STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND CHANGE MANAGEMENT IN THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY IN RIVERS STATE

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A B S T R A C T	K E Y W O R D S
The hospitality industry in Nigeria, particularly in Rivers State, faces persistent volatility stemming from infrastructural deficits, security concerns, and evolving customer expectations. As a result, change management has become a vital organizational function, requiring not only strategic planning but also effective internal communication. This study investigates the role of strategic communication in facilitating successful change management within hospitality firms in Rivers State. Specifically, it examines how communication clarity, timeliness, channel appropriateness, and employee involvement influence employees' readiness for change, resistance levels, and overall implementation outcomes. Adopting a quantitative research design, the study utilized a structured questionnaire distributed to a stratified sample of 173 employees from selected hospitality firms. A total of 142 valid responses were analyzed using SPSS Version 26. The findings revealed that all four dimensions of strategic communication significantly and positively predicted change management success, with employee involvement emerging as the strongest predictor ($\beta = 0.318$, $p < 0.001$). These results underscore the importance of participatory, timely, and clear communication practices in shaping employee support and aligning behavior with new organizational goals. The study concludes that strategic communication is not merely a supportive function but a critical enabler of organizational transformation in the hospitality sector. It recommends that hospitality managers institutionalize clear, responsive	Change Management, Employee Involvement, Hospitality Industry, Strategic Communication

communication frameworks and prioritize employee engagement throughout the change process to enhance adaptability, minimize resistance, and ensure more sustainable change outcomes in a rapidly evolving industry environment.

Introduction

The hospitality industry plays a pivotal role in global economic development, contributing significantly to GDP, employment, and cultural exchange. Globally, it has evolved into one of the largest and fastest-growing sectors, accounting for about 10% of global GDP and supporting millions of jobs across diverse economies (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2023). In Africa, the industry has become a vital engine of economic diversification, especially in countries seeking to reduce dependence on extractive industries. Nigeria, in particular, boasts a growing hospitality landscape driven by increased urbanization, a rising middle class, and investments in tourism and event-driven businesses. Despite these opportunities, the Nigerian hospitality sector remains highly dynamic and volatile, impacted by infrastructural gaps, security concerns, policy inconsistencies, and rapidly shifting consumer expectations (Bama et al., 2022; Waale & Onuoha, 2023).

The volatile environment of the hospitality industry necessitates frequent organizational changes such as digital transformation, rebranding, safety policy adaptation, and service restructuring, thereby positioning change management as a critical organizational capability. Within Rivers State hospitality businesses must frequently adapt to the challenges of fluctuating demand, technological advancement, and workforce variability, all while striving for service innovation and operational efficiency (Waale & Onuoha, 2023) However, the success of such change initiatives hinges on the organization's ability to communicate change effectively to internal stakeholders. Poorly executed communication often results in confusion, misalignment, employee resistance, and project failure. This brings to the fore the role of strategic communication—defined as the intentional use of communication to advance organizational goals (Hallahan et al., 2007).

Within the context of organizational change, strategic communication serves as a bridge between leadership and employees, helping to cultivate trust, convey vision, and foster ownership (Lewis, 1999). The dimensions of strategic communication—communication clarity, timeliness, channel appropriateness, and employee involvement—are central to ensuring that messages are not only understood but also internalized. These dimensions support the creation of meaningful dialogue, reduce misinformation, and drive engagement, making them particularly important in a service-intensive industry like hospitality where employee interaction directly affects customer satisfaction and brand experience (Rita-Men et al., 2022). In the hospitality sector, effective change management enables organizations to stay competitive, retain talent, enhance service quality, and respond to environmental shifts. Especially in Rivers State's hospitality landscape, marked by both opportunity and volatility, successful change management is critical to organizational resilience and long-term viability. However, despite its importance, change management is often undermined by inadequate communication practices—resulting in disruptions, employee disengagement, and failed transformations (Mishra et al., 2014).

