

## Evaluation of communication strategies used during the 2022 general elections in Shinyalu constituency, Kenya

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### ABSTRACT

Various studies have been undertaken on the role of interpersonal communication in elections in different countries. However, its efficacy and role in political communication have not been fully interrogated. This ignorance may lead to undesirable or negative outcomes contrary to the expectations of the contestants, making it difficult to tap into the gains that could be availed through this means of communication. This study sought to examine communication strategies used during the 2022 general elections in Shinyalu Constituency. The elaboration likelihood theory underpinned the study. The study adopted a mixed-method research design approach and utilised both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection and analysis. The population of the study was 76,978. A sample population of 398 respondents was arrived at by the Slovin's formula. 398 respondents responded to questionnaires, and 12 key informants participated in interviews. Quantitative data was analysed using descriptive statistics, while qualitative data from interviews was analysed thematically. The findings established that political candidates in Shinyalu Constituency utilised a variety of communication strategies to engage with the electorate. Policymakers and electoral bodies such as the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) should formulate policies which encourage transparent and effective communication. Political candidates and campaign managers should adopt interpersonal communication as a strategy and participate in community events in order to obtain affirmative vote outcomes.

**Keywords:** Communication Strategies, Interpersonal communication, Persuasion, Political Campaigns, Voter Behaviour

### I. INTRODUCTION

Communication is part and parcel of human life and activity. Paxson (2018) points out that communication takes place everywhere, every day and every time. This indicates that every individual engages in communication with others around them in many other social spaces. According to Denton et al. (2019), communication is effective when it is well designed and structured. In Kenya, political processes involve a sequences of activities which can only be achieved through organized communication. Communication that is not well planned may lead to negative outcomes contrary to expectations of contestants, making it difficult to tap into the gains that could be availed through communication modes. This study interrogated the communication strategies used during the 2022 general elections in Shinyalu Constituency.

Communication is vital in any political space and takes place in various forms including formal, informal, public and private (Cardey et al., 2024; Edgerly & Thorson, 2020). To have a streamlined communication, the communicator needs to put age, gender and education into consideration. López-García and Pavía (2019) postulate that in every election, there is need for a proper channeled communication for the purpose of persuasion. This is because every decision of a voter to choose a certain leader depends on the level of persuasion from the candidate. Globally, different candidates choose different channels of communication depending on their target audience. In the urban regions, electronic communication, which is supported by the internet and computers is easily accessible compared to rural areas which experience poor infrastructure and internet connection (Rajab et.al., 2024).

Understanding communication is important in the political space since it involves sharing of information, ideas and feelings among individuals. Communication as a strategy can be improved through appropriate awareness, exercise, opinion and considerations. Denton et al. (2019); Anstead and Chadwick (2008); Gelman and King (1993) have

confirmed that communication plays a key role in every election and thus influencing the voters to cast their votes in a certain way.

Fujishin (2019) explains that the current communication studies have extended this definition beyond the face-to-face context. Every campaign has objectives purposed to sell an idea to individuals or to an institution. During political campaigns, people popularize ideas to others with the aim of involving them to actively participate in the building of a better society (Asemah, 2012). The role and effectiveness of communication strategies in shaping results in elections cannot therefore be underrated. Communication plays a major role in determining how the electorate votes for the candidates.

Globally, Politicians explore multiple strategies of communication to persuade their supporters to cast votes in their favor. Kenyan politicians are not an exclusion to this truth. Depending on the geographical setting and other infrastructural concerns, some communication strategies work better in some areas and not others. For instance, in urban settings, candidates, through their political parties, target to reach bigger masses through new media powered by internet. However, rural areas such as Shinyalu, which face challenges such as poor infrastructure and internet connectivity cannot rely on media for communication (KAKAMEGA CIDP 2018-2022). This leaves room for interpersonal communication strategies as a more viable means of communicating to the masses. This study seeks to interrogate the communication modes that were used in Shinyalu Constituency in the 2022 general elections.

### **1.1 Statement of the problem**

Persuasive communication in semi-rural areas is a challenge, compelling politicians to explore multiple strategies of communication to persuade their supporters to cast votes in their favor. One of the major causes of unproductive communication for persuasion to shape voting behavior in rural areas is failure to identify a proper communication strategy (Nwachukwu, 2023). The author further says that if this problem persists, the voters are likely to encounter challenges in their bid to attain their democratic rights.

