than as the only form of leadership relevant to the programme. The programme ultimately sought to explore whether women's leadership could contribute to changes in communities, governance, social relations, national development, peace and security, and public perceptions of political authority. Producer 1 stated that the production team wanted to create a television programme about women's leadership and observe how the idea would be received by the public. The producer accounts therefore framed the show as an evolving communication response to broader social and governance concerns.

Reality television as a deliberate media intervention

All three producers described *Ms. President* as more than an entertainment programme. The reality television format was selected because it could combine leadership training, human-interest stories, competition, public participation, technical policy content, emotional engagement and repeated national visibility. Producer 2 characterised the programme itself as a media intervention. Television was not merely used to document a separate leadership programme; the television product was part of the advocacy strategy. The producers believed reality television could make women's leadership accessible to audiences who might not attend formal gender-equality workshops, political seminars or policy forums. The format allowed governance and leadership themes to be presented through identifiable individuals and unfolding stories. Rather than presenting viewers with a lecture arguing that women could lead, the programme showed women receiving training, conducting research, addressing national issues, working in teams, and even making decisions. Producer 3 described the media approach through the principle of "show, do not tell." The programme sought to demonstrate competence through action instead of relying only on statements promoting women's leadership. This approach was visible in assignments involving diplomacy, devolution, security, social protection, public appointments, environmental issues and political campaigns. The producers' accounts showed

that reality television was selected because it could communicate through repeated observation. Audiences followed the contestants over time and were able to assess their development.

The recurring question as the central advocacy frame

The question, "Is Kenya ready for a female president?" was identified by the producers as the central framing device of the programme. Producer 1 explained that the programme was organised around this question as the concept evolved into a women's leadership show. The producers did not present the question as one that could be answered only by selecting a winner. Each training exercise, presentation, public campaign and debate was intended to give audiences additional material through which to consider the question. The female presidency therefore functioned as both 1) a specific political possibility; and 2) a symbolic representation of women occupying the highest levels of leadership.

Intentional positive portrayal of women

A major theme across the producer interviews was the deliberate effort to portray women as capable, knowledgeable and credible leaders. Producer 3 indicated that the production approach intentionally avoided stereotypical portrayals of women. The programme was not designed around domestic conflict, physical appearance, romantic relationships or interpersonal drama as the primary source of entertainment. Instead, the main narrative focus was placed on leadership ability, knowledge, public communication, and decision-making. The producers acknowledged that contestants displayed different levels of competence and did not attempt to present every performance as equally strong. Weak presentations, misunderstandings and emotional reactions were included in the final programme. However, these moments were generally framed as part of learning and competition rather than as evidence that women were incapable of leadership.

National recruitment and diversity

Producer 1 explained that contestant recruitment was designed to attract women from across the country. The recruitment and audition process was conducted nationally, with attention to county representation and regional diversity. The programme sought to avoid creating a show that appeared to represent only Nairobi-based, urban or socially connected women.

The Leadership Academy as the foundation of programme content

All producers described the Leadership Academy as central to the programme. The Academy differentiated *Ms. President* from a competition based only on natural charisma, popularity or performance. Contestants received training before completing assignments. The Academy covered a broad range of subjects connected to national leadership and governance. Season One topics included innovation and emerging technologies, culture and heritage, social welfare, environmental conservation, food security, international relations and campaign strategy. Season Two similarly included governance, inclusion, public appointments, devolution, security, diplomacy, political communication, campaigning and major national-development issues. The producers explained that trainers were selected from people with professional knowledge of the episode topic. The Academy also served the audience. The final programme included parts of the training so viewers could learn about the same national issues being studied by contestants. In the Season One finale, the producers stated that viewers had benefited from the knowledge of trainers and practitioners who had worked with contestants.

Selection of topical governance and policy issues

Producer 1 explained that episode topics were selected through consultations and workshops involving multiple stakeholders. The topics were intended to reflect current national concerns, governance responsibilities, leadership challenges, issues relevant to public debate; and knowledge expected of senior public leaders. Topic selection was therefore not random. Producer 1 also explained that the topics needed to work as television. They had to be technically relevant but capable of being presented within a clear assignment and episode narrative. This requirement sometimes influenced how broad subjects were reduced into specific tasks.

Storytelling and personal profiling

All three producers identified storytelling as a deliberate programme strategy. Personal profiles were used to explain why contestants were interested in particular issues and what had shaped their leadership identities. The profiles also differentiated contestants from one another. Without personal narratives, the women could have appeared only as participants responding to identical tasks. Storytelling gave each contestant a distinct public identity. The producers recognised that television storytelling required selection. Not every aspect of a contestant's

background could be included, and stories had to be edited into relatively short segments. This meant that the final profile represented selected aspects of the contestant's life rather than a complete biography.

Role modelling and expert validation

The producers intentionally included trainers, judges, public officials, diplomats, professionals and former contestants. The inclusion of recognised experts communicated that the contestants' ideas were being evaluated within professional rather than purely entertainment standards.

Multi-platform communication strategy

The producer interviews showed that television was the principal communication platform but not the only one. Producer 2 explained that the advocacy intervention extended beyond television to radio, social media and structured community-engagement activities. Television provided national visibility and a structured weekly narrative. On the other hand, radio offered opportunities to reach audiences outside television coverage and conduct longer discussions. Social media was mainly for promotion, public discussion, and contestant visibility. Additionally, Producer 2 and Producer 3 emphasised community engagement as an extension of the media campaign. The programme's advocacy message was taken into selected communities through dialogue sessions after or alongside broadcast. Producer 3 explained that community dialogue was included because media exposure alone did not guarantee conversation or local interpretation.

Editing and narrative construction

Editing emerged as one of the most significant production themes. Producer 1 explained that many hours of training, discussion, research, field activity, presentation, judges' feedback; and contestant reflection had to be reduced into a television episode of approximately 40 minutes. This required the production team to decide which elements best communicated the programme's wider advocacy message. The edited episode was therefore a selected narrative rather than a complete record of everything that occurred. The producers acknowledged that not every contestant was equally visible in each episode.

Funding and production-resource limitations

Funding was identified as a factor affecting the number of episodes and the scale of production. Producer interviews indicated that Season One consisted of 26 episodes, while Season Two consisted of 20 episodes. The reduction was associated partly with the resources available for the second season. Funding influenced how extensively the programme could travel, how long the season could run and how much post-broadcast engagement could be undertaken. The producers did not indicate that funding directly determined contestant performance or judging outcomes. It was described mainly as a structural production constraint.

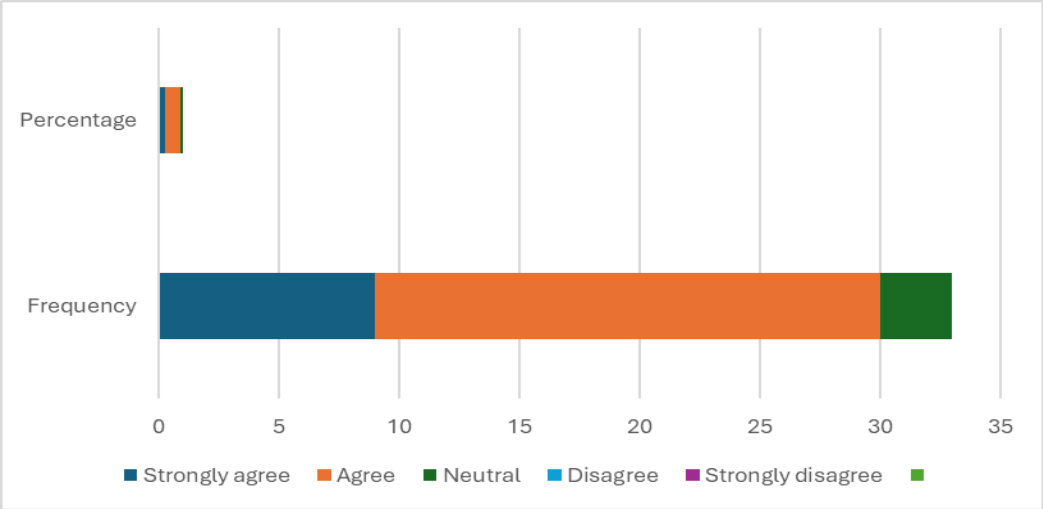
4.2.5 Audience Questionnaire Findings

The findings from the questionnaire administered to members of the public who had watched the *Ms. President* reality television programme combined closed-ended and open-ended questions and therefore generated both quantitative and qualitative data. A total of 48 questionnaire submissions were received. However, 15 respondents indicated that they had not watched any episode of the programme. Since they could not provide informed assessments of the programme's portrayal of women, advocacy strategies or influence on attitudes, they were excluded from the substantive audience analysis. The respondents were coded as Respondents R1-R48. However, the findings in this subsection are therefore based on 33 eligible viewers. The closed-ended responses were analysed using frequencies, percentages and, where applicable, a mean score. The open-ended responses were analysed thematically to identify recurring explanations, perceptions and recommendations.

Audience assessment of the portrayal of women in leadership

Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed with the statement, "The show positively portrays women in leadership." The findings are presented in Figure 9.

Figure 9:Respondents' Assessment of the Portrayal of Women Leaders



The results show that 21 respondents, representing 63.6%, agreed that the programme positively portrayed women in leadership. A further nine respondents, or 27.3%, strongly agreed. Combined, 30 of the 33 viewers, equivalent to 90.9%, assessed the portrayal positively. Three respondents, representing 9.1%, selected the neutral response. None of the respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. Using a five-point scale in which 1 represented "strongly disagree" and 5 represented "strongly agree," the mean rating was 4.18, with a standard deviation of approximately 0.58. The mean was above the scale midpoint of 3.00 and close to the "agree" and "strongly agree" categories. The frequency distribution is more informative than the mean alone because responses were heavily concentrated within the two positive categories. The absence of disagreement indicates a high level of consistency among the participating viewers concerning the programme's overall representation of women. However, this result should be interpreted within the composition of the sample. Most respondents were women, and several open-ended responses showed that some participants already supported women's leadership before watching the programme. The programme may therefore have both changed some respondents' attitudes and reinforced already positive views among others.

Audience explanations of the positive portrayal

The open-ended responses provided explanations for why viewers assessed the programme positively. Several respondents stated that the programme demonstrated that effective leadership was based on capability rather than gender. One respondent explained:

"Watching the show highlighted how women leaders often navigate complex challenges with resilience, emotional intelligence, and strategic decision-making." – Respondent R3

The same respondent added that the programme showed that effective leadership was defined by "capability, vision, and the ability to inspire others," rather than by gender. Another respondent stated:

"Women are smart and only need that door opened and a little support and they can do it." – Respondent R4

This response framed the problem as limited opportunity rather than limited ability. A further respondent noted:

"The show made the women tackle issues that are usually perceived as difficult and for only a select number of people in leadership to handle, specifically men." – Respondent R6

The respondent explained that seeing women debate these issues was "mind opening." Other viewers emphasised equality in leadership capacity. One stated simply:

"Women have capacity same as men." – Respondent R26

Another respondent explained that the programme showed that women had "great ideas and policies" which could create impact if implemented.