A review of existing literature (Daly et al., 2003; Kitchen & Daly, 2002; Neves & Eisenberger, 2012) reveals increasing scholarly attention to the intersection of communication and change. Consequently,

effective communication has been linked to higher employee trust, reduced resistance, and improved change outcomes. Luo & Jiang (2014) primarily focused on multinational corporations or tech-driven firms. Other studies (Omolabi & Olakunle, 2024; Waale & Onuoha, 2023) have explored how these dynamics unfold in the Nigerian context, particularly within the hospitality industry of Rivers State—a region characterized by unique socio-cultural, infrastructural, and organizational variables.

Ineffective strategic communication during change has been linked to significant organizational symptoms, including increased employee turnover, customer dissatisfaction, productivity decline, and loss of competitive advantage. These consequences manifest in poor service delivery, fragmented internal culture, and ultimately financial losses (French & Holden, 2012; Rita-Men et al., 2022). In regions like Rivers State, where businesses must simultaneously manage market uncertainty and human capital challenges, understanding the symptoms and implications of failed communication is essential. As Verčič et al. (2012) assert, internal communication is evolving into a strategic management discipline, and its impact on organizational change needs deeper empirical exploration, especially in high-contact industries like hospitality.

Therefore, this study intends to examine the influence of strategic communication on change management in hospitality organizations in Rivers State, Nigeria. Specifically, it seeks to investigate how clarity of communication, timeliness of delivery, suitability of communication channels, and employee involvement contribute to successful change initiatives. By focusing on a service-driven and culturally diverse sector, the research aims to provide practical insights for managers and policymakers on how to leverage communication strategies for effective change. Ultimately, the goal is to support the development of adaptive, transparent, and employee-centered communication models that can enhance organizational agility and success in the hospitality industry.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine how strategic communication influences change management in hospitality organizations in Rivers State, Nigeria. It aims to explore how hotel leaders use internal communication strategies to engage employees, reduce resistance, and ensure smooth transitions during organizational change. Special focus will be placed on the roles of clarity, timeliness, channel appropriateness, and employee involvement in shaping communication effectiveness.

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

This study is underpinned by Communication Theory and Social Exchange Theory (SET), both of which offer complementary perspectives for understanding how strategic communication facilitates effective change management in the hospitality industry in Rivers State, Nigeria. Communication Theory provides a foundational lens through which the processes, mechanisms, and effects of organizational communication can be systematically understood. Rooted in early transmission models such as that of Shannon and Weaver (1949), the theory has evolved to embrace more interactive, interpretive, and organizationally embedded approaches (Craig, 1999; Schramm, 1954). In particular, Craig's (1999) meta-theoretical synthesis of various traditions—including rhetorical, sociopsychological, and cybernetic—positions communication not merely as a conduit for message delivery but as a constitutive force in shaping organizational life. From this standpoint, communication is central to how meanings are negotiated, roles are understood, and actions are coordinated,

particularly during periods of organizational change (Men & Stacks, 2014). The central argument is that change messages must be coherent, context-sensitive, and emotionally resonant in order to foster employee alignment and reduce resistance (Christensen, 2014). Therefore, Communication Theory anchors this study's independent variable—strategic communication—by illustrating how its various components enable the social construction of meaning, sense-making, and organizational identity during change processes (Mazzei, 2014;).

Social Exchange Theory (SET), on the other hand, offers a relational and motivational perspective, explaining why employees respond to communication efforts in particular ways. Originating from early studies (Blau, 1964; Homans, 1958), SET posits that workplace interactions are governed by reciprocal exchanges of tangible and intangible resources such as trust, recognition, support, and information. Applied to internal communication, SET suggests that when leaders communicate openly, consistently, and empathetically, employees perceive these actions as high-value exchanges that elicit positive reciprocal behaviors, including loyalty, commitment, and change support (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Saks (2006) further asserts that employee engagement—often a determinant of change success—is shaped by the perception of organizational support, of which communication is a central component.

In change management contexts, SET becomes especially salient. Employees assess not only the content of change messages but also the intent and sincerity of their communicators. Honest, transparent communication helps to reduce uncertainty, foster psychological safety, and reinforce affective commitment (Meyer & Allen, 1991; Verčič & Vokić, 2017). This sense of fairness and mutual respect increases employees' willingness to cooperate with change initiatives and decreases resistance. Conversely, ambiguous or top-down communication that excludes employee input is interpreted as low-value exchange, leading to disengagement, distrust, and high turnover intention (Luo & Jiang, 2014).