In rural areas such as Shinyalu Constituency, the terrain poses a challenge of internet access for residents who wish to communicate through online platforms, leaving interpersonal communication as the only strategy for persuasion (Trigun, 2024). Although this mode of communication proved effective in shaping voting behavior in Shinyalu Constituency during the 2022 general elections, its efficacy and role in politics has not been fully interrogated.

Further, interpersonal communication is an inexpensive means of persuasion yet its gains cannot be effectively tapped if the users are not aware of its unique role in political campaigns and voting. This ignorance regarding the viability of the interpersonal communication strategies may lead to undesirable or negative outcomes contrary to expectation of the contestants. This study evaluated the use of interpersonal communication strategies as a tool of political persuasion.

### **1.2 Research Objective**

It specifically examined communication strategies used during the 2022 general elections in Shinyalu Constituency.

## **II. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Theoretical Review**

The study was anchored on the Elaboration Likelihood Theory (ELT).

#### **2.1.1 Elaboration Likelihood Theory (ELT)**

Developed by Petty and Cacioppo in 1984, the ELT describes how persuasive messages can lead to change of attitude. It put forward two main channels of persuasion, namely, central and peripheral channels. According to El Hedhli and Zourrig (2023), the central route involves the inspired processing and evaluation of messages while the peripheral route involves more pretense aspects of the message. These authors further explain that the central route involves thinking about the qualities of the argument and considering that persuasion through this channel it leads to lifelong change.

The peripheral route shows how attractive and clear the speaker when conveying the message without considering the qualities of the argument. In persuasive communication, the audience receives information depending on how smart the speaker is when sharing the message (Rosenberg et al., 2022). In politics the campaign manager use speaker who are smart in speech and will persuade the electorate to cast a vote in their favor. The ELM can be used to incorporate the communication factors like age, levels of education and gender in describing the voting behavior. When people process information through the central process route, their expectations is high and will believe what is being communicated to them through different communication channels. The voters will carefully analyze the message before making decisions. Despite the criticisms this theory has faced, it is still applicable in politics as voters make decisions to vote for a certain candidate or not due to the perception they make of the political contestant.

## 2.2 Empirical review

The United States of America has been hailed as a country that uses high technology. However, most of the political campaigns in this country have also embraced Interpersonal Communication to reach the masses. This happens through conferences and town hall meetings which provide an opportunity to the potential leaders to discuss about issues affecting the electorate and propose ways of mitigating their concerns. These meetings have been active in all campaigns in the elections of 2008, 2012, 2016, 2020 and 2024 in USA (Mohammed & Kirfi, 2024).

In 2008 and 2012, President Barack Obama utilized the internet to rally his supporters and make his policies known to the electorate. This was made possible by social media platforms which were quickly gaining popularity. He became the first US president who effectively used the internet and especially social media for a successful political outcome. This has since raised the bar and is now a presidential standard. Apart from the use of technology through the internet, Barack Obama, John Biden and Donald Trump also embraced conferences, town hall meetings and open rallies to rally voters in different states.

In Africa, particularly in South Africa, during 2019 and 2024 general elections, interpersonal communication played a crucial role in elections. South African leading political parties, the African National Congress (ANC) and the Democratic Alliance (DA) adopted the use of interpersonal communication as an effective instrument for persuasion. The purpose for the use of such communication was to persuade the electorate to engage in the political discourse (Waisbord & Amado, 2017). These authors confirm that South Africa is a leading country in Africa in terms of technological tradition followed closely by Nigeria and then Kenya.

According to Mpungose (2020) Africa is a social continent and therefore face to face communication cannot be ignored. Dabula (2017) states that this form of political marketing was used in South Africa to rally people to participate in elections by voting for a certain candidate. The eventual goal of political campaigns was to sway the election (Waisbord & Amado 2017). Dabula (2017) also points out that speeches made by political party leaders within the framework of stylistic principles contain persuasive expressions.