Visibility and representation

Visibility was one of the most prominent explanations for the positive assessment. Respondents described the programme as giving women a public platform and opportunities to demonstrate leadership skills. One respondent stated:

"Watching the show has highlighted the strong qualities and capabilities of women in leadership roles, which has helped me recognise the importance of visibility and representation for women leaders in various fields." – Respondent R24

Another said:

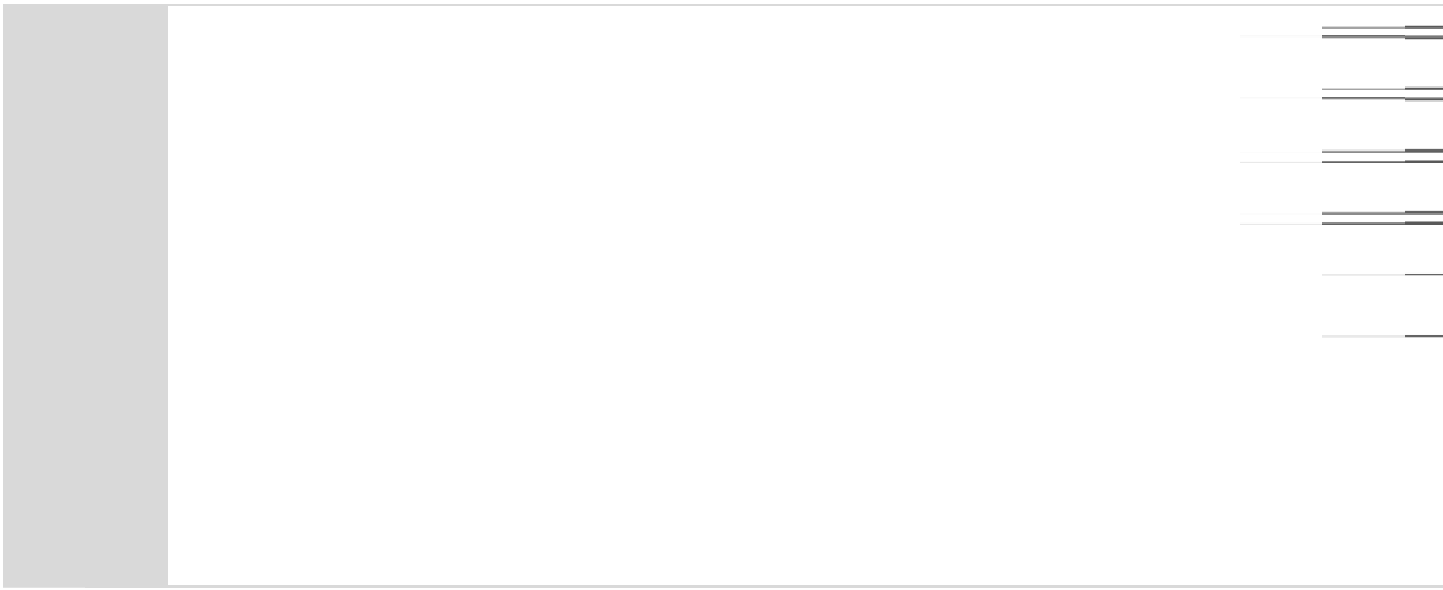
"We are seeing more women in male dominant spaces." – Respondent R12

Respondent R22 described the programme as effective because it gave “a face of women in leadership” and influenced how viewers perceived their capabilities. The title of the programme was also remembered as an advocacy element. One respondent stated that “the name alone was such a vibe,” while another identified the name of the show as its most effective aspect.

Change in perception of women leaders

Respondents were asked whether they had noticed any change in their perception of women leaders after watching the programme. The responses are presented in Figure 10.

Figure 10: Change in Respondents’ Perceptions of Women Leaders



Thirty respondents, representing **90.9%**, stated that they had noticed a change in their perception of women leaders. Three respondents, equivalent to 9.1%, stated that they had not. This finding indicates a high level of self-reported perception change among the respondents. However, the explanations showed that “change” took different forms. For some viewers, change meant moving from a negative or doubtful view to a more positive assessment. For others, it involved becoming more aware of women’s capacities, even though they had not previously opposed women’s leadership. For respondents who already held positive views, the programme reinforced rather than changed their position. The open-ended responses revealed five main forms of perception change. The first was the recognition of the possibility of a female president. One respondent stated:

"The show made it possible for me to envision the possibility of a female president." – Respondent R2

The respondent explained that contestants were repeatedly asked to imagine themselves in the presidential role, making the possibility appear more believable. Secondly, it was the recognition of women's competence. Several respondents reported increased appreciation of women's policy knowledge, ideas and ability to address complex issues. One respondent stated:

"Women have the expertise and are in tune with the macro issues affecting society." – Respondent R29

Thirdly, it was the change from negative to positive perceptions. One respondent openly described a previous belief that women could not make good leaders:

"Back then I always had a perception that women cannot make good leaders. However, the platform gave women of all characters and cadres an opportunity to showcase their skill and I realised it is opportunity that we lacked." – Respondent R17

This response represented one of the clearest self-reported attitude shifts. Fourth, was the increased awareness of barriers facing women. Some viewers reported that the programme helped them understand that women's limited representation resulted from structural and social barriers rather than inability. One respondent said the programme helped her see,

"what seemed to limit women leaders and understand that women are inherently capable leaders." – Respondent R2

Lastly, it was the reinforcement of existing support. Three respondents reported no perception change. Two explained that they already supported women's leadership before watching the programme. One stated:

"I already had a pre-existing perception of women in leadership, so the show did not really change my views." – Respondent R10

Another explained:

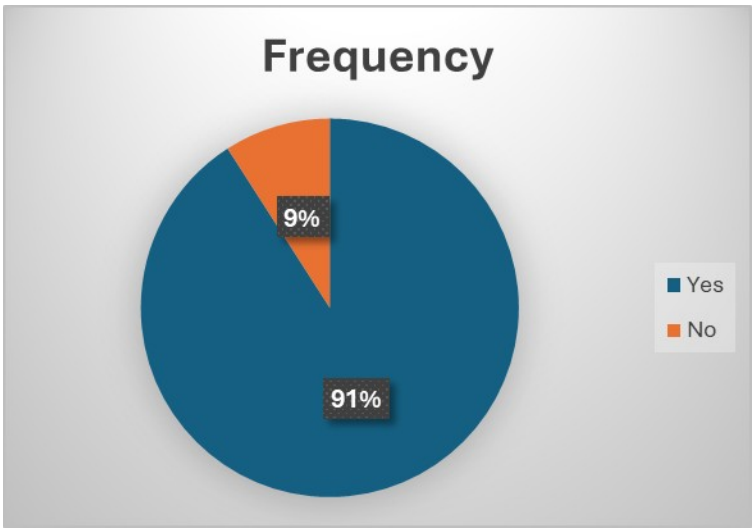
"Not because I didn't agree with the show, I just always supported women. Feminism is my thing." – Respondent R43

Respondent R2 attributed the absence of change to inconsistent viewing rather than disagreement with the message. The "no change" responses therefore did not necessarily represent negative assessments.

Inspiration to support women's leadership or take action

Respondents were asked whether the programme inspired them to support women's leadership or take action within their communities. The responses are presented in Figure 11.

Figure 11 Inspiration to support women's leadership or take action



Thirty respondents, representing **90.9%**, reported that the programme inspired them to support women's leadership or take action. Three respondents, or 9.1%, answered "No." The proportion was identical to that recorded for perception change, although the respondents were not necessarily the same in every case.

Aspects of the programme considered most effective

Respondents were asked which aspects of the programme they considered most effective in advocating for women's empowerment and leadership. The answers were diverse but clustered around several recurring categories as demonstrated in Table 11.

Table 11: Main Programme Features Identified as Effective by Viewers

Thematic category	**Examples mentioned by respondents**
Public visibility and	Prime television exposure, giving women a face, platforming

representation	women's voices, diversity of contestants
Policy presentations and debates	Tough national topics, policy discussions, final debate, SDG-related presentations, arguments and pitching
Training and capacity development	Leadership Academy, governance training, capacity building, exposure to institutions
Competition and campaign activities	Campaigns, pitching, leadership competitions, public performance
Storytelling and personal profiles	Unique stories, diverse leadership experiences, contestant backgrounds
Mentorship and expert interaction	Trainers, judges, governance specialists and role models
Civic education and public engagement	Voting, public participation, affirmative action messages and civic education
Programme title and presidential framing	The name *Ms. President* and the direct association of women with the presidency
Community and county representation	Local identification, county pride and grassroots connection

The most frequently recurring responses concerned visible leadership performance, particularly debates, presentations, policy discussions and campaigns. Respondents did not identify a single advocacy element. Instead, they described the programme's effectiveness as arising from the interaction of several components.

Storytelling and diverse leadership profiles

A smaller but clear group of respondents emphasised storytelling and contestant diversity. Respondent R24 stated:

"The show's portrayal of diverse women leaders and their unique stories is powerful."

Personal profiles were valued because they allowed audiences to understand that women leaders came from different communities and had different experiences. Storytelling made the leadership message more relatable and reduced the distance between viewers and contestants. However, respondents generally mentioned debates and visible performance more frequently than storytelling when recalling the show's most effective aspects.

Perceived influence of mainstream television

Respondents were asked whether being aired on mainstream television affected the credibility or effectiveness of the programme's message. The responses are presented in Figure 12. Seventeen respondents, representing 51.5%, answered "No." Ten respondents, equivalent to 30.3%, answered "Yes," while six respondents, or 18.2%, were uncertain. The wording of the question allowed different interpretations. Some respondents understood "affected" as improved credibility, while others interpreted it as negatively influenced or compromised credibility. The open-ended explanations were therefore required to understand the numerical responses. Respondents who believed mainstream television improved the programme emphasised wide reach, national visibility, access for viewers without social media, credibility associated with an established broadcaster and exposure of women's voices. Respondent R24 stated:

"Being aired on mainstream television gave the show a wider audience."

Respondent R17 explained that mainstream broadcasting enabled many people to "watch and critique" the contestants. Respondents who answered "No" often did not mean that television harmed the programme. Some explained that the programme's message remained credible regardless of the platform. For instance Respondent R37 stated,

"The agenda was passed. Women can lead. I don't think the platform lost any credibility."

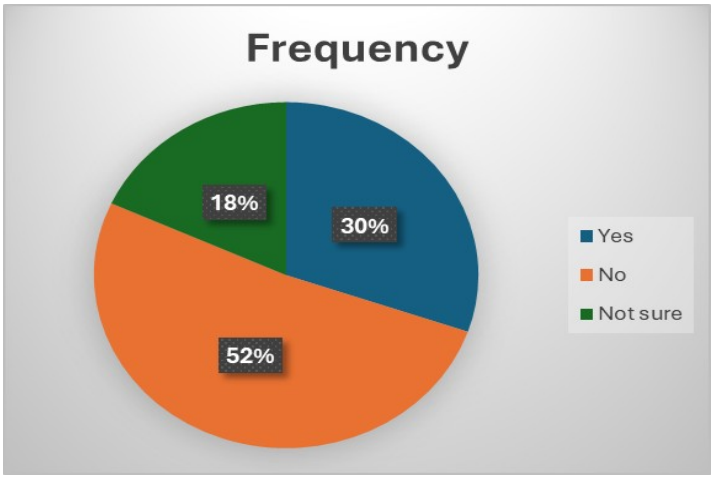
Respondent R38 said,

"The message was there, mainstream or not."

A number of respondents also stated that media helped distribute the story but was not the reason they found it credible. Some respondents accessed the programme online rather than through television. For instance, Respondent R28 simply stated,

"I saw it because it was online."