Concept of Strategic communication

Strategic communication refers to the purposeful use of communication by an organization to fulfill its mission and achieve long-term objectives. It involves crafting messages that are clear, consistent, and aligned with organizational goals, while considering the needs and perceptions of both internal and external stakeholders. It is grounded in organizational communication, which focuses on how individuals interpret and respond to messages within institutional settings (Nzitunga, 2016). Strategic communication requires a balance between maintaining stability through established communication patterns and adapting to change with innovative messaging strategies (Winkler & Zerfass, 2016).

Effective strategic communication enhances learning, fosters engagement, and promotes growth by ensuring that information is accurate, timely, and relevant (Kang et al., 2016). It includes both downward and upward communication flows, where leadership conveys vision, feedback, and procedures, and employees communicate concerns, improvements, and client feedback. The effectiveness of strategic communication also depends on adopting appropriate communication styles that align with individual personality and situational demands. Consistency in communication improves task efficiency and reduces misunderstandings, especially during organizational change (Liu, 2016).

Clarity

Clarity, derived from the Latin word claret meaning brightness, refers to the quality of being coherent, intelligible, and free from ambiguity. In communication, it ensures that the message is clearly understood by the receiver, minimizing misinterpretation and confusion. According to Lingard (2022), clarity is the foundation upon which all other communication goals rest be it persuasion, argument, or expression. According to Clampitt (2016), communication clarity entails both the structure of the message and the simplicity of the language used. Managers who communicate with clarity are more likely to foster trust, increase engagement, and minimize the cognitive strain on employees. Hallahan et al. (2007) argue that clarity is one of the core principles of strategic communication, essential for aligning stakeholders with organizational goals. In strategic initiatives such as branding, crisis management, and internal transformation, clear communication enhances transparency and builds credibility.

Timeliness

Timeliness in communication refers to the delivery of information at the most appropriate moment, ensuring that messages reach stakeholders when they are most needed and can yield the greatest impact. It is a critical element in both internal and external organizational communication, as it influences decision-making, responsiveness, and the overall success of strategic initiatives. Timely communication improves operational efficiency, reduces ambiguity, and enhances coordination within organizations. As noted by Allen et al. (2007), timely dissemination of information increases employees' confidence and perception of leadership credibility, especially during periods of change. Similarly, Clampitt (2016) highlights that the speed with which information is delivered can affect employees' emotional readiness and trust in management during transitions. Furthermore, Welch and Jackson (2007) emphasize that timely internal communication strengthens employee engagement and supports trust-building, particularly when organizations undergo transformation. In rapidly evolving environments, especially with digital technologies, timeliness supports real-time updates and responsiveness, which are essential for maintaining a competitive edge.

Channel

A communication channel refers to the medium or method through which a message is transmitted from sender to receiver. Channels can be verbal or non-verbal, formal or informal, synchronous (e.g., face-to-face, phone calls) or asynchronous (e.g., emails, memos). The effectiveness of communication often depends on the appropriateness of the channel used, considering the message content, urgency, audience, and organizational context. Selecting the right channel is crucial for ensuring message clarity, engagement, and feedback. According to Hossain and Rahman (2022), the strategic selection of communication channels significantly influences employee understanding and participation, especially in organizational transformation settings. Pereira et al. (2021) highlight that digital transformation in organizations has led to a shift from traditional channels to integrated digital platforms, which offer speed, interactivity, and broader reach. However, the choice of digital or face-to-face channels should align with the complexity of the message and the emotional intelligence required. Furthermore, Gutiérrez-García et al. (2023) stress that multichannel communication strategies enhance employee satisfaction and organizational transparency when they are well-coordinated and responsive to employee preferences.

Employee Involvement

Employee involvement refers to the active participation and commitment of employees in organizational processes, decision-making, and change management efforts. It encompasses the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral investment of employees in their work and the organization (Alagaraja & Shuck, 2015). Involvement goes beyond task completion it includes communication, awareness, initiative, and alignment with organizational goals. Employees who are involved are more likely to take ownership of their roles, communicate openly, and contribute to continuous improvement, especially during periods of change (Mishra et al., 2014).

