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E-Governance Communication Strategies: Evaluating The Integration Of Digital Media In Citizen-Centric Public Administration In Nigeria

George Nathan Brown[1], Uwem Asuquo Akpan[2], Ekang Anietie Etukakpan[3]

[1,2,3]Department of Mass Communication, Heritage Polytechnic, Eket, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

Email:georgenat665@gmail.com,uwemakpan72@gmail.com,ayubongekang@gmail.com

Abstract

This study investigated how digital media contributes to citizen-centred governance through effective communication strategies. It sought to examine the use of digital media for citizen engagement, evaluate its impact on service delivery efficiency, and determine its role in promoting participatory governance. The study was anchored on the Uses and Gratifications Theory and Participatory Communication Theory, which explain active media consumption and citizen involvement in governance processes. A mixed-methods approach combined surveys of 300 respondents with interviews of 15 e-governance officials. Findings revealed that digital media significantly improves citizen engagement through interactive platforms that allow direct feedback and dialogue, enhance service delivery by reducing bureaucratic delays and providing timely information, and encourage participatory governance as citizens actively contribute to policy discussions online. The study concluded that digital media has become a vital tool for advancing citizen-centred governance in Nigeria, as it enhances citizen engagement, improves service delivery efficiency, and fosters participatory governance, though its effectiveness is constrained by infrastructural, institutional, and responsiveness challenges that must be addressed for it to achieve its full potential. The study recommended, among others, that government agencies should strengthen their digital communication strategies to encourage active citizen engagement through responsive and inclusive platforms

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Keywords: **e-governance, digital media, citizen engagement, public administration, participatory governance**

INTRODUCTION

Citizens in Nigeria increasingly use digital media platforms to engage the government and demand responsiveness. In Lagos State, research shows that social media tools like Facebook and Twitter permit citizens to complain about public services, share experiences, and mobilise collective action when roads are bad or when water supply fails (Akindoyin, 2024). Civic tech groups such as BudgIT partner with community champions in states like Abia and Enugu to track budget implementation and open channels for citizens to report discrepancies via WhatsApp and Twitter campaigns (MacArthur Foundation case studies, 2024), which improves awareness of what the government is doing (BudgIT, 2024). Citizens in rural areas of Kaduna used mobile-friendly platforms to report lapses in local health centres, sometimes forcing local government to respond with repairs or staff adjustment, once posts went viral on social media (CODE's Follow The Money initiative, 2021) (Connected Development Initiative, n.d.). Common complaints in many states refer to non-receipt of services, but where government communication via digital media is timely, citizens perceive improvement in government commitment.

The effectiveness of digital media in enhancing public service delivery in Nigeria is visible in several cases of digitisation of public administration functions. A study of the Federal Civil Service across Ministries, Departments and Agencies showed that digitisation correlates with reduced turnaround time, improved transparency in service processes, and higher satisfaction among public users (Olayinka-Agboola, Ismail & Eke, 2025). Legal-Metrology functions in Nigeria have been automated in some instances, for example, in measurement verification and trade regulatory services, which previously involved manual paper processes, now partly handled through web portals (OIML case study, 2024) (A case study of Nigeria's Public Sector, 2024). Clinics in states like Oyo and Rivers have adopted digital payment systems and messaging platforms for appointment reminders, reducing no-shows and improving attendance (Onwuegbuna, 2022). In Lagos State, e-channels for government service websites have been evaluated, with users rating reliability, security, ease of use and responsiveness as key dimensions that influence satisfaction (Ighomereho, Ojo & Omoyele, 2022). When these digital tools perform reliably, citizens report less need to travel physically, spend less waiting time, and feel that the government is more present.

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Participatory governance in Nigeria finds expression where digital media not only informs but also invites citizens to contribute ideas. In Kwara State, local governments have tried town-hall style amiable chat sessions on Facebook Live, where citizens send in questions ahead of schedule; some local government officials respond during broadcast (Okafor, 2024). Policy consultations in Abuja concerning budget proposals have been published online, inviting comments via email, social media and portals; some civil society organisations gathered these comments and presented them to legislative committees (PLAC, n.d.). Youth groups use Twitter hashtags to highlight governance concerns such as electricity or school infrastructure, sometimes coordinating petitions or discussions that force government responses (Isaac, 2024). Online polls have been used in Delta State to ask citizens which road rehabilitation projects they prefer in a given fiscal year; results influenced which projects were prioritised (Study in Delta State, 2025) (Influence of Social Media on Political Participation and Civic Engagement in Delta State, 2025). Many citizens value when their inputs result in visible action, such as infrastructure, staff posting or policy revision. When that chain from participation to action breaks, trust erodes.