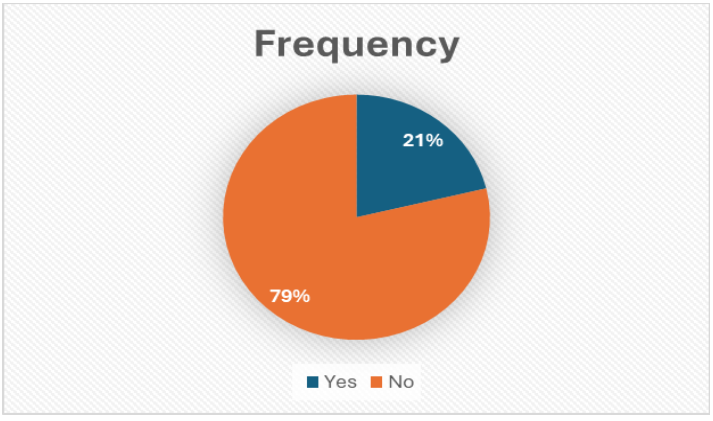
Figure 12: Perceived Effect of Mainstream Television



Perceived constraints, exaggeration or media expectations

Respondents were asked whether any aspect of the programme appeared constrained, exaggerated or shaped by media expectations. The responses are presented in Figure 13.

Figure 13: Perceptions of Production and Media Constraints



The majority of respondents, 26 or 78.8%, did not identify significant constraints, exaggeration or media influence. Seven respondents, representing 21.2%, believed some aspects were constrained or shaped by television expectations. A number of respondents who answered

"No" later stated that they could not remember enough to assess the issue. The result should therefore not be interpreted as conclusive evidence that viewers observed no production influence. Time was one of the most common constraints mentioned. Respondents stated that presentations were too short, women had limited time to explain ideas, the season was compressed, contestants' community work was not shown in enough depth and complex narratives were simplified. Respondent R31 stated,

"The time was constrained. The women barely had time to fully address some issues."

Respondents also raised concerns about elimination. For instance, Respondent R18 stated,

"The eliminations were too dramatic."

The concern was not necessarily that elimination should have been removed. It related to the attention given to emotional departures compared with contestants' ideas and community leadership. One respondent specifically referred to the inclusion of a pregnant contestant. The response suggested that allowing the contestant to participate demonstrated inclusion but also raised questions about how the contestant and her circumstances were handled within the programme. This was not a dominant theme, but it showed that viewers paid attention to how individual women's circumstances were incorporated into the competition. A small number of respondents associated funding with possible limitations. One respondent working in the non-governmental sector stated that the programme appeared donor-funded and that funding usually came with certain limitations. Another stated that all television programmes had sponsors or influential actors and that these relationships could affect how viewers interpreted the message. The respondents did not provide evidence of direct interference in the programme's content. Their comments reflected perceptions of possible influence.

Audience recommendations for future seasons

Respondents provided a broad range of recommendations. These were grouped into the categories shown in Table 12.

Table 12: Audience Recommendations for Future Seasons

Recommendation theme	Examples from responses
Increase diversity and grassroots inclusion	Include young women, marginalised women, informal-sector women and women from all regions
Increase preparation and airtime	Give contestants more time, spread out the season and show fuller presentations
Strengthen post-programme continuity	Continue conversations, follow contestants, profile alumni and avoid long gaps between seasons
Expand community engagement	Show women in their communities and establish county or devolved versions
Strengthen social media and promotion	Increase online visibility, use social media more and promote episodes consistently
Reduce contestant numbers	Allow audiences to know contestants more deeply
Link the show to real leadership pathways	Track contestants who seek office and support finalists after the programme
Include serving women leaders	Involve women already in political and public leadership
Broaden the concept of leadership	Show leadership beyond the presidency and include different public roles
Maintain or strengthen debate and campaign elements	Retain memorable policy debates, campaigns and public engagement
Continue the programme	Produce another season and make the intervention more regular

4.2.6 Triangulated Analysis by Research Objective

The study offered a triangulated analysis of the findings according to the three research objectives. The analysis integrates evidence from the content and discourse analysis of 45

episodes, interviews with five contestants, interviews with three producers, and questionnaire responses from 33 eligible viewers. Triangulation was used to compare findings from different positions within the programme's communication process. The episode analysis provided evidence of what was broadcast; the producer interviews described the intentions and production decisions behind the programme; the contestant interviews captured the experiences of the women who participated; and the audience questionnaire showed how viewers received and assessed the programme. The analysis focused on areas of convergence, complementarity and variation across the four datasets.

Research Objective One: To Examine the Role of Reality Television in Strategic Media Advocacy

The first research objective examined the role played by reality television in strategic media advocacy. Across the four datasets, reality television emerged as a communication format that combined public visibility, personal storytelling, leadership demonstration, civic education, audience participation and entertainment. The programme did not communicate its advocacy message only through direct statements supporting women's leadership. Instead, it placed women in situations where viewers could observe them performing leadership. These situations included policy presentations, group assignments, public debates, institutional visits, political campaigns, community engagements and responses to judges' questions.

Theme 1: Reality television as visible demonstration.

The clearest point of convergence across the datasets was the use of visible demonstration. The episode analysis established that contestants were repeatedly shown undertaking leadership-related activities. They debated public policy, proposed national programmes, interpreted constitutional responsibilities, selected public officials, responded to security challenges, developed campaign messages and engaged citizens. Producer 3 described this communication method as a "show, do not tell" approach. Rather than relying entirely on verbal advocacy messages stating that women could lead, the programme created assignments through which contestants demonstrated leadership qualities. The contestant interviews supported this finding. Participants believed the programme challenged stereotypes because audiences observed women discussing national issues and functioning within demanding leadership settings. Contestants associated the programme's influence with what viewers could

see them doing rather than with general empowerment slogans. Audience findings reflected the same pattern. Respondents most frequently identified debates, policy discussions, presentations, campaigns and pitching exercises as the programme's strongest advocacy elements. One viewer stated that seeing women tackle issues normally perceived as difficult and associated with male leaders was "mind opening." The four datasets therefore converged in identifying visible leadership performance as a central role of the reality television format.

Theme 2: Reality television as entertainment–education.

The programme combined entertainment with governance and leadership education. The episode analysis showed that training on public policy, devolution, international relations, food security, national security, environmental conservation, social welfare and other subjects was incorporated into a competitive reality television structure. Producers confirmed that the format was deliberately designed to attract audiences who might not ordinarily consume formal governance or gender-advocacy content. The competition, personal stories, eliminations and anticipation of a winner provided entertainment, while trainers, field visits, policy assignments and judges' feedback provided educational content. Contestants described the Academy as technically demanding and educational. They reported gaining knowledge in governance, political leadership, communication, policy development and public affairs. Audience respondents also identified training, mentorship, civic education, policy debates and interaction with governance institutions as effective aspects of the programme.

Theme 3: Storytelling and personal identification.

Storytelling was identified across the episode, contestant, producer and audience findings. The episodes included contestants' personal histories, home counties, professional experiences, community initiatives, struggles and leadership ambitions. The later episodes of both seasons gave greater attention to individual profiles and connected personal experiences to campaign agendas. Producers explained that personal stories were intentionally included to distinguish contestants and make their leadership identities understandable to audiences. Contestants on the other hand reported that storytelling allowed the programme to organise their experiences into coherent leadership narratives. Participant 1 explained that a contestant's different experiences could be shaped into a story showing what her future leadership might look like. Audience respondents similarly valued the portrayal of diverse women and their unique

stories, although debates and visible policy performance were more frequently mentioned than personal narratives.

Theme 4: Leadership development as an advocacy narrative.

Reality television allowed audiences to observe contestants' development over time. The episode analysis identified a progression from recruitment and entry into the Academy to group tasks, individual assignments, campaigns and final debates. Contestants were initially framed as learners and gradually presented as public leaders and presidential candidates. Producers confirmed that the Academy and progressive assignments formed the core structure of the programme. The contestants reported increased confidence, communication ability, policy knowledge and clarity of leadership ambition as they progressed through the programme. Additionally, the viewers also recognised this developmental process. Some respondents referred to the courage and leadership positions later pursued by former contestants as evidence of growth associated with participation.

Theme 5: Repetition and sustained framing.

The recurring question, "Is Kenya ready for a female president?", provided a consistent advocacy frame across episodes. The programme title (Ms President), weekly introductions, assignments and final selection repeatedly associated women with presidential leadership. Producers identified this question as central to the programme concept. A key area to note was the contestants reported that the title Miss President continued to shape how communities referred to them even after the programme ended. And as for the audience, they also identified the title as memorable. One respondent stated that the name itself was one of the programme's strongest features, while another said it made the possibility of a female president easier to imagine.

Theme 6: Public participation.

The episode analysis showed that public participation became more visible as contestants progressed towards the finale. Campaigns and public debates allowed audiences to assess contestants beyond the Academy setting. Producers stated that voting and multi-platform engagement were incorporated to encourage active audience involvement. Contestants also used personal social media pages to communicate with supporters and mobilise attention. The

audience respondents recognised public voting and participation as effective advocacy features. One respondent observed that the public was given the opportunity not only to listen but also to vote.

Theme 7: Multi-platform strategic communication.

The programme's advocacy extended beyond scheduled television broadcast. Producers identified television, radio, social media, YouTube and community dialogue as complementary communication channels. Contestants confirmed that they participated in social media communication, radio appearances and community engagement. They also used personal networks to promote their participation. The audience findings showed that 13 of the 33 eligible viewers followed the programme on social media, while 20 did not. Some respondents reported accessing the programme online rather than through mainstream television.

Research Objective Two: To explore how mainstream media and platforms are used for advocacy and leadership efforts

The second research objective examined how mainstream media and related platforms are used for advocacy and leadership efforts. The findings identified both enabling features and structural constraints. Opportunities mainly concerned reach, visibility, credibility, public participation, leadership branding and multi-platform communication. Challenges concerned airtime, unequal visibility, funding, continuity and barriers beyond media exposure.

Theme 1: Opportunities associated with mainstream television.

Mainstream television gave the programme a national public platform. The episode analysis showed that women's leadership content was presented through a structured weekly broadcast rather than restricted to closed training spaces. Producers described television as the principal platform through which the programme could make women's leadership visible to broad audiences. Contestants associated mainstream television with public recognition and professional credibility. While on the other hand the audience responses were more varied. 10 respondents believed mainstream television affected the programme's credibility or effectiveness, 17 said it did not, and 6 were uncertain.

Theme 2: Opportunity for agenda-setting.

The programme brought women's leadership and national governance issues into public entertainment media. Producers selected topics on the basis of current governance issues and national leadership responsibilities. Contestants believed the programme opened conversations in counties and communities that might not otherwise have focused on women's leadership. Audience respondents referred to the show as fresh, unusual and capable of opening people's eyes to women's leadership.

Theme 3: Opportunity for leadership training and exposure.

Mainstream media was linked to a wider training structure. Contestants gained access to trainers, judges, public institutions, diplomats, governance specialists and other women leaders. The episodes showed parts of this training, allowing viewers to observe both the learning process and the final performances. Producers described the Academy as central to the programme rather than an activity undertaken only for television. The audience respondents identified training, mentorship and exposure to governance as effective aspects of the programme.

Theme 4: Opportunity for audience participation.

The programme enabled participation through public voting, social media comments, campaigns, online engagement and audience questions. Audience respondents valued the ability to vote and evaluate contestants. Contestants reported mobilising supporters through counties, community networks and social media. Producers described voting as a mechanism for involving viewers and sustaining interest in the programme.

Theme 5: Limited airtime.