Involvement manifests in various forms some employees are fully engaged, others are passively involved, while some may be actively disengaged (Robinson, 2012). Engaged employees tend to align closely with organizational vision and maintain high performance levels, whereas disengaged employees may feel disconnected or dissatisfied, often resisting collaboration or expressing dissent (Liton, 2016; Payne, 2014). However, dissent can sometimes serve as valuable feedback when properly addressed by leadership. Effective employee involvement is often facilitated by transparent communication, supportive leadership, and an environment that acknowledges work-life balance (Adame-Sanchez et al., 2016). Organizational policies that support family needs and foster inclusion can increase involvement. Additionally, factors such as culture, language, and location can influence how employees interpret and engage with organizational messages (Jowers et al., 2016).

Successful organizations integrate structured communication systems, regular assessments, and strong team dynamics to promote employee involvement and mitigate barriers to engagement (Yoerger et al., 2015; Zacher et al., 2015). As the pace of organizational change accelerates, involving employees becomes not just a matter of participation but a strategic necessity for navigating uncertainty and fostering resilience (Spencer, 2013; Wilson, 2012). Ultimately, employee involvement is both a driver and a reflection of organizational culture where leadership, trust, and shared responsibility intersect to build performance and sustainability.

Concept of Change Management

Change management is the deliberate, systematic approach by which organizations guide people, processes, and structures from a current state to a desired future state while maintaining operational stability and employee well-being. It recognises that change is inherently emotional and often disruptive indeed, more than 70 % of healthcare change initiatives fail because leaders underestimate the human and communication challenges involved. Classic frameworks portray change as a phased journey: Lewin's model of unfreezing, changing, and refreezing emphasises the need to loosen existing routines, introduce new behaviors, and stabilize the gains (Frantz, 2004), whereas Kotter's eight-step process highlights urgency creation, coalition building, vision communication, and institutionalization of new practices (Kotter, 1996). Contemporary scholars extend these ideas by viewing organizations as open systems entities constantly shaped by internal dynamics and external uncertainty so effective change requires unity of purpose, broad involvement, transparent communication, and adaptive leadership (Lawrence et al., 2014).

Change management succeeds when leaders couple high-quality decision-making with intensive, two-way communication that cascades from executives to frontline staff and back again (Yap et al., 2016). Such dialogue helps employees process emotions, innovate, and rebound from initial resistance (Norton, 2015). Strategic tools including organic and interactionist models provide

diagnostic lenses for identifying barriers and guiding restructure without sacrificing flexibility (Bausch, 2002). Timing also matters: shifts often unfold gradually, shaping attitudes before, during, and after pivotal events; leaders who anticipate these temporal patterns can align resources and maintain momentum. Ultimately, effective change management blends structured methodologies with empathetic leadership, ensuring responsibility, clear goals, and well-defined boundaries while steering organizations toward sustainable improvement (Naranjo-Gil, 2015).

Research Gap

Empirical research consistently affirms the pivotal role of strategic communication in facilitating effective change management across various organizational contexts. Scholars have approached this relationship from multiple dimensions, emphasizing the significance of communication transparency, channel selection, leadership style, and organizational culture. The following empirical studies provide valuable insights that directly inform the present investigation of hospitality organizations in Rivers State. Li et al. (2021) conducted a quantitative study during the COVID-19 pandemic, examining how transparent internal communication impacts employee coping during organizational change. Drawing from the transactional theory of stress and coping, the study analyzed data from 490 full-time U.S. employees and found that transparent communication practices reduce uncertainty, foster stronger employee–organization relationships, and promote problem-focused coping behaviors. These findings underscore the role of internal communication as a strategic enabler of psychological adjustment during periods of disruption. For the hospitality industry—characterized by high volatility and frequent structural adjustments—such transparency is essential not only for disseminating information but also for building trust and supporting employee adaptation to change.