In Kenya, politicians take to different channels and platforms to persuade voters. This communication is enhanced through bodily language including facial expressions, packaging of the message, which call for immediate feedback. Interpersonal communication is the best way to convey emotions and attitude and gives an immediate feedback between two or more individuals (Venter, 2019).

## III. METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Study Area

The study was conducted in Shinyalu Constituency, Kakamega County, Kenya. The constituency is among the twelve administrative units in Kakamega County. According to the Kenya census report of 2019, the constituency has an approximate population of 167,641 residents. Its area is approximated at 445.4 km square km (Sub Counties – County Government of Kakamega). The Sub Counties- County Government of Kakamega report of 2015 further indicates that Shinyalu constituency has 6 wards, namely, Isukha north, Murhanda, Isukha central, Isukha south, Isukha east and Isukha west.

### 3.2 Research Design

The study adopted a mixed method research design approach which utilized both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection and analysis in order to get a scientific as well as in-depth inquiry into the research problem.

### 3.3 Target Population

The study population consisted of both male and female residents of the Sub County aged 18 years and above who were eligible to vote. According to the Independent Electoral and Boundary Commission voter register of 2022, Shinyalu Constituency had 76,978 registered voters (Iebc, n.d.).

### 3.4 Sampling and sample size

In this study, 12 respondents for interviews were sampled purposively while 398 respondents for questionnaires were sampled through proportionate stratified sampling based on the number of voters in each Ward. A sample population of 398 respondents for questionnaires was arrived at by use of the Slovin's formula as follows:

Equation:

$$n = N \div (1 + Ne^2)$$

Where:

n= Number of samples or sample size

N= Total population

e= Margin of Error (0.05)

N is

$$n = 76,978 / (1 + 76,978 \times 0.05^2)$$

$n = 76,978 / 193.44 = 397.94$ . Therefore, the sample size was 398.

The Key Informants for interviews have been denoted by the following symbols:

KI 1- Key Informant 1; KI 2- Key Informant 2; KI 3- Key Informant 3; KI 4- Key Informant 4; KI 5- Key Informant 5; KI 6- Key Informant 6; KI 7- Key Informant 7; KI 8- Key Informant 8; KI 9- Key Informant 9; KI 10- Key Informant 10; KI 11- Key Informant 11; KI 12- Key Informant 12.

### 3.5 Data collection

In this study both primary and secondary data was collected through questionnaires (for quantitative data) and interview schedules (for qualitative data).

### 3.6 Data analysis

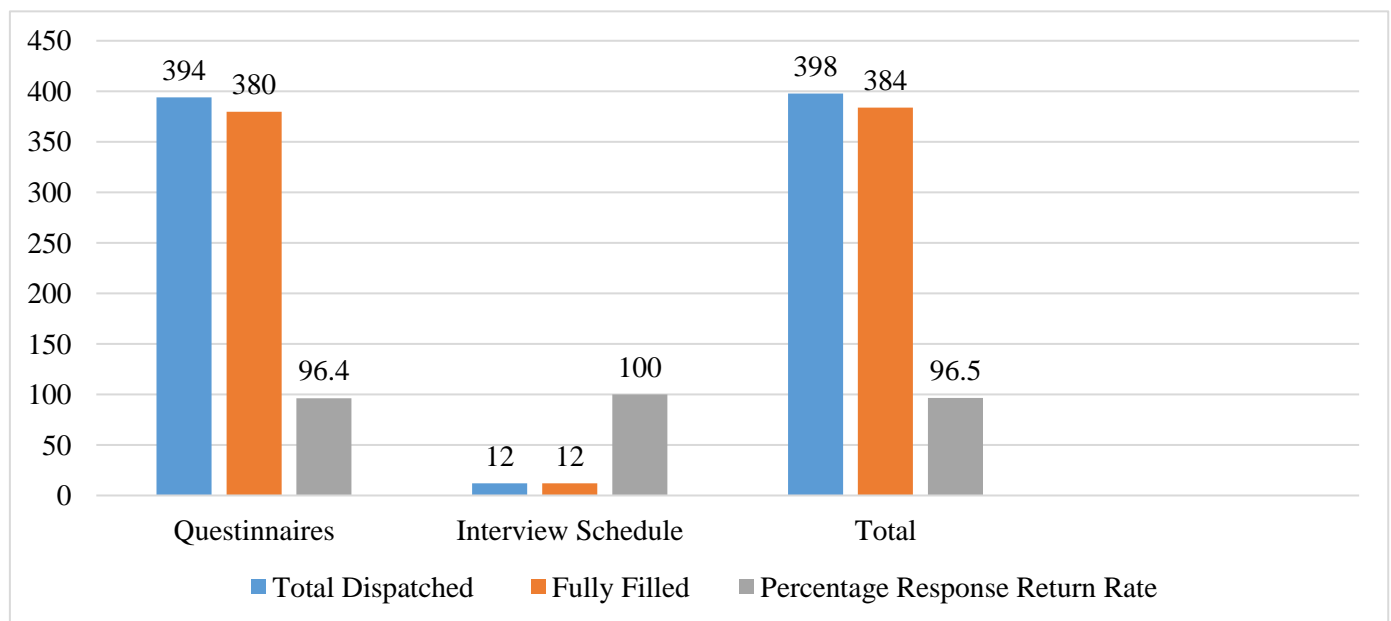
Quantitative data from the respondents was analyzed descriptively, by way of frequency tables, charts and graphs, and percentages. In this study, qualitative data was analyzed thematically. The themes were categorized as per the research objective of the study.

## IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Findings

#### 4.1.1 Response Return Rate

The response rate for questionnaires was 380 (96.4%) out of the 398 questionnaires which were administered. A high response rate is desirable because it enhances the representativeness of the sample, reduces non-response bias, and increases the reliability of findings (Roberts et al., 2014). This study used a sample size of 398 respondents from Shinyalu constituency.



**Figure 1**

*Summarizes the Response Return Rates for both the Questionnaires and Interview Schedules*

The response return rate for questionnaires was 96.4%, with 380 out of 398 dispatched questionnaires being fully filled and returned. Additionally, all 12 interview schedules were completed, yielding a 100% response rate for qualitative data. This high percentage indicates a strong level of engagement among the respondents, suggesting that the data collected is likely to be representative of the population being studied. Achieving a response rate above 96% aligns with best practices in survey research, where rates above 75% are generally considered excellent (Holtomet et al., 2022).

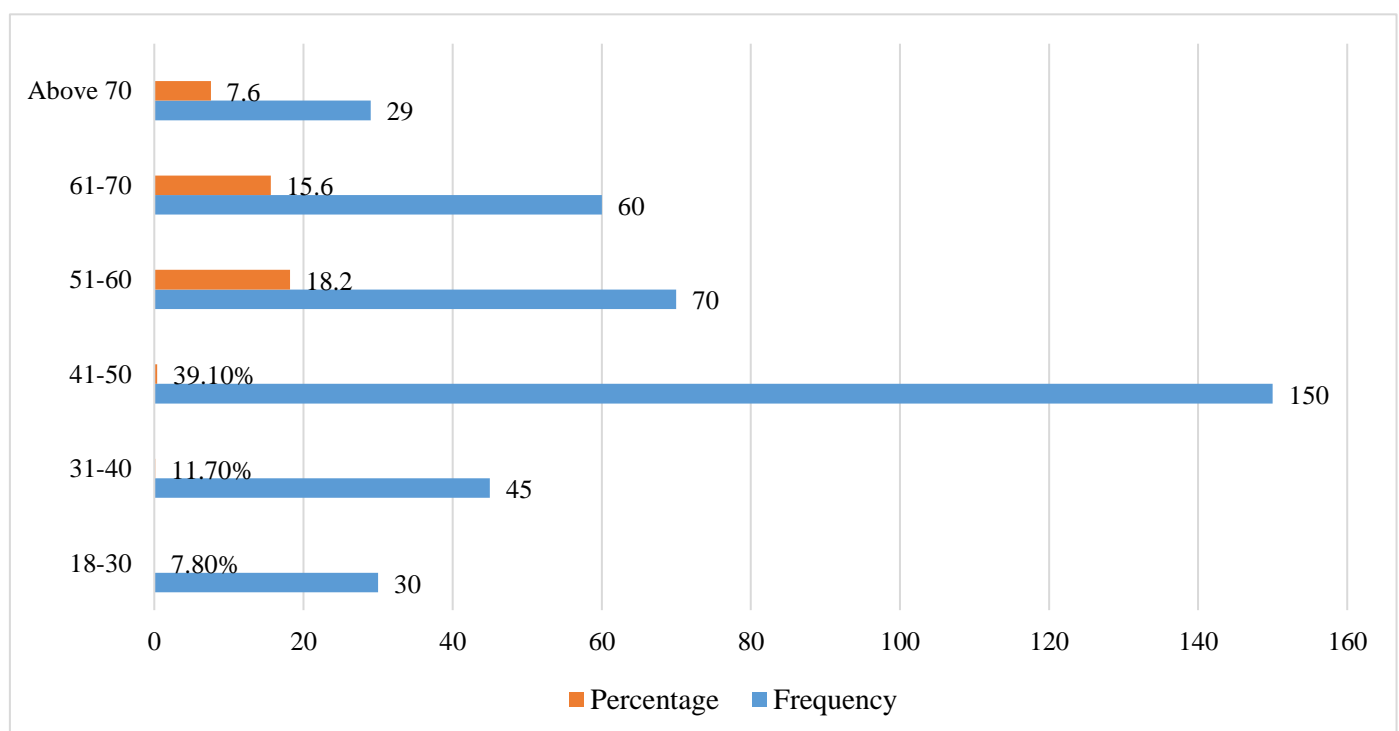
#### 4.1.2 Demographic Data of Respondents