Limited airtime was the most consistently identified media challenge. The episodes compressed extensive training, field visits, research, presentations, judges' feedback and contestant reactions into standard broadcast durations. Producers stated that hours of material had to be reduced to approximately 40-minute episodes. Contestants reported that substantive policy presentations were sometimes shortened, while emotional or elimination-related scenes received greater attention. Audience respondents also observed that contestants had limited time to explain their arguments and that some presentations appeared too short.

Theme 6: Limited digital engagement.

Although the programme used social media, the audience data showed that only 13 of the 33 eligible viewers followed the programme online. Twenty respondents did not follow it on social media. Contestants reported that some digital communication depended on their personal initiative and networks. Audience respondents recommended increased social media use and stronger promotion. Additionally, Contestants, producers and audience respondents all raised concerns about continuity after the programme. Contestants reported that public attention declined and that formal alumni support was limited. Producers acknowledged that follow-up was less structured and visible than the televised Academy. Audience respondents repeatedly stated that they had forgotten the programme until receiving the questionnaire.

Research Objective Three: To Examine How Reality Television Champions Gender Representation

The third research objective examined how reality television champions gender representation. Across the four datasets, Ms. President was found to champion gender representation by placing women at the centre of national leadership narratives and presenting them as capable of occupying political, administrative, diplomatic and community leadership roles.

Theme 1: Positioning women as presidential leaders.

The programme title and recurring question explicitly connected women with presidential leadership. Episode content repeatedly placed contestants in simulated presidential roles. They made appointments, discussed foreign policy, developed national programmes, debated public issues and campaigned for support. Producers confirmed that the presidency was deliberately selected as the central symbolic frame of the programme. Contestants reported that being described as Miss President changed how communities perceived them and reduced the symbolic distance between women and the presidency. Audience responses also showed that the framing made a female presidency more imaginable. One respondent stated that the show enabled her to envision the possibility of a woman president.

Theme 2: Representation of women as competent leaders.

The programme predominantly represented women through knowledge, public speaking, policy analysis and leadership performance. The episode analysis found that contestants addressed various topics of key interest in leadership positions. Producers stated that women's competence was intended to be shown through tasks rather than merely asserted. Contestants believed their performances demonstrated that women could address complex national issues and withstand leadership pressure. Among viewers, 30 of the 33 respondents, representing 90.9%, agreed or strongly agreed that the programme positively portrayed women in leadership.

Theme 3: Challenging masculine ownership of leadership.

The programme placed women in policy areas and institutions commonly associated with male authority. Contestants were not restricted to gender or family topics. They discussed national security, diplomacy, economic matters, constitutional responsibilities and public-sector appointments. Producers explained that the assignments were selected from national governance issues and were not simplified because the participants were women. Contestants interpreted this as a direct challenge to the assumption that only men could deal with difficult political and technical issues. Audience respondents similarly observed that women tackled subjects often perceived as belonging to male leaders.

Theme 4: Diversity of women's representation.

The programme recruited contestants from different counties and professional backgrounds. The episode analysis identified geographic, cultural, occupational and leadership diversity while the producers stated that national recruitment was intended to prevent the programme from representing only Nairobi-based or urban women. The contestants valued the opportunity to interact with women from different regions and communities. They also noted the inclusion of women from marginalised areas and women with disabilities. And the audience respondents referred positively to the diversity and intelligence of contestants and to the visibility of women from their own counties.

Theme 5: Women as learners and developing leaders.

The Academy format represented women as capable of growth. Contestants were shown learning, making mistakes, receiving criticism and improving. Producers deliberately structured the programme around training followed by application. Contestants described increased confidence, communication competence, policy knowledge and leadership clarity. Audience respondents recognised the training and transformation of contestants as important programme features.

Theme 6: Positive representation and reported audience perception.

Audience findings provided direct evidence of how viewers received the gender representation. Thirty respondents, or 90.9%, agreed or strongly agreed that the programme positively portrayed women leaders. Thirty respondents also reported a change in their perceptions of women's leadership.

4.3 Key Findings

The study found that *Ms. President* functioned as a strategic media advocacy intervention by combining reality television, leadership training, storytelling, public participation and civic education. Across the 45 analysed episodes, women were shown engaging in policy presentations, debates, campaigns, institutional visits and public decision-making tasks. Producer interviews confirmed that this visible demonstration was intentional and followed a "show, do not tell" approach. Contestants similarly reported that the programme allowed audiences to observe women performing leadership, while viewers identified debates, presentations, campaigns and policy discussions as the most effective advocacy elements. The programme predominantly portrayed women as competent, knowledgeable, confident and legitimate leaders. Women were shown addressing national issues such as governance, diplomacy, security, devolution, public appointments, food security, climate change and economic challenges. This representation challenged stereotypes that associate political authority and technical policy knowledge mainly with men. Audience findings supported this pattern, with 90.9% of eligible viewers agreeing or strongly agreeing that the programme positively portrayed women in leadership. The same proportion reported a change in their perception of women leaders and indicated that the programme inspired them to support women's leadership or take action.

Additionally, the findings also showed that participation contributed to contestants' leadership development. Contestants reported increased confidence, stronger public-speaking and communication skills, improved governance knowledge, greater clarity of leadership ambition and increased professional visibility. Role modelling was a major strategy, as contestants interacted with women trainers, judges, public officials, diplomats, professionals and former participants. Season One primarily established the visibility and legitimacy of women as potential national leaders, while Season Two placed stronger emphasis on individual policy competence, campaigning and readiness for executive leadership. Mainstream television created opportunities for national visibility, audience participation, public leadership branding and wider discussion of women's leadership. Social media, radio, YouTube and community dialogues extended the programme beyond television, although most eligible viewers did not follow the show on social media. The programme also achieved notable geographic, professional and cultural diversity among contestants. However, audience respondents recommended greater inclusion of grassroots women, informal-sector workers, younger women and participants from marginalised communities. The main challenges identified were limited airtime, extensive editing, short preparation periods, unequal contestant visibility and the tension between advocacy and entertainment. Contestants and viewers felt that policy presentations and personal stories were sometimes compressed, while eliminations and emotional moments received substantial attention. Weak post-programme continuity was also a recurring concern, as contestants, producers and viewers reported declining visibility and limited structured follow-up after broadcast.

4.4 Summary of the Fndings

This chapter presented the findings of the study based on the analysis of data obtained from the content and discourse analysis of *Ms. President* Seasons One and Two, interviews with contestants and producers, and questionnaire responses from members of the viewing public. The findings were presented systematically according to the study objectives and through the different sources of data before being brought together through triangulation.

CHAPTER FIVE
DISCUSSIONS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the discussion of the study findings in relation to the research objectives, the reviewed literature and the theoretical framework that guided the study. The discussion draws upon the findings presented in Chapter Four and examines their significance within the context of media advocacy for women's leadership. Specifically, the findings are discussed in relation to Framing Theory and Social Cognitive Theory, which provide an understanding of how *The Ms President* TV Show constructed and communicated messages about women's leadership and how these representations may have influenced audience perceptions and attitudes. The chapter is organised according to the three research objectives. It begins by discussing the role of reality television in strategic media advocacy, followed by an examination of the opportunities and challenges associated with utilising mainstream media and related platforms for advocacy and leadership efforts. The chapter then discusses how reality television champions gender representation before presenting the overall conclusions of the study, recommendations arising from the findings and suggestions for further research.

5.2 Discussions of Key Findings

The discussion integrates the findings from the content and discourse analysis, contestant interviews, producer interviews and audience questionnaire to examine how they compare with existing empirical evidence and theoretical perspectives. The discussion is organised according to the three research objectives and seeks to demonstrate the study's contribution to the understanding of media advocacy for women's leadership through reality television.

5.2.1 The Role of Reality Television in Strategic Media Advocacy

The first objective of this study sought to examine the role of reality television in strategic media advocacy for women's leadership. The study established that *The Ms President* TV Show employed reality television as an intentional media advocacy platform that combined entertainment, leadership development, civic education and public engagement to promote

positive perceptions of women in leadership. Rather than relying on conventional advocacy techniques such as awareness campaigns, public service announcements or political messaging, the programme embedded advocacy within a competitive reality television format where contestants demonstrated leadership through observable practice (Bazarah, 2025). This finding suggests that reality television can extend beyond its traditional entertainment function to become a participatory medium through which complex governance issues and gender advocacy messages are communicated to wider audiences. This finding is consistent with the concept of media advocacy advanced by Nkemdilim, (2024) and Widodo & Kristiyono (2025), who argue that media advocacy involves the strategic use of mass media to influence public discourse, shape social agendas and support social change.

Unlike traditional media campaigns that often focus on transmitting persuasive messages, media advocacy seeks to influence how society understands particular issues by determining what receives public attention and how those issues are discussed (Nkemdilim, 2024). Throughout *The Ms President show*, women's leadership was consistently positioned as a legitimate public concern rather than a peripheral gender issue. Weekly assignments required contestants to engage with national governance, diplomacy, food security, devolution, climate change, public appointments, constitutional leadership and political campaigns, thereby relocating women from the margins of political discourse to its centre. Consequently, the programme demonstrated that advocacy could occur through sustained media visibility and public engagement rather than through direct persuasion alone.

The study further reinforces scholarship on entertainment-education, which argues that educational and developmental messages become more persuasive when embedded within engaging narratives (Mariani & Ciancia, 2023). Entertainment-education programmes traditionally seek to improve knowledge, attitudes and behaviours by incorporating educational themes into popular media formats (Didi et al., 2022). While *The Ms President* shared these characteristics, the present study suggests that it extended beyond entertainment-education by positioning viewers as active participants in a wider advocacy process. Leadership training, governance discussions and policy presentations were integrated into competitive episodes, while public voting, social media engagement and community dialogue encouraged audiences to move beyond passive consumption towards active reflection on women's political leadership.

This finding broadens existing understandings of entertainment-education by illustrating how reality television can simultaneously educate, entertain and advocate for structural social change. The findings also resonate with previous studies examining media representation and women's political participation. Simon and Hoyt (2013) argue that the visibility of women in political media is fundamental to challenging historical patterns of exclusion because representation influences what societies perceive as politically normal. Similarly, Byerly (2020) contends that media institutions possess significant power to shape public understandings of gender and leadership by determining whose voices become visible within public discourse. Across the analysed episodes, *The Ms President* consistently portrayed women engaging with policy issues traditionally associated with male political leadership. Contestants debated national security, negotiated diplomatic scenarios, addressed governance challenges, developed campaign strategies and proposed national development policies. Such portrayals shifted attention from women's suitability for leadership towards their approaches to leadership, thereby contributing to the normalisation of women's participation in executive political spaces.

However, this study extends previous scholarship by demonstrating that visibility alone was not the programme's primary advocacy mechanism. Across the producer interviews, contestant experiences and audience responses, one communication approach repeatedly emerged: advocacy was achieved through visible performance. Producer 3 described this philosophy as "show, don't tell," emphasising that audiences should witness women exercising leadership rather than simply hear messages encouraging support for women leaders. Contestants similarly reflected that viewers were persuaded because they observed women responding to demanding governance tasks, public debates and leadership challenges. Audience respondents reinforced this interpretation by identifying debates, policy presentations, pitching exercises and campaign activities as the programme's most memorable advocacy elements.