Complementing this view, Rita-Men et al. (2022) explored how the use of communication channels—mass-mediated and interpersonal—affects employees' affective commitment to organizational change. Based on a survey of 1,034 employees undergoing planned change, the study found that channel frequency and transparency significantly influence employees' sense of uncertainty and emotional alignment with change initiatives. Notably, interpersonal channels (e.g., direct supervisor communication) had a stronger effect on perceived transparency and commitment than mediated channels (e.g., newsletters, emails). This finding is particularly relevant to hospitality settings, where face-to-face interactions and real-time feedback mechanisms are prevalent and culturally significant. It highlights the need for channel appropriateness in communication planning, aligning with Media Richness Theory, which suggests that richer communication modes are more effective in emotionally charged contexts.

In other related studies (Bagga et al., 2023; Jimmieson et al., 2013), using partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM), the authors found that transformational leadership significantly influences change outcomes and that organizational culture partially mediates this relationship. Although the study is situated in IT-based virtual teams, its implications resonate with the hospitality sector's increasing reliance on technology and remote coordination. The results suggest that leadership communication—especially when it is visionary, consistent, and culturally aligned—can shape an internal environment conducive to change readiness. This complements the view that strategic communication is not merely transactional but also symbolic, reinforcing values, shared purpose, and behavioral expectations. However, while these studies contribute to a growing body of evidence on strategic communication during organizational change, limited empirical work has been conducted in

the context of the hospitality industry in sub-Saharan Africa, where socio-cultural, economic, and infrastructural factors may shape communication dynamics differently. This study therefore extends the literature by applying these findings to hospitality firms in Rivers State—offering context-sensitive insights into how strategic communication practices affect change management outcomes in a developing country context.

Conceptual Framework

The study variables were decomposed as illustrated in Fig 1 below

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION

Communication Clarity
- Message simplicity and precision
- Unambiguous use of language
- Clear explanation of change objectives & expectations
- Minimization of technical jargon
- Consistency between verbal and written messages

Communication Timeliness
- Prompt dissemination of information about change
- Timely updates at each stage of the change process
- Frequency of communication during change initiatives
- Responsiveness to questions or feedback
- Early warning of impending organizational changes

Communication Channel
- Use of appropriate platforms (e.g. email, memo, etc.)
- Channel diversity and accessibility
- Appropriateness of channel to message complexity
- Employee preference in channel selection
- Consistency of information across channels

Employee Involvement
- Opportunities for employee input and feedback
- Inclusion in decision-making processes
- Active participation in planning or executing change
- Recognition of employee concerns and contributions
- Level of engagement in communication processes

CHANGE MANAGEMENT
- Employee readiness for change
- Reduction in resistance to change
- Successful implementation of change initiatives
- Alignment of employee behavior with new goals
- Organizational adaptability and resilience
- Sustained employee morale and productivity during change
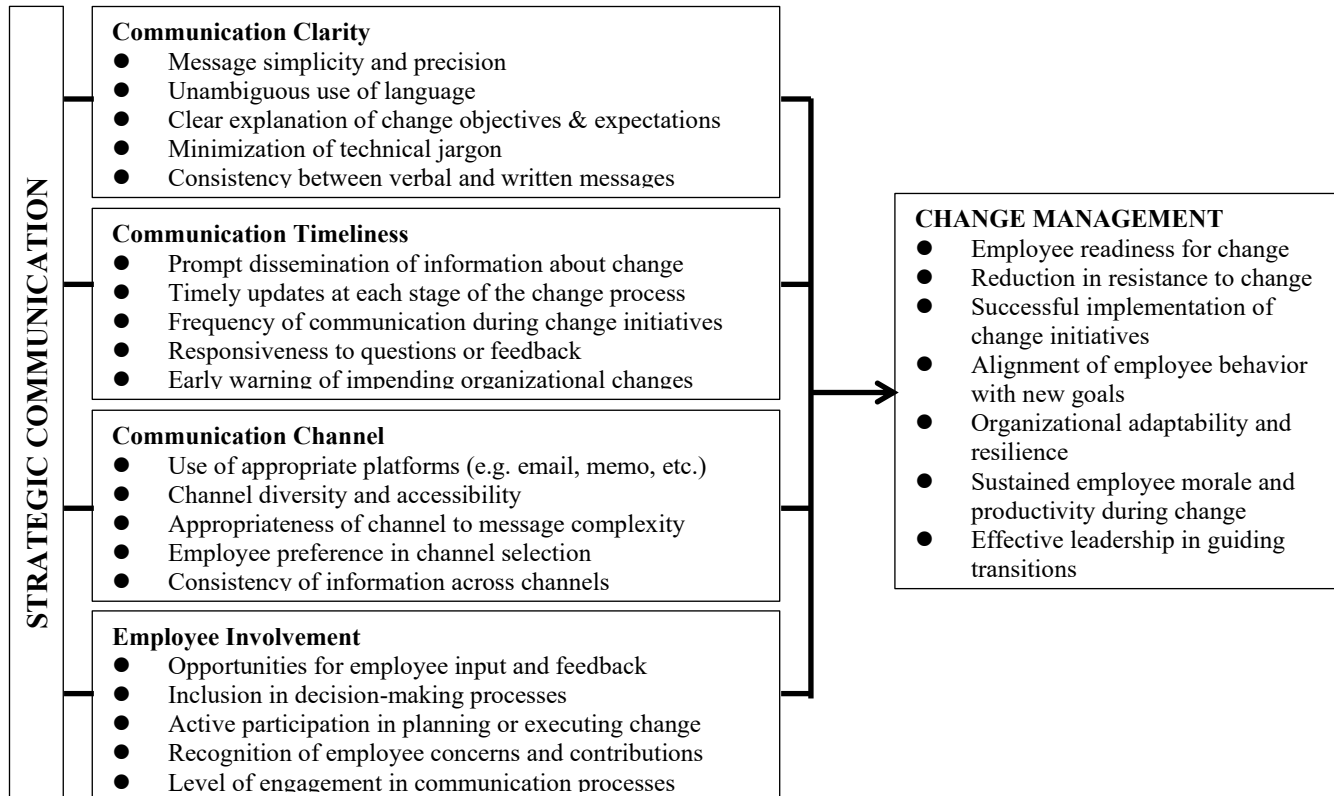- Effective leadership in guiding transitions