Demographic data serves to contextualize research findings, offering observations into the characteristics of respondents that may influence their perceptions and behaviors. Such information enables researchers to identify patterns, tailor communication strategies, and interpret results within the relevant social, cultural, and economic frameworks (Kumar & Kumar, 2020)

In this study, demographic variables such as age, gender, nationality, language, religion, educational level, and ward were collected so as to understand the profile of respondents in Shinyalu constituency. This was presented as follows:

##### 4.1.2.1 Age of Respondents

Understanding the age distribution of respondents is fundamental in research as it allows for analysis of how different age groups perceive or are affected by the subject of study. Age can influence respondents' experiences, behaviors, attitudes, and preferences. By capturing this data, the study identified trends and ensured that findings are relevant across different life stages. The findings are presented in Figure 2.



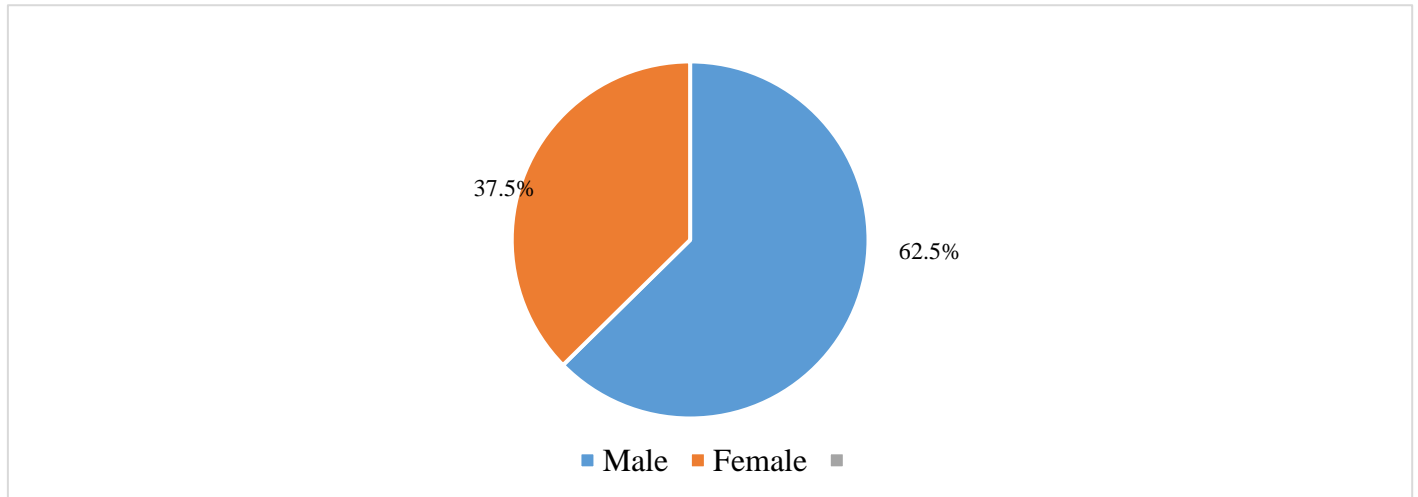
**Figure 2**  
*Age Distribution of Respondents*