These findings suggest that observable competence functioned as a more persuasive advocacy strategy than direct promotional messaging. The centrality of visible performance is particularly significant when viewed through the lens of Framing Theory**.** Entman (1993) as referenced by Persson (2018) argues that framing involves selecting particular aspects of reality and making them more salient so as to promote a preferred interpretation. In the context of *The Ms President*, producers deliberately framed women not as passive recipients of empowerment

initiatives but as active political actors capable of analysing policy, making decisions, negotiating competing interests and communicating governance priorities. This framing was evident not only through the selection of assignments but also through the language, imagery and narrative progression of the programme. Rather than asking whether women deserved opportunities to lead, the programme repeatedly invited audiences to evaluate how contestants exercised leadership. The symbolic title *Ms President* itself constituted a powerful framing device by associating women directly with the highest political office in the country. Through repeated exposure across two seasons, the programme challenged conventional associations between executive political leadership and masculinity, encouraging audiences to regard women's leadership as both legitimate and attainable.

The findings also provide strong support for Social Cognitive Theory**,** which explains how individuals learn attitudes, values and behaviours through observing credible models (Bandura, 2001). According to Bandura, observational learning occurs when individuals watch others perform behaviours, observe the consequences of those behaviours and subsequently modify their own beliefs or actions. Throughout *The Ms President*, contestants functioned as observable leadership models. Viewers watched them research public issues, formulate policy proposals, participate in debates, negotiate team challenges, interact with public institutions and respond to expert feedback. These repeated observations provided audiences with concrete examples of women performing leadership roles that have historically been dominated by men. Evidence of this observational process is reflected in the audience findings. The overwhelming majority of respondents reported that the programme positively influenced their perceptions of women leaders, while an equal proportion stated that watching the programme inspired them to support women's leadership or strengthened their confidence in women's capacity to lead. Several respondents explained that the programme enabled them to imagine the possibility of a female president for the first time, while others acknowledged that their previous assumptions about women's political capability had changed after observing contestants engage with complex governance issues.

Although the present study did not measure behavioural change over time, these reported shifts in perception are consistent with Social Cognitive Theory's proposition that repeated exposure to positive role models can influence attitudes and expectations. Interestingly, Social

Cognitive Theory also helps explain the experiences of the contestants themselves. Several participants described entering the programme with uncertainty about their own leadership abilities but gradually developing confidence through repeated participation in leadership tasks, interaction with experienced women leaders and observation of fellow contestants. Learning therefore occurred at multiple levels. Contestants learned from trainers, judges and peers, while audiences simultaneously learned from contestants. This multi-directional process expands traditional applications of Social Cognitive Theory by illustrating how reality television creates interconnected learning environments in which participants and audiences become both observers and models of behaviour. The relationship between Framing Theory and Social Cognitive Theory is particularly evident in explaining the programme's advocacy function. Framing Theory explains how producers deliberately constructed women as competent political leaders through repeated portrayals of governance, policy expertise and executive decision-making (Brantner et al., 2012). Social Cognitive Theory complements this explanation by illustrating how those repeated portrayals became opportunities for observational learning among audiences (Stefanone et al., 2019). Together, the two theories provide a comprehensive explanation of the programme's media advocacy process: women were first strategically framed as credible leaders, after which audiences repeatedly observed these framed representations through the reality television format. The convergence of strategic framing and observational learning therefore strengthened the programme's capacity to challenge stereotypes and encourage more positive perceptions of women's leadership.

Although the study demonstrates the considerable potential of reality television as a media advocacy platform, it also reveals inherent tensions within the format. Previous scholars have argued that reality television continually negotiates the competing demands of authenticity and entertainment (Hill et al., 2019). The findings of this study support that position. Producers acknowledged that hours of leadership training and governance discussions had to be condensed into broadcast episodes, while contestants expressed concern that editing sometimes prioritised emotional moments and eliminations over substantive policy discussions. Audience respondents similarly recommended longer episodes and more detailed coverage of contestants' leadership journeys. These observations suggest that while reality television creates valuable opportunities for advocacy through visibility and engagement, its effectiveness is simultaneously shaped by

commercial production requirements, audience expectations and broadcasting constraints. Despite these limitations, the study demonstrates that *Ms President* contributes a distinctive model of media advocacy within the field of development communication. Rather than separating advocacy from entertainment, the programme integrated governance education, leadership development, storytelling and public participation into a single media intervention. This integration enabled audiences not only to receive messages about women's leadership but also to observe, evaluate and engage with women exercising leadership over an extended period. The study therefore argues that reality television possesses significant potential as a strategic media advocacy platform capable of expanding public discourse on women's leadership while simultaneously providing audiences with credible role models through which new understandings of political leadership can be developed.

5.2.2 Mainstream Media and Platforms for Advocacy and Leadership Efforts

The second objective of this study sought to explore how mainstream media and related communication platforms are used for advocacy and leadership efforts. The study established that *The Ms President* TV Show created significant opportunities for advancing media advocacy by providing women with national visibility, increasing public engagement, facilitating leadership development and stimulating conversations on women's political participation. However, the findings also revealed that the effectiveness of mainstream media advocacy was shaped by structural and production-related challenges, including limited airtime, selective editing, funding constraints, unequal contestant visibility, limited post-programme continuity and the competing demands of advocacy and entertainment. These findings suggest that while mainstream media possesses considerable potential as an advocacy platform, its effectiveness depends on how media institutions, producers and other stakeholders negotiate these opportunities and constraints.

One of the most significant opportunities identified by this study was the ability of mainstream television to amplify issues of women's leadership to a national audience. Media advocacy scholars argue that the greatest strength of mass media lies in its agenda-setting capacity, whereby issues repeatedly presented in the media become matters of public concern (Tendengu, 2021). Although agenda-setting theory was not adopted as one of the guiding

theories for this study, its central proposition helps explain how repeated television exposure elevated discussions on women's leadership from specialised gender forums to mainstream public discourse (McCombs & Valenzuela, 2007). Through weekly broadcasts, *The Ms President* consistently foregrounded women's participation in governance, executive leadership and political decision-making, thereby increasing the visibility of issues that have historically received limited attention within Kenyan political media. This finding supports previous research which has shown that mainstream media plays an important role in shaping public awareness of governance and social development issues (Couldry et al., 2018).

Development communication scholars have increasingly argued that media should not merely report social issues but should actively facilitate public dialogue around them (Servaes, 2007; Couldry et al., 2018). The present study demonstrates this role by showing that *The Ms President* transformed discussions about women's political leadership into sustained public conversations that extended beyond the television screen through social media, community dialogue sessions and public engagement activities. Contestants reported receiving recognition within their communities, producers intentionally designed multiple engagement platforms beyond television, and audience respondents acknowledged that the programme initiated conversations about women's leadership within families, workplaces and local communities.

An equally important opportunity identified by the study was the creation of public leadership identities for women. Previous scholarship suggests that visibility is itself a form of political power because individuals who are consistently represented in public discourse become recognised as legitimate participants within that discourse (Byerly, 2020). Throughout *The Ms President*, contestants were not simply participants in a television competition; they became publicly recognised leadership figures. Their identities were constructed through repeated appearances, county representation, personal storytelling, policy presentations and campaign activities. Several contestants explained that they continued to be recognised as "Miss President" long after the programme ended and that this public identity opened opportunities for board appointments, leadership positions, professional engagements and community initiatives. In this respect, mainstream media functioned not only as a communication channel but also as a platform for leadership branding. These findings extend existing literature by demonstrating that media advocacy can produce tangible professional opportunities in addition to influencing public

discourse. Whereas previous studies have primarily examined media advocacy in terms of awareness creation or attitude change (Nkemdilim, 2024), the findings from this study indicate that media visibility may also generate personal leadership capital. Contestants reported that participation enhanced their professional credibility, expanded their networks and increased their confidence to pursue leadership opportunities. The programme therefore functioned as both an advocacy intervention and a platform for developing public leadership profiles. The findings also illustrate the opportunities created through the convergence of multiple communication platforms. Modern advocacy increasingly relies on integrated communication strategies rather than single-media interventions (E. Morgan & Hacker, 2014). Consistent with this perspective, producers explained that television broadcasts were complemented by radio discussions, social media engagement, YouTube distribution and community dialogue forums. Each platform served different communication functions. Television provided national visibility; radio facilitated discussion among local audiences; social media encouraged continuous interaction and audience participation; while community dialogues contextualised the programme's messages within local realities. This integrated communication strategy reflects contemporary understandings of media advocacy, which emphasise combining traditional and digital media to maximise audience reach and engagement.

However, despite these opportunities, the study also identified important challenges that affected the programme's advocacy effectiveness. The most consistently reported challenge across all four datasets was limited airtime. Contestants, producers, episode analysis and audience responses all indicated that substantial amounts of leadership training, policy discussion and community engagement had to be condensed into standard television episodes. As a result, many complex discussions and leadership processes could only be partially represented. Producers acknowledged that several hours of training, research and presentations were often reduced to approximately fifty-two minutes of broadcast content, requiring difficult editorial decisions regarding what audiences would ultimately see. These findings correspond with observations by Hill et al. (2019), who argues that reality television is fundamentally shaped by production imperatives that require extensive editing and narrative simplification. Unlike documentary formats that prioritise completeness, reality television constructs coherent stories by selecting particular events, personalities and emotional moments. The findings of this study

confirm this position. Contestants frequently expressed concern that important policy discussions and leadership ideas received less attention than eliminations, emotional reactions or competitive moments. Audience respondents similarly recommended longer episodes and more detailed presentation of contestants' work. Consequently, while editing was necessary for television production, it simultaneously constrained the depth with which advocacy messages could be communicated. From the perspective of Framing Theory, these editorial decisions are particularly significant because framing does not only involve what is presented but also what is omitted. Persson (2018) while discussing Entman (1993) argues that media frames emphasise particular aspects of reality while simultaneously downplaying others. The producers' decisions regarding which debates, assignments, contestant reactions and judges' comments were included in each episode inevitably influenced how audiences interpreted contestants and leadership itself. Although the programme consistently framed women positively, contestants who received limited screen time had fewer opportunities to demonstrate their capabilities publicly. Similarly, complex policy discussions were often simplified to fit broadcast requirements. The findings therefore suggest that media advocacy through mainstream television is shaped not only by message design but also by the practical realities of media production. The findings equally align with Social Cognitive Theory**,** which emphasises that observational learning depends upon sustained exposure to credible behavioural models (Bandura, 1989, 2001).

While *The Ms President* provided audiences with positive leadership models, limited airtime inevitably restricted the amount of behaviour available for observation. Contestants who advanced further in the competition received greater visibility and therefore functioned as more prominent role models than contestants eliminated during earlier stages. Similarly, shortened policy presentations reduced opportunities for audiences to observe detailed leadership reasoning and decision-making processes. These findings suggest that the effectiveness of observational learning within media advocacy is partly dependent upon the quantity and quality of exposure that media platforms provide.

Another significant challenge identified by the study concerns the relationship between advocacy objectives and entertainment requirements. Reality television must simultaneously educate, advocate and entertain in order to remain commercially viable. Producers acknowledged that emotional narratives, competitive tension and elimination episodes were necessary to sustain

audience interest. However, contestants believed that these elements occasionally overshadowed substantive leadership discussions. Audience respondents echoed this concern, with several suggesting that policy debates and community work deserved more airtime than dramatic eliminations. Similar tensions have been identified by Skeggs and Wood (2012), who argues that reality television frequently balances educational intentions against audience expectations for emotional engagement and entertainment. The findings from this study suggest that advocacy-oriented reality television must continually negotiate this balance without compromising either audience engagement or message integrity. The study further identified funding and institutional support as important determinants of media advocacy. Producers explained that financial resources influenced programme length, travel, field activities, promotion, community engagement and follow-up initiatives. The reduction in the number of episodes between Seasons One and Two reflected some of these resource limitations.