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of Study Variable

Methodology

This study employed a quantitative research approach using a descriptive cross-sectional survey design to investigate the relationship between strategic communication and change management in selected hospitality firms in Rivers State, Nigeria. The study population consisted of industry players, including hotels and travel-related businesses, operating in urban centers within Rivers State. The population was estimated at 310. A multi-stage sampling technique was adopted for this research. Initially, purposive sampling was used to select prominent and operationally active hospitality firms. Subsequently, employees within these organizations were stratified into categories such as managerial, supervisory, and frontline staff. Simple random sampling was then employed to select participants from each stratum, ensuring adequate representation across all organizational levels. The sample size for the study was determined using Krejcie and Morgan's sample size determination table, which provided a statistically valid number of 173 respondents based on the estimated population size.

Data were gathered using a structured questionnaire developed from validated instruments in previous studies (Jimmieson et al., 2013; Kitchen & Daly, 2002; Rita-Men et al., 2022). Responses were recorded on a 5-point Likert scale. Prior to the main data collection, a pilot test was conducted with 20 employees from a similar hospitality firm not included in the final sample. The validity of the research instrument was confirmed through expert reviews by academics specializing in organizational communication and change management, ensuring strong content and construct validity. The reliability of the instrument was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha. Specifically, communication clarity yielded an alpha of 0.82, communication timeliness 0.79, communication channels 0.84, employee involvement 0.81, and change management 0.86. These values exceeded the minimum threshold of 0.70, indicating that the instrument was suitable for the main study. Data collection took place over a period of four weeks and involved both physical distribution of questionnaires and digital dissemination via email and messaging platforms. Ethical standards were strictly observed throughout the study. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and they were assured of confidentiality and the voluntary nature of their participation. Data were collected, stored, and analyzed solely for academic purposes.