The predominance of respondents aged between 41-50 years 149 (39.1%) underscores that middle-aged adults formed the core of the electorate in Shinyalu. The finding reveal that middle-aged voters are often the most active participants in rural electoral processes due to their economic stability and social influence.

The relatively small representation of youth (18-30) years 30 (7.89%) and older adults (above 70) years 37(9.73%) suggests that the study's insights predominantly reflect the perceptions of middle-aged voters, who are often key targets in interpersonal communication campaigns during elections. This distribution emphasizes the importance of tailoring communication strategies that resonate with this age group, as they are likely to be the primary influencers and decision-makers in rural voting contexts.

##### 4.1.2.2 Gender of Respondents

The gender of the respondents is presented in Figure 3 below.

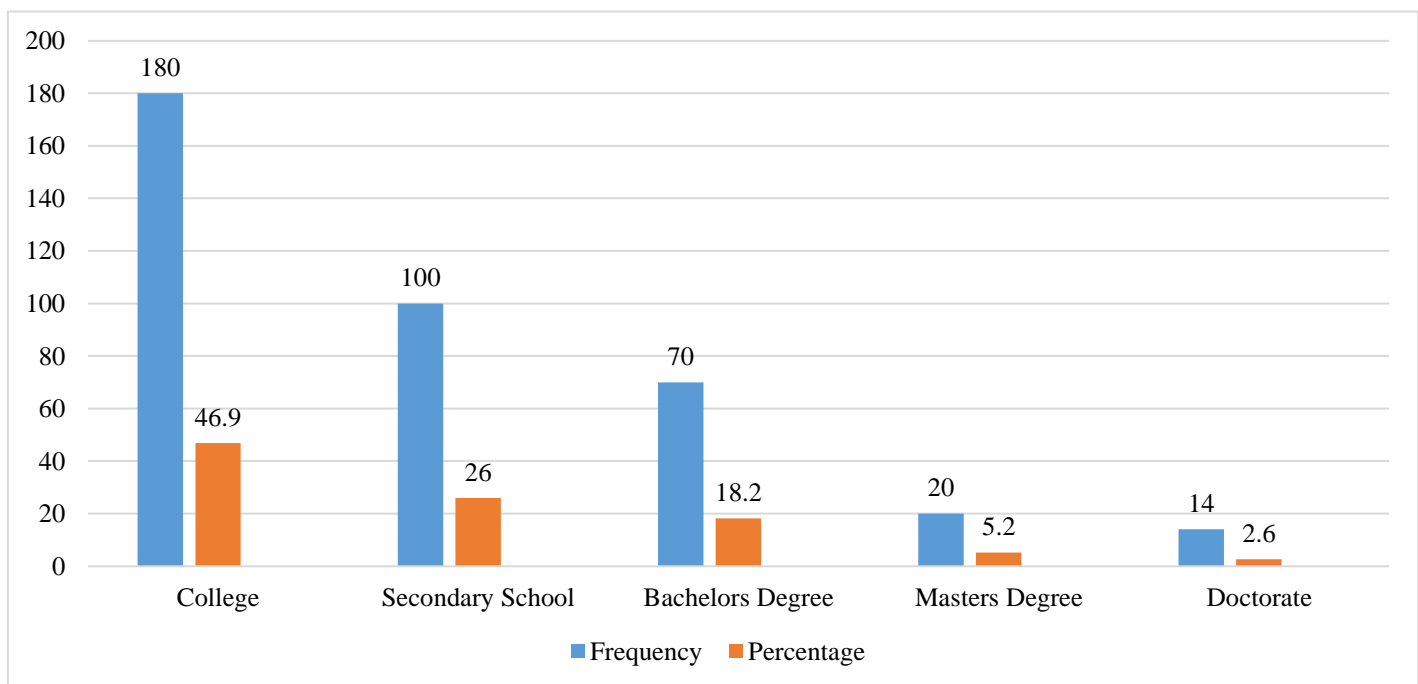


**Figure 3**  
*Gender Distribution of Respondents*

Out of 380 returned questionnaires which is a representation of 96.4%, male respondents were 238 at the rate of 62.5% with female respondents response at 142 representing 37.5%. As shown in figure 3, more male respondents were willing to respond to the questionnaires compared to the females. The higher representation of males 238(62.5%). This gender imbalance could shoot from societal norms that often assign men as primary decision-makers and community leaders, especially in rural areas such as Shinyalu. Such a demographic profile indicates that interpersonal communication strategies might need to consider gender-specific preferences and channels, as men and women may respond differently to political messaging (Zibin et al., 2025). Recognizing this imbalance ensures that any gendered differences in voting behavior are appropriately analyzed and addressed.

**4.1.2.3 Education Level**

As indicated in figure 4 below, respondents with secondary school level education were 99 representing 26%, those of college level were 178 representing 46.8%, bachelor’s degree level were 70 representing 18.4%, masters level were 17 representing 0.04% and doctorate level were 3 representing 0.007%. More responses were received from college level respondents as compared to other levels.



**Figure 4**  
*Education Level of Respondents*