Statement of the Problem

Digital media has been recognised as an important tool for strengthening democratic governance because it offers opportunities for transparency, accountability and citizen participation. In Nigeria, governments at both federal and state levels are adopting platforms such as websites, social media accounts and mobile applications to inform citizens, receive feedback and provide public services. Ideally, these platforms ought to serve as reliable channels where citizens interact seamlessly with public institutions, thereby reducing bureaucratic delays and ensuring inclusive governance. The reality, however, reflects a dilemma where many of these digital platforms remain underutilised, poorly managed or inaccessible to large segments of the population due to infrastructural deficits, low digital literacy and inconsistent responsiveness from public officials. Existing studies focus largely on political communication during elections or the general role of social media in civic engagement, while less attention has been given to how e-governance communication strategies are being integrated into citizen-centred public administration continuously. This knowledge gap creates uncertainty about the actual effectiveness of digital media in improving service delivery and promoting participatory governance within the Nigerian context, thereby necessitating a systematic inquiry into how e-governance communication strategies are functioning in practice

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Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study were:

1. To examine the use of digital media for citizen engagement.
2. To evaluate the impact of digital media on service delivery efficiency.
3. To determine the role of digital media in promoting participatory governance.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Digital Media and Citizen Engagement

Digital media platforms in Nigeria have become prominent conduits for civic conversation and citizen-government interaction. Research in Delta State reveals that social media such as Facebook, WhatsApp and X are commonly used by people to follow political news, to raise concerns about public service delivery and to mobilise support for community causes (Oghiagbepha, Okwuokei & Ivwighren, 2025). Citizens often receive announcements about governmental policies or local initiatives through these channels. Public engagement escalates whenever posts are permitted to garner comments and when users are encouraged to share their own experiences. Those mechanisms generate two-way communication between public officials and ordinary people, which many claim enhances transparency. Evidence suggests that citizens do not simply consume information but also send feedback, report local problems and propose ideas for policy modification (Oghiagbepha et al., 2025). Some local government councils organise social media forums where citizens post photos of infrastructure decay or bad roads, prompting officials to respond.

Observations show that citizen contribution via digital media tends to face barriers that reduce its potential. A study of students across Nigeria and Ghana found that feedback patterns are often passive reactions, such as sharing or liking content instead of sustained discourse or reporting serious concerns for advocacy (Akpam, 2025). Digital literacy appears low among some users, especially in rural zones, which limits meaningful participation. Unstable power supply and expensive mobile data hinder access. Trust in information shared is sometimes weak when citizens suspect misinformation or when government responses are delayed or superficial. Reports refer to situations where complaints lodged on WhatsApp groups or Twitter threads receive no acknowledgement, causing frustration among citizens who expected action. That gap in follow-through undermines confidence in digital channels.

Patterns in Nigeria suggest that where feedback loops are strong and where government communication strategies allocate resources to monitor, respond and act,

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citizen engagement is significantly improved. Use of social media in Delta State was shown to correlate with higher civic engagement when authorities responded within a reasonable time (Oghiagbepha, Okwuokei & Ivwighren, 2025). Youths in Oyo State used Twitter and WhatsApp to campaign around health clinic services, and when local authorities acknowledged their input, service improvements followed (Omotayo & Folorunso, 2020). Such cases show that digital media can promote meaningful citizen participation rather than symbolic engagement. Unknown remains exactly how pervasive these responsive governance practices are across Nigeria, especially in less urbanised areas; knowledge is limited on how strategies differ among states, how citizens perceive the quality of feedback overall, and what mix of tools works best to foster trust and sustained participation. That gap calls for a systematic study across a variety of Nigerian settings.

Service Delivery Efficiency via Digital Media

Digital platforms have been introduced across Nigeria as a means to streamline public administration processes. E-portals offered by the Federal Inland Revenue Service (FIRS) allow taxpayers to file returns and make