Upon completion of data collection, the responses were coded and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26. Descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, were used to summarize the demographic characteristics and general trends in the responses. Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation was employed to examine the strength and direction of the relationship between strategic communication and change management. Furthermore, multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine the extent to which dimensions of strategic communication predicted employee responses to organizational change. All statistical tests were conducted at the 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Out of the 173 questionnaires distributed, 142 valid responses were obtained and analyzed, representing business owners, senior managers, and supervisors from hospitality organizations across Rivers State, Nigeria. The gender distribution showed 58.5% male and 41.5% female respondents. Regarding firm size, 52% of participants were from small-scale firms, 34% from medium-scale, and 14% from large-scale enterprises. In terms of industry experience, 36% had less than five years while 64% had more than five years of experience. Business category analysis revealed that respondents were drawn from a range of sectors, with 31.0% working in hotels, 33.1% in restaurants and bars, 17.6% in nightclubs, 13.4% in spa and wellness centers, and 4.9% in events management firms.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables

Variable	Item Statement	Mean	SD
Communication Clarity	CC1: Messages about change are easy to understand.	4.20	0.61
	CC2: Change goals are clearly explained.	4.12	0.67
	CC3: Jargon is avoided in official communication.	4.03	0.64
	CC4: Verbal and written messages are consistent.	4.10	0.59
	CC5: Language used is unambiguous.	4.15	0.58

Variable	Item Statement	Mean	SD
Communication Timeliness	CT1: We are informed promptly about changes.	4.18	0.60
	CT2: Communication is frequent during change.	4.09	0.63
	CT3: Updates come at each stage of the change.	4.05	0.65
	CT4: Management responds quickly to inquiries.	4.11	0.56
	CT5: We receive early notifications of changes.	4.07	0.62
Communication Channels	CH1: The right channels are used to relay change info.	4.14	0.61
	CH2: I can easily access information on change.	4.06	0.66
	CH3: Channels match the complexity of the message.	4.01	0.64
	CH4: My channel preferences are considered.	3.98	0.70
	CH5: Messages are consistent across all platforms.	4.00	0.68
Employee Involvement	EI1: Staff are involved in change planning.	3.95	0.72
	EI2: My opinions are considered during change.	3.88	0.76
	EI3: Staff actively contribute to change success.	4.02	0.63
	EI4: Concerns are addressed openly.	3.91	0.67
	EI5: Staff are recognized for their input.	3.85	0.74
Change Management	CM1: Employees are ready for change.	4.17	0.57
	CM2: There is minimal resistance to change.	4.01	0.64
	CM3: Change initiatives are successfully implemented.	4.10	0.59
	CM4: Staff behavior aligns with new directions.	4.05	0.60
	CM5: The organization adapts quickly.	4.13	0.58
	CM6: Productivity remains stable during change.	4.00	0.61
	CM7: Leaders guide change effectively.	4.16	0.54

Criterion Mean = 3.0

Source: Field Survey Computation, 2025

These results reflect a generally positive perception of strategic communication practices and their role in enhancing organizational change outcomes across the sampled hospitality firms.

Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation coefficients revealed significant and positive relationships between all dimensions of strategic communication and change management outcomes.

Table 2: Pearson Correlation Between Strategic Communication and Change Management

Variables	Change Management
Communication Clarity	$r = 0.531^{**}$, $p < 0.00$
Communication Timeliness	$r = 0.574^{**}$, $p < 0.00$
Communication Channels	$r = 0.495^{**}$, $p < 0.02$
Employee Involvement	$r = 0.603^{**}$, $p < 0.00$

Note: *N = 142; *Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed)
Source: IBM SPSS Version 26.0 Output, 2025

These findings suggest that better clarity, timing, choice of channels, and employee participation in communication positively influence the success of change management initiatives.

Regression Analysis
Multiple regression analysis was performed to assess the extent to which dimensions of strategic communication predict successful change management outcomes.

Model Summary
$R^2 = 0.51$, $F_{(4,137)} = 35.47$, $p < 0.001$

Predictor	β	t	p-value
Communication Clarity	0.212	3.06	0.003
Communication Timeliness	0.255	3.88	0.000
Communication Channels	0.186	2.57	0.011
Employee Involvement	0.318	4.62	0.000

Source: IBM SPSS Version 26.0 Output, 2025

The regression model indicates that all four dimensions of strategic communication significantly predict change management effectiveness, with employee involvement exerting the strongest influence.

Summary of Findings
The study investigated the relationship between strategic communication and change management in selected hospitality firms in Rivers State, Nigeria. Findings indicated that communication clarity was significantly correlated with successful change implementation ($r = 0.531$, $p < 0.01$), with regression results ($\beta = 0.212$, $p = 0.003$) suggesting its predictive effect on employee readiness and reduced resistance, consistent with earlier studies (Jimmieson et al., 2013) emphasizing clarity as a means of reducing uncertainty.