Existing development communication literature similarly recognises that advocacy interventions frequently depend upon sustained institutional and financial investment (Odoom, 2020). Limited resources may therefore constrain not only programme production but also long-term advocacy impact through reduced continuity, follow-up and audience engagement. An additional challenge emerging from the findings concerns sustaining advocacy beyond broadcast. Although contestants experienced considerable visibility during the programme, many reported that structured engagement declined after the competition ended. Audience respondents similarly indicated that they had largely forgotten about the programme until participating in this study, and many recommended stronger follow-up with former contestants, alumni networks and continued public profiling. These findings suggest that while mainstream television effectively initiates advocacy conversations, maintaining those conversations requires longer-term communication strategies that extend beyond a single broadcast season. Contemporary advocacy literature increasingly recognises that social change is rarely achieved through isolated media events but requires sustained communication over time (Nkemdilim, 2024). The findings of this study reinforce this position.

The audience findings also provide an interesting perspective on the role of mainstream media itself. Although respondents overwhelmingly viewed the programme positively, opinions differed regarding whether mainstream television enhanced its credibility. Some participants

believed national television increased legitimacy by exposing contestants to broader audiences and public scrutiny. Others argued that the programme's credibility depended more on the quality of its content than on the broadcasting platform. This distinction is important because it suggests that audiences evaluate advocacy messages not only according to the medium through which they are delivered but also according to the authenticity, competence and consistency of the representations they observe.

Despite these challenges, the evidence indicates that mainstream media remains a powerful platform for advocacy when strategically designed. The convergence of television, social media, radio and community engagement enabled *The Ms President* to reach audiences through multiple channels while reinforcing consistent advocacy messages. The study therefore supports the growing recognition within development communication that integrated media approaches are more likely to sustain public engagement than reliance on a single communication platform (Esiere & Obot, 2014). However, the findings also demonstrate that media advocacy requires careful attention to production decisions, editorial practices, resource allocation and post-broadcast engagement if its long-term objectives are to be realised.

5.2.3 Reality Television as a Champion of Gender Representation

The third objective of this study sought to examine how reality television champions gender representation. The findings demonstrate that *The Ms President* TV Show employed reality television not merely to increase the visibility of women but to deliberately reconstruct public perceptions of women as legitimate political leaders. Throughout the programme, women were consistently presented as decision-makers, policy thinkers, negotiators, campaign strategists and community leaders. Rather than limiting female contestants to traditionally feminised issues, the programme situated them within discussions on governance, constitutional leadership, diplomacy, national security, public finance, devolution, environmental conservation and economic development. These portrayals positioned women as capable participants in national decision-making and challenged dominant assumptions that political leadership is inherently masculine. These findings support existing scholarship on gender and media representation, which argues that the media plays a critical role in constructing social understandings of gender

and leadership. Albadri (2024) observes that media representations significantly influence public perceptions of who is considered suitable for political office.

Historically, women have often been underrepresented in political media or portrayed through stereotypical frames emphasising personality, appearance or family roles rather than competence and leadership. Similarly, Byerly (2020) argues that the persistent marginalisation of women in media contributes to unequal political participation by reinforcing the perception that leadership is primarily a male domain. The present study supports these observations while demonstrating that *The Ms President* deliberately adopted an alternative representational approach by consistently foregrounding women's competence, expertise and leadership potential. Unlike many media portrayals that focus primarily on the challenges women encounter in politics, *The Ms President* centred its narrative on women's capacity to lead. Across both analysed seasons, contestants were required to solve governance problems, present policy proposals, defend political positions, participate in executive simulations and engage with national institutions.

Although issues such as gender discrimination and structural barriers were acknowledged, they did not dominate the programme's narrative. Instead, the emphasis remained on demonstrating women's leadership capabilities through action. This distinction is particularly important because it shifts media advocacy from portraying women primarily as victims requiring empowerment towards portraying them as leaders already capable of exercising political authority. This finding contributes to a growing body of literature suggesting that positive media representation can challenge entrenched gender stereotypes. According to Kizi (2026), balanced representation of women in media contributes to greater public acceptance of women's participation in leadership by normalising their presence within decision-making spaces. Likewise, Istiqomah (2024) argues that media representations influence both societal expectations and women's own leadership aspirations. The present study reinforces these observations by showing that positive representation was not confined to symbolic inclusion but was reinforced through repeated demonstrations of leadership competence.

A particularly important finding emerging from this study is that gender representation was achieved through repeated exposure rather than isolated examples. Contestants appeared

across multiple episodes undertaking progressively complex leadership tasks. Rather than presenting a single successful woman leader, the programme introduced numerous contestants from different counties, professions, educational backgrounds and personal experiences. Viewers therefore encountered repeated examples of women demonstrating leadership under different circumstances. This repetition distinguished *The Ms President* from conventional political media coverage, where women often receive intermittent or event-driven visibility. The study also highlights the importance of diversity in strengthening gender representation. Producers intentionally recruited contestants from different regions of Kenya, while the episodes presented women from diverse professional, cultural and social backgrounds. Contestants similarly described the programme as bringing together women with different leadership experiences who learned from one another throughout the Academy. Audience respondents appreciated this diversity and frequently referred to seeing women "from all characters and cadres" participating in national leadership discussions. These findings align with intersectional perspectives on gender representation, which argue that meaningful representation requires recognising diversity among women rather than treating women as a homogeneous category (Carastathis, 2014). Although the programme did not represent every social category equally, it broadened public understandings of who could occupy leadership spaces.

The findings are strongly explained through Framing Theory. D'Angelo (2019) argues that media framing shapes how audiences understand issues by selecting certain aspects of reality and making them more salient than others. Throughout *The Ms President*, producers consistently selected frames that associated women with competence, preparedness, resilience and public leadership. Leadership was repeatedly framed as a matter of knowledge, integrity, policy understanding and service rather than gender. Contestants were evaluated according to the quality of their arguments, governance proposals, communication skills and decision-making rather than according to stereotypes associated with femininity. Even where contestants disagreed, struggled or made mistakes, these moments were framed as part of leadership development rather than evidence of women's unsuitability for political office.

The programme title itself illustrates the operation of framing. By combining the title "Ms." with "President," the programme immediately challenged dominant political imagery in which presidential authority is frequently associated with men. The title repeatedly invited

audiences to imagine women occupying the country's highest political office. This symbolic framing was reinforced throughout both seasons as contestants engaged in presidential debates, campaign simulations, policy presentations and executive decision-making exercises. Consequently, the programme shifted public attention away from questioning whether women belong in leadership towards evaluating the different leadership approaches demonstrated by individual contestants. Framing was also evident in the programme's deliberate selection of issue areas. Rather than confining women to discussions traditionally associated with gender, contestants engaged with subjects such as international relations, constitutional governance, public appointments, national security, economic planning and environmental sustainability. These repeated portrayals challenged traditional media frames that often associate women primarily with social welfare, education or family-related concerns. Instead, *The Ms President* constructed a broader frame in which women were presented as leaders capable of addressing the full range of national governance responsibilities. The findings similarly align with Social Cognitive Theory**,** which explains how individuals develop attitudes and expectations through observing credible role (Bandura, 1989, 2001; Kolodziej, 2015).

The contestants served as visible models of female leadership whose actions, communication styles and problem-solving approaches were repeatedly observed by audiences. Unlike fictional characters, contestants were real women confronting realistic governance challenges, making their performances particularly relevant for observational learning. Through repeated observation, viewers were exposed to women demonstrating confidence, public speaking, negotiation, teamwork and policy analysis. Evidence supporting this process emerged strongly within the audience findings. A substantial majority of respondents reported that the programme positively influenced their perceptions of women leaders. Several respondents explicitly stated that the programme enabled them to recognise women's leadership capabilities, while others acknowledged changing previous assumptions that political leadership was primarily a male responsibility. One respondent explained that the programme demonstrated that women "only need that door opened and a little support" to lead effectively, while another indicated that watching contestants discuss issues traditionally associated with male politicians fundamentally changed their perception of women's leadership potential. These responses are

consistent with Bandura's proposition that repeated observation of competent models can influence attitudes and expectations.

The contestant interviews further extend the explanatory value of Social Cognitive Theory. Participants consistently reported learning from observing fellow contestants, trainers, judges and established women leaders throughout the programme. Leadership development therefore occurred through continuous observation as well as direct participation. Several contestants described entering the programme uncertain about their own leadership abilities but gradually becoming more confident after witnessing women with similar backgrounds successfully complete demanding assignments. This suggests that observational learning operated not only among television audiences but also within the programme itself, creating a dynamic learning environment in which participants simultaneously functioned as observers and models. An important contribution of this study lies in demonstrating how Framing Theory and Social Cognitive Theory operate together in explaining gender representation. Framing Theory explains how producers intentionally constructed positive portrayals of women leaders by selecting particular narratives, assignments and leadership images (Persson, 2018). Social Cognitive Theory explains how repeated exposure to those portrayals provided audiences with opportunities to revise existing beliefs and develop new expectations regarding women's leadership (Stefanone et al., 2019). The relationship between these theories is therefore complementary. Positive framing created favourable representations, while observational learning provided a mechanism through which those representations could influence audience perceptions.

Despite the programme's predominantly positive representation of women, the findings also reveal several limitations. Contestants and producers acknowledged that editing decisions sometimes resulted in unequal visibility, with finalists receiving substantially greater exposure than participants eliminated during earlier stages. Audience respondents similarly recommended more comprehensive coverage of contestants' personal leadership journeys and greater inclusion of grassroots women, younger women and women from marginalised communities. These observations suggest that although *The Ms President* significantly broadened media representation of women leaders, opportunities remain to expand the diversity and depth of future representations. The findings also indicate that positive media representation alone cannot

eliminate structural barriers to women's leadership. Contestants consistently identified challenges such as political financing, party nomination processes, limited professional networks and societal expectations that extended beyond the influence of television. These findings correspond with previous scholarship arguing that media representation is an important but insufficient condition for achieving gender equality in political leadership (Albadri, 2024; Hoewe & Sherrill, 2019; Santoniccolo et al., 2023). Media advocacy can challenge stereotypes, increase visibility and influence public attitudes, but wider institutional, political and socio-cultural factors continue to shape women's leadership opportunities.

Nevertheless, the study demonstrates that *The Ms President* represents an important example of how reality television can contribute to gender-transformative media advocacy. By consistently framing women as competent political actors, providing audiences with repeated opportunities to observe women exercising leadership, and creating public visibility for diverse female leaders, the programme challenged dominant gender narratives within Kenyan political media. Rather than positioning women as exceptions within leadership spaces, the programme normalised their presence and encouraged audiences to evaluate leadership on the basis of competence, integrity and vision rather than gender.

5.3 Conclusion

This study sought to examine media advocacy for women's leadership using *The Ms President* TV Show as a case study. Specifically, the study examined the role of reality television in strategic media advocacy, explored the opportunities and challenges associated with utilising mainstream media and related platforms for advocacy and leadership efforts, and examined how reality television champions gender representation. Using a qualitative case-study approach that triangulated content and discourse analysis of 45 episodes, interviews with contestants and producers, and audience questionnaire responses, the study generated a comprehensive understanding of how reality television functions as a media advocacy intervention within the Kenyan context. In relation to the first objective, the study concludes that reality television can function as strategic media advocacy when advocacy is embedded in visible leadership performance, storytelling, role modelling and participation. In relation to the second objective, mainstream television expanded reach and visibility, but its advocacy value was shaped by

airtime, editing, digital integration and post-programme continuity. In relation to the third objective, The Ms President predominantly challenged gender stereotypes by repeatedly framing women as competent, presidential and technically capable leaders. The study concludes that reality television can serve as an effective platform for media advocacy when intentionally designed to communicate social change objectives alongside entertainment.