Findings from figure 4 above reveal that a significant proportion of respondents (46.9%) have attained college education. Higher education levels often correlate with greater political awareness and receptiveness to interpersonal communication strategies aimed at influencing voting behavior (Kiratli & Schlipphak 2024). This educational diversity provides an opportunity for tailored messaging that considers varying levels of literacy and critical engagement.

**Table 1**

*Communication Platform(s)/Forum(s) used to Share Information*

Platform/s	F	%
House to house visits	87	22.9
Funeral gatherings	89	23.4
Self-help group meetings	67	18
Organized sporting events	64	17
Church gatherings	56	15
Open air market rallies	76	20
Television	45	12
Radio	88	23.2
Newspapers	37	10
Social media	54	14
Posters	31	8
Banners	41	11

From table 1 above, the most popular platforms/forums through which the candidates reached the respondents were funeral gatherings at 89 (23.4%), radio at 88 (23.2 %) and house to house visits at 87 (22.9%). This indicates that personal engagement strategies were effective in reaching the electorate. Similarly, all the 12 Key Informants indicated that funerals and house to house visits, which entailed personalized communication strategies, were the most used platforms to reach them. Asked why they thought politicians preferred using particular platforms/forums, the respondents gave the following reasons:

**Table 2**

*Reasons for Preference of Particular Platforms/Forums*

Reason(s)	F	%
Easily accessible	78	20.5
Voters trusted the information shared through interpersonal communication	87	22.9
Reduces boredom	88	23.2
Affordable	45	11.8
Others prefer it	46	12.1
Information is easily understood	88	23.2
Easy to receive immediate feedback	67	17.6
Did not require internet connection	87	22.9

From the findings in table 2 above, voters indicated that the said platforms were preferable because they reduced boredom (88, 23.2%), the information was easily understood (88, 23.2%), voters trusted the information shared through these platforms (87, 22.9%) and they did not require internet connection (87, 22.9%). This underscores the fact that the modes of communication were interactive and therefore deemed best suited for both the candidates and voters in Shinyalu. The Key Informants had the following to say regarding why they thought politicians preferred using particular platforms/forums:

KI 4: *They were interesting and made us laugh*

KI 7: *The candidates used idioms and proverbs that were related to the information they were giving us*

Participants were asked what their most preferred forums were. They responded as indicated in table 3 below.