Communication timeliness also demonstrated a strong influence ($r = 0.574$, $p < 0.01$; $\beta = 0.255$, $p < 0.001$), underscoring the value of prompt and regular updates throughout the change process, aligning with findings by Li et al. (2021) on crisis communication and employee adaptability. The analysis further revealed that communication channels had a positive correlation with change management ($r = 0.495$, $p < 0.01$; $\beta = 0.186$, $p = 0.011$), suggesting that using consistent and appropriate platforms facilitates better message reception and employee alignment—a conclusion supported by Rita-Men et al. (2022).

Notably, employee involvement emerged as the strongest predictor of change success ($r = 0.603$; $\beta = 0.318$, $p < 0.001$), affirming that active engagement and participatory communication significantly enhance employee support for change, echoing the emphasis placed on inclusive practices in organizational culture by Bagga et al. (2023). Altogether, the results affirm that strategic communication is a powerful enabler of effective change management, with all four dimensions contributing to improved readiness, lowered resistance, and stronger alignment with evolving organizational goals.

Implication of the Study

The findings of this study carry significant practical and theoretical implications for organizational leaders, change managers, communication professionals, and scholars interested in the intersection of internal communication and organizational change. From a practical standpoint, the study highlights the central role of strategic communication as a driver of successful change management within the hospitality sector. It demonstrates that clear, timely, and channel-appropriate communication—coupled with active employee involvement—can enhance employee readiness, reduce resistance, and foster organizational adaptability. This implies that hospitality firms, especially in dynamic and competitive markets like Rivers State, must integrate communication strategies into the core of their change management plans. For leadership and management practitioners, the study affirms that communication is not just a support function but a strategic tool that can shape outcomes of transformation initiatives. On a theoretical level, the study contributes to the growing body of literature that positions communication clarity, timeliness, and participatory practices as not only antecedents of successful change but also as mechanisms for sustaining employee engagement during transitions.

Conclusion

This study examined the relationship between strategic communication and change management in selected hospitality firms in Rivers State, Nigeria. Drawing on empirical data, it established that dimensions of strategic communication—namely communication clarity, timeliness, appropriate channel use, and employee involvement—positively and significantly influence the success of organizational change efforts. The results showed that when organizations communicate change processes with clarity, keep employees informed in a timely manner, use appropriate communication channels, and actively involve employees in the process, there is a notable improvement in employee readiness and alignment with organizational objectives. The study thus reinforces the idea that communication is a powerful organizational capability that can either support or hinder the achievement of change goals, depending on how it is designed and implemented. In sum, the study concludes that for hospitality firms navigating frequent and sometimes complex changes, the strategic management of internal communication can significantly enhance change outcomes, minimize disruptions, and strengthen organizational cohesion.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, several recommendations are offered to practitioners and policymakers in the hospitality industry. Firstly, hospitality firms should invest in building a structured internal communication framework that emphasizes clarity of message content, timely updates, and consistent use of communication channels tailored to the needs and preferences of employees. Management teams should also prioritize feedback mechanisms that enable two-way communication, ensuring that employee voices are heard and integrated into the change process. Secondly, firms should adopt a participatory approach to change by involving employees early in the planning and implementation stages. This involvement fosters a sense of ownership and commitment, reducing resistance and improving change receptiveness. Furthermore, training programs on communication best practices and change readiness should be conducted for both managers and employees to enhance their ability to engage with organizational change in constructive ways. Lastly, organizational policies should reflect a long-term commitment to transparent communication and inclusive decision-making as part of the organizational culture.

Suggestions for Future Studies

While this study has provided valuable insights into the role of strategic communication in change management, several areas remain open for future research. Future studies could extend this research to other service sectors beyond hospitality to assess whether the relationships observed in this study hold true in different organizational contexts. Given the increasing use of digital platforms for internal communication, another avenue worth exploring is the effectiveness of various digital communication tools in supporting organizational change. It would also be beneficial for future researchers to explore the mediating or moderating roles of organizational culture, leadership style, or employee trust in the relationship between communication and change outcomes.

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