The Ms President TV Show demonstrated that advocacy does not necessarily depend on direct persuasive messaging or awareness campaigns alone. Instead, advocacy can be achieved by creating sustained public visibility for women leaders, providing opportunities for audiences to observe women exercising leadership, and framing leadership as a matter of competence rather than gender. Through debates, governance simulations, policy presentations, community engagement activities and leadership training, the programme transformed advocacy into a participatory communication process that encouraged audiences to engage critically with issues of women's political leadership. The study further concludes that mainstream media provides significant opportunities for advancing women's leadership advocacy by increasing visibility, stimulating public dialogue, creating leadership role models and expanding access to governance discussions. Television, complemented by social media, radio and community engagement, enabled the programme to reach audiences through multiple communication channels while strengthening public recognition of women leaders. Participation in the programme also contributed to contestants' leadership development by enhancing their confidence, communication skills, governance knowledge and public profiles. These findings demonstrate that media advocacy can influence not only public discourse but also the personal and professional development of those directly involved in advocacy initiatives.

However, the study also concludes that the effectiveness of media advocacy is influenced by structural and institutional factors that extend beyond the media itself. Production constraints such as limited airtime, selective editing, funding limitations and the need to balance advocacy objectives with entertainment requirements affected how leadership narratives were communicated to audiences. Furthermore, while the programme generated considerable public visibility during broadcast, the limited continuity of structured post-programme engagement reduced opportunities for sustaining public attention and supporting contestants beyond the

televised competition. The study therefore concludes that successful media advocacy requires long-term communication strategies that extend beyond the duration of a media intervention.

Regarding gender representation, the study concludes that *The Ms President* TV Show challenged conventional representations of women in political leadership by consistently portraying women as knowledgeable, capable and legitimate leaders. Rather than positioning women as passive beneficiaries of empowerment initiatives, the programme represented them as active decision-makers capable of addressing complex governance challenges and occupying the country's highest leadership positions. The programme also broadened public understandings of women's leadership by presenting contestants from diverse counties, professional backgrounds and life experiences, thereby demonstrating that leadership potential exists across different social and cultural contexts. Although opportunities remain to strengthen the representation of grassroots women and other underrepresented groups, the study concludes that the programme made a meaningful contribution towards normalising women's presence within political leadership discourse. The study further concludes that the combined application of Framing Theory and Social Cognitive Theory provides a useful framework for understanding media advocacy for women's leadership. Framing Theory explains how *The Ms President* strategically constructed positive representations of women leaders by consistently emphasising competence, integrity, policy expertise and leadership capability. Social Cognitive Theory complements this explanation by demonstrating how audiences may develop new attitudes and expectations through repeated observation of credible female leadership models. Together, these theories explain both the construction of advocacy messages and the processes through which those messages may influence public perceptions of women's leadership.

Overall, this study concludes that *The Ms President* TV Show represents an innovative model of media advocacy within the field of development communication. By integrating reality television, leadership development, civic education, storytelling and audience participation, the programme demonstrated that entertainment media can contribute meaningfully to advocacy for women's leadership. Rather than separating advocacy from popular media, the programme illustrated how mainstream television can be used strategically to challenge gender stereotypes, expand public discourse and create opportunities for audiences to engage with alternative representations of political leadership.

Finally, the study concludes that while media advocacy alone cannot eliminate the structural, political and socio-cultural barriers that continue to limit women's participation in leadership, it constitutes an important component of broader efforts to promote gender equality in public life. The findings suggest that strategically designed media interventions have the potential to influence public attitudes, strengthen positive representations of women leaders and contribute to creating an environment that is more supportive of women's participation in leadership. Consequently, *The Ms President* TV Show demonstrates the value of reality television not only as a source of entertainment but also as a practical development communication tool capable of advancing media advocacy for women's leadership in Kenya.

5.4 Recommendations

Based on the overall findings of this study, it is recommended that reality television be recognised as a legitimate development communication and media advocacy tool capable of supporting women's leadership initiatives. Stakeholders in media, government, academia and civil society should work collaboratively to develop and sustain innovative media interventions that not only increase women's visibility but also provide practical opportunities for leadership development, public engagement and positive gender representation. Such collaborative efforts would contribute to strengthening media advocacy as a strategic approach for promoting women's leadership and advancing gender equality in Kenya. The recommendations derived from the study are intended to enhance the use of media advocacy for promoting women's leadership in Kenya. They are directed to key stakeholders involved in media production, governance, policy, development communication and leadership development.

5.4.1 Recommendations for Television Producers and Content Developers

The study established that *The Ms President* TV Show successfully utilised reality television as a media advocacy platform by portraying women as competent, knowledgeable and capable leaders. Future productions should therefore continue investing in reality television formats that intentionally integrate leadership development, civic education and advocacy objectives. Producers should move beyond conventional entertainment programming and develop content that addresses contemporary social and governance challenges while

maintaining audience engagement. The findings further showed that limited airtime constrained the depth of policy discussions, leadership demonstrations and contestant profiles. It is therefore recommended that future seasons allocate more time to governance assignments, policy debates and leadership reflections to allow audiences to gain a deeper understanding of contestants' ideas and leadership approaches. Producers should also consider reducing the number of contestants per season or restructuring episodes to provide more balanced visibility among participants.

The study also recommends strengthening post-programme engagement. Rather than ending communication once the competition concludes, producers should establish structured alumni programmes that showcase contestants' leadership journeys, community initiatives and professional achievements. Regular follow-up documentaries, digital content and leadership forums would sustain public interest while reinforcing the programme's advocacy objectives. In addition, producers should strengthen audience engagement through integrated communication strategies that combine television broadcasts with social media campaigns, podcasts, digital discussions and community outreach activities. Such multi-platform approaches would increase audience interaction and extend advocacy messages beyond scheduled television broadcasts.

5.4.2 Recommendations for Media Houses and Broadcasters

Media organisations should recognise reality television as a viable platform for development communication and media advocacy. Broadcasters are encouraged to support programmes that address governance, gender equality, youth leadership and other national development priorities while remaining accessible and engaging to diverse audiences. The study also recommends that broadcasters allocate favourable scheduling and promotional support to advocacy-oriented programmes in order to increase audience reach and participation. Greater investment in promotional campaigns before, during and after broadcast would enhance programme visibility and strengthen public engagement with advocacy messages. Media houses should further diversify representations of women in news and entertainment programming by consistently portraying women as leaders, professionals, innovators and decision-makers. Such representations would complement advocacy initiatives like *The Ms President* and contribute to normalising women's participation in leadership across different media genres.

5.4.3 Recommendations for Government and Policy Makers

The Government of Kenya, particularly institutions responsible for gender equality, governance and public communication, should collaborate with media organisations to support initiatives that promote women's leadership through strategic media advocacy. Programmes such as *The Ms President* provide practical opportunities for translating national commitments on gender equality into public communication interventions that reach broad audiences. Government agencies should also strengthen partnerships between media organisations, leadership institutions and public agencies to create pathways through which participants in leadership advocacy programmes can access mentorship, internships, leadership fellowships and public service opportunities. Such partnerships would enhance the sustainability of leadership development beyond media participation. In addition, policymakers should continue supporting policies that encourage balanced and equitable representation of women within mainstream media. Strengthening policy implementation on gender-responsive media practices would contribute to creating a media environment that consistently promotes positive portrayals of women in leadership.

5.4.4 Recommendations for Development Partners and Civil Society Organisations

Development partners, civil society organisations and organisations working in governance, democracy and gender equality should consider media advocacy as an integral component of leadership development initiatives. The study demonstrates that reality television has the potential to complement conventional advocacy approaches by reaching wider audiences and stimulating public dialogue on women's leadership. Development partners on the other hand should provide financial and technical support for programmes that combine leadership training with strategic media engagement. Such support would enable longer programme seasons, stronger community outreach, wider digital engagement and sustained post-programme follow-up. Civil society organisations should also collaborate with media producers to develop complementary advocacy activities, including public dialogues, leadership forums, mentorship programmes and civic education initiatives that reinforce the messages communicated through television programmes.

5.4.5 Recommendations for Women Aspiring to Leadership

Women aspiring to leadership should strategically utilise mainstream and digital media to increase their visibility, communicate their leadership agendas and engage with citizens. The findings indicate that media exposure can contribute significantly to leadership confidence, public recognition and professional opportunities when combined with demonstrated competence and continuous learning. Aspiring women leaders should also take advantage of mentorship opportunities, leadership training programmes and professional networks that strengthen their governance knowledge, communication skills and public engagement capacities. Media visibility is most effective when supported by substantive leadership competence and sustained community involvement.

5.4.6 Recommendations for Academic Institutions and Leadership Training Organisations

Universities, leadership academies and training institutions should integrate media advocacy into leadership development programmes. The findings of this study demonstrate that communication, media engagement and public visibility are increasingly important components of effective leadership, particularly within democratic societies where public perception significantly influences leadership legitimacy. Institutions offering communication, media studies, political science, governance and leadership programmes should incorporate practical training on strategic media engagement, public communication and media advocacy. Such training would prepare future leaders to communicate effectively through both traditional and digital media platforms. Leadership development institutions should also establish collaborations with media organisations to create experiential learning opportunities that expose emerging leaders to real-world communication and advocacy environments.

5.5 Suggestions for Further Studies

While this study offers an in-depth understanding of The Ms President TV Show as a media advocacy intervention for women's leadership in Kenya, further research using comparative, longitudinal and broader audience approaches could establish whether the patterns identified are sustained over time, transferable to other media programmes and contexts, and associated with longer-term changes in attitudes, leadership aspirations and participation. These

areas for further research arise directly from the scope and limitations of the present study and provide opportunities to extend its contribution.

Thus, areas for further study include:

1. Comparative studies on different reality television programmes in Kenya and other African countries to examine their effectiveness as media advocacy tools for promoting women's leadership.
2. Longitudinal studies to assess the long-term influence of media advocacy interventions on public attitudes, voting behaviour and support for women leaders.
3. Studies examining the effectiveness of other media platforms, including social media, podcasts, online streaming platforms and digital advocacy campaigns, in promoting women's leadership and gender equality.
4. Comparative cross-country studies exploring how different political, cultural and media environments influence the effectiveness of media advocacy initiatives for women's leadership.
5. Research involving a broader range of stakeholders, including policymakers, broadcasters, media regulators, political parties and development partners, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the institutional factors influencing media advocacy.
6. Longitudinal studies tracking the leadership trajectories of contestants who participate in leadership-oriented reality television programmes to assess the long-term impact of such programmes on leadership development and public participation.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Consent Form

Title of Study: Media Advocacy for Women Leadership: A Case Study of the Ms President TV Show in Kenya

Introduction

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted as part of my academic work. Your participation will help explore how reality TV promotes women's leadership and empowerment through advocacy communication. Participation is voluntary, and you are free to withdraw at any time. This study aims to examine how reality TV shows, specifically *Ms. President*, influence perceptions and attitudes toward women in leadership roles.

What You Will Be Asked to Do:

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to:

1. Complete a questionnaire that explores your perceptions and engagement with the *Ms. President* TV show.
2. Participate in an interview (if applicable), where you will be asked about your experiences and views related to the show.