**Table 3***Preferred Communication Forums*

Forums	F	%
House to house meetings	102	26.8
Funeral gatherings	123	32.4
Self-help groups	67	17.6
Organized sports events	66	17.4
Open air meetings	54	14.2
Town hall meetings	53	13.9
Local social forums	89	23.4

The findings in table 3 reveal that funeral gatherings at 123 (32.4%), house to house meetings at 102(26.8%) and local social forums at 89 (23.4%) were the most preferred forums. This could be attributed to the fact that the voters preferred more personalized communication modes. The Key Informants had the following to say regarding which platform they preferred:

KI 5: *House to house meetings enabled us to reach the electorate in the constituency*

KI 6: *I attended most funeral gatherings and sold my manifesto*

When asked which message was communicated through communication platforms/forums, they responded as recorded in the table below:

**Table 4***Message Communicated through Communication Forums*

Message Communicated	F	%
Political party manifesto	132	34.7
Candidate Previous development record	93	24.5
Opponent Previous development records of the candidates	56	14.7
Real issues affecting the public	144	37.9
Case studies	53	13.7
Solution to the current issues affecting the public	102	26.8

These findings in table 4 above point to a tendency for voters to gravitate towards political leaders who address real issues affecting the public at (144, 37.9%), who ably present their political party manifestos at (132, 34.7%), who find solutions to the current issues affecting the public at (102, 26.8%) and who share their previous development records at (93, 26.4%). This is indicative of the fact that voters evaluate social and economic value of political leaders before deciding to vote for them, based on what they hear from the candidates. The Key Informants had the following to say:

KI 9: *We concentrated on the party manifesto*

KI 12: *I shared previous development records to the residents*

The participants were asked how the messages were packaged through the communication platforms/forums. They responded as indicated in the table below:

**Table 5***Packaging of the Messages*

Packaging	F	%
Used my native language	97	25.5
The message was clear	89	23.4
The message was communicated in an engaging manner	134	30.0
The message was communicated in a comical way	144	37.9
The candidate used case studies	89	23.4

The findings in table 5 above indicate that the messages were presented in a comical way (144, 37.9%), the messages were communicated in an engaging manner (134, 30%), the messages were communicated in voter's native languages (97, 25.5%), and the messages were communicated in a clear manner (89, 23.4%). This then means that the manner in which the information was communicated had a great influence on the voting pattern in Shinyalu Constituency. Comedy, delivery style, language features, and the language used were important in the reception of the political messages conveyed by potential political leaders. The Key Informants said the following towards the same question:

KI 10: *The politician used my mother tongue*

KI 11: *The candidate was a master comedian; he told us many stories*

These findings resonate with those of the respondents. The politician packaged the information in such a manner that it was appealing and attractive to the target audience of voters. The highly persuasive language features used are often employed when communicating through more personalized interactions also known as interpersonal communication strategies.

## V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

### 5.1 Conclusion

The study established that political candidates in Shinyalu Constituency utilized a variety of communication strategies to engage with the electorate. Statistics revealed high levels of voter engagement, with respondents reporting that they participated in the elections. Funeral gatherings, radio and house-to-house visits were the platforms that were most used to reach the voters since they entailed personalized communication. The voters indicated that the said platforms were preferable because they were more interactive and deemed best suited for both the candidates and voters in Shinyalu Constituency. There was a tendency for voters to gravitate towards political leaders who addressed real issues affecting the public, who ably presented their political party manifestos, who found solutions to the current issues affecting the public and who shared their previous development records. This points to the fact that voters evaluate social and economic value of political leaders before deciding to vote for them, based on what they hear from the candidates. Additionally, the politicians packaged information in such a manner that it was appealing and attractive to the target audience of voters and used highly persuasive language features in their personalized interactions, and this had a great influence on the voting pattern in Shinyalu Constituency.

### 5.2 Recommendations

Policymakers and electoral bodies such as the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) are a crucial entity in elections in Kenya and could formulate policies that encourage transparent and effective communication in the political engagements. The IEBC could recommend to the politicians to use simple and comprehensible languages in campaign materials and in communication with voters. Civic education initiatives could be undertaken to enhance voter awareness and decision-making. Political candidates and campaign managers could adopt direct, interpersonal communication strategies in order to reach the voters. These strategies, used during outreach activities, are likely to influence voting behavior, and significantly influencing their perceptions especially in rural set ups where people prefer one on one communication. From a theoretical perspective, the findings of this study support up-to-date models of political communication that emphasizes emotional connection, credibility, and social identity. For instance, in Shinyalu Constituency, residents prefer communication which enhances connection with the politicians. Scholars and researchers could consider integrating these factors into existing frameworks of electoral behavior. Future theoretical models could also explore the interplay between traditional interpersonal communication and emerging digital platforms in shaping modern political behavior.

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