Confidentiality and Risk

Your identity will remain confidential. All data will be anonymized in any reports, publications, or presentations. There are no anticipated risks to participating in this study.

Consent Statement

By signing below, you indicate that you have read and understood the information provided above, you voluntarily agree to participate in this study, and you are at least 18 years of age.

Participant's Name:

Signature:

Date:

Researcher’s Name:

Signature:

Date:

Appendix 2: Interview Guide for Participants of the Ms. President Show

Introduction:

Interviewer will introduce themself and the purpose of the interview. Then assure the participant of confidentiality and the right to withdraw at any time. Interviewer will also seek consent to record the interview.

Interview Questions:

Section A: Demographic Information

1. Age: [ ] 18-24 [ ] 25-34 [ ] 35-44 [ ] 45 and above
2. Gender: [ ] Male [ ] Female [ ] Other
3. Occupation: _____

Section B: Background Information

1. Can you tell me a bit about yourself and your experience participating in the Ms. President show?
2. What motivated you to participate in the show?

Section C: Perceptions of the Show's Impact

3. How do you think the show portrayed women in leadership?

4. In your opinion, how effective was the show in challenging gender stereotypes?

5. Have you noticed any personal changes in your confidence, leadership skills, or public speaking since joining the show?

Section D: Advocacy Strategies and Communication Tools

6. What communication strategies do you think the show employed to advocate for women in leadership?

7. How does the use of storytelling and personal narratives influence viewers' perceptions?

8. What do you think worked well in the show's format for advocacy? What could be improved?

Section E: Audience Engagement and Feedback

9. How have you engaged with the show's audience, and what feedback have you received?

10. Do you think the show has influenced viewers' attitudes towards women in leadership? Can you provide examples?

Section F: Challenges and Recommendations

11. From your experience, were there any limitations or constraints imposed by television production processes, media platforms, or public expectations that affected how women's leadership was portrayed on the show?

12. What challenges have you faced as a participant in advocating for women's leadership?

13. What recommendations would you make to enhance the show's impact on women's empowerment?

Appendix 3: Interview Guide for Show Organizers and Production Staff

Introduction

Interviewer will introduce themself and explain the purpose of the interview and ensure confidentiality and obtain consent for participation and recording.

Interview Questions:

Section A: Demographic Information

4. Age: [ ] 18-24 [ ] 25-34 [ ] 35-44 [ ] 45 and above
5. Gender: [ ] Male [ ] Female [ ] Other
6. Occupation:

Section B: Background and Role

1. What was your role in the production of the Ms. President show?
2. What inspired the creation of this show?

Section C: Communication Strategies and Advocacy Approaches

3. What were the main communication strategies used in the show to promote women's empowerment and leadership?

4. How did you select and develop content that aligns with the show's advocacy goals?

Section D: Audience Reach and Impact

5. How did you measure the impact of the show on the audience's perceptions and attitudes?

6. What feedback have you received from viewers about the show's content?

Section E: Challenges and Improvements

7. What challenges did you encounter in producing content that effectively communicates the intended advocacy message?
8. How did factors such as broadcaster expectations, audience ratings, sponsorship interests, or platform regulations influence the advocacy messages embedded in the show?

9. In your opinion, what improvements could be made to enhance the advocacy impact of the show?

Appendix 4: Questionnaire for Viewers of the Ms. President Show

Section A: Demographic Information

1. Age: [ ] 18-24 [ ] 25-34 [ ] 35-44 [ ] 45 and above
2. Gender: [ ] Male [ ] Female [ ] Other
3. Occupation: _____

Section B: Viewing and Engagement

4. How often did you watch the Ms. President show?

[ ] Always [ ] Often [ ] Sometimes [ ] Rarely [ ] Never

5. Did you follow the show on social media?

[ ] Yes [ ] No

Section C: Perceptions and Impact

6. To what extent do you agree with the statement: "The show positively portrays women in leadership."

[ ] Strongly Agree [ ] Agree [ ] Neutral [ ] Disagree [ ] Strongly Disagree

7. Have you noticed any changes in your perception of women leaders after watching the show?

[ ] Yes [ ] No

If yes, please explain: _____

Section D: Influence and Advocacy

8. Has the show inspired you to support women's leadership or take action in your community?

[ ] Yes [ ] No

1. What aspects of the show do you think are most effective in advocating for women's empowerment?
2. Do you think being aired on mainstream television affected the credibility or effectiveness of the show's message on women's leadership?

[ ] Yes [ ] No [ ] Not sure

Please explain: _____

3. Were there any aspects of the show that you felt were constrained, exaggerated, or commercialized because it was a television production?

[ ] Yes [ ] No

If yes, please explain: _____

Section E: Feedback and Suggestions

10. What improvements would you suggest to enhance the show's impact on women's leadership advocacy?

Appendix 5: Episode Content Analysis Matrix for *Ms. President*

Each episode will be reviewed and coded using the matrix below.

Episode Details	**Description/Notes**
Episode Number/Title	
Season	
Date Aired	
Duration	
Main Theme of Episode	
Key Leadership Task/Activity	

Section A: Representation of Women in Leadership

Indicator	**Observation Notes**
How are women portrayed in leadership roles? (confident, capable, emotional, weak, strategic etc.)	
Types of leadership skills demonstrated (decision-making, negotiation, teamwork, public speaking)	
Are contestants shown as competent leaders? How?	
Are gender stereotypes reinforced or challenged? Explain	

Are women portrayed as equal to male leaders?	
Overall tone of portrayal (positive / neutral / negative)	

Section B: Advocacy Communication Strategies

Strategy	**Evidence from Episode**
Storytelling (personal stories, struggles, growth journeys)	
Role modelling (visible leadership behaviour demonstrated)	
Framing of women's leadership (empowered, contested, emotional, professional etc.)	
Public engagement elements (audience voting, social media prompts, community tasks)	
Explicit advocacy messages about women empowerment	
Implicit advocacy messages (subtle messaging, symbolism)	

Section C: Framing and Narrative Construction

Indicator	**Observation**

How is leadership defined in this episode?	
How are female contestants framed (leaders, learners, competitors, emotional figures)?	
Language used to describe women leaders	
Visual framing (camera focus, editing emphasis, reactions)	
Are leadership successes celebrated? How?	
Are failures framed differently for women?	

Section D: Audience Engagement and Intended Impact

Indicator	**Observation**
Are viewers encouraged to support women leadership? How?	
Calls to action (vote, discuss, support women etc.)	
Emotional appeal used (inspiration, sympathy, motivation)	
Likely audience takeaway from episode	

Potential influence on perceptions of women leaders	

Section E: Constraints and Media Limitations

Indicator	**Observation**
Evidence of commercial influence (sponsorship, branding, ratings focus)	
Any censorship or softened messaging	
Entertainment vs advocacy tension observed	
Stereotypes retained for entertainment value	
Structural/media limitations observed	

Section F: Overall Episode Assessment

Evaluation Area	**Notes**
Overall advocacy strength of episode (High/Moderate/Low)	
Most powerful empowerment moment	
Most problematic portrayal (if any)	
Key takeaway related to women's leadership	
Link to research objectives	

Appendix 8: SPU Introduction Letter to ISERC

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

Private Bag 00217 LIMURU, KENYA
Email:office@spu.ac.ke
Website: www.spu.ac.ke

Tel Office: +254 (0) 20-2020505/10
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(0) 736 - 424440

BOARD OF POSTGRADUATE STUDIES

16th March, 2026

National Commission for Science and Technology,
P.O. BOX 30623-00100,
Nairobi.

Dear Sir/Madam,

RE: RECOMMENDATION FOR PAULA NORAH KODIA – MACSNRB445223 TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

This letter confirms the above-named person is a student in the Master of Arts in Communication Studies (MACS) Program at St. Paul's University.

After completion of the course work, the student is engaged in major research work leading to a Thesis/Dissertation writing. The student's selected topic is:

"Media advocacy for women leadership: A case study of the Ms President TV Show in Kenya."

The SPU-Institutional Scientific Ethics Review Committee has reviewed the above-named research proposal and granted the ERB approval number 705, for the period between 16th March, 2026 – 16th March, 2027 (1 year).

Kindly grant this student the required permit. For further information, please contact the undersigned through postgraduatestudies@spu.ac.ke

Yours Faithfully,

16 MAR 2026

Dr. John Muhoho Kimani
Director Board of Postgraduate Studies

Appendix 9: ISERC Approval

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

Private Bag 00217 Limuru,
Kenya
Email: office@spu.ac.ke
Website: www.spu.ac.ke

Tel Office: +254 (0) 20-2020505/10
Mobile: +254 (0) 728-669000
(0) 736-424440

REF: SPU/695/2026 **Date: 16th March 2026**

TO: Paula Norah Kodia
St. Paul's University

Dear Paula,

==========

REF: Media Advocacy for Women Leadership: A Case Study of The Ms President TV Show in Kenya

==========

Greetings,

This is to inform you that SPU- Institutional Scientific Ethics Review Committee has reviewed the above-named research proposal. **Your ERB approval number is 705, for the period between 16th March 2026 – 16th March 2027 (1 year).**

This approval is subject to compliance with the following requirements;

i. Only approved documents including (informed consents, study instruments) will be used.
ii. All changes including (amendments, deviations, and violations) are submitted for review and approval by SPU- Institutional Scientific Ethics Review Committee.
iii. Death and life-threatening problems and serious adverse events or unexpected adverse events whether related or unrelated to the study must be reported to SPU- Institutional Scientific Ethics Review Committee within 72 hours of notification
iv. Any changes, anticipated or otherwise that may increase the risks or affected safety or welfare of study participants and others or affect the integrity of the research must be reported to *SPU- Institutional Scientific Ethics Review Committee* within 72 hours
v. Clearance for export of biological specimens must be obtained from relevant institutions.

vi. Submission of a request for renewal of approval at least 60 days prior to expiry of the approval period. Attach a comprehensive progress report to support the renewal.

vii. Submission of an executive summary report within 90 days upon completion of the study to SPU- Institutional Scientific Ethics Review Committee.

viii. Should there be any publications from your research, note that you are supposed to anonymize the particulars of the respondents, the identifiers and the name of institution (s) where you collected data.

ix. Please note that it is within the ISERC's mandate to monitor your research and to do random visits to the site. All research is subject to post approval monitoring. Kindly provide a closure report after the research.

Prior to commencing your study, you will be expected to obtain a research license from National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI) if you are collecting data in the country - https://research-portal.nacosti.go.ke **or obtain other clearances needed in the country where you will collect your data from.**

Yours sincerely,



Dr. Daniel Nzengya, PhD
Chairperson
SPU- Institutional Scientific & Ethics Review Committee



Appendix 10: NACOSTI Approval letter

REPUBLIC OF KENYA

NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR SCIENCE,TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION

Ref No: **378564**

Date of Issue: **06/April/2026**

RESEARCH LICENSE



This is to Certify that Miss.. PAULA NORAH KODIA of St. Paul's University, Kenya, has been licensed to conduct research as per the provision of the Science, Technology and Innovation Act, 2013 (Rev.2014) in Nairobi on the topic: Media Advocacy for Women Leadership: A Case Study of The Ms President TV Show in Kenya for the period ending : 06/April/2027.

License No: **NACOSTI/P/26/4186973**

378564

Applicant Identification Number

Ag. Director General
NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR SCIENCE,TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION

Verification QR Code

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See overleaf for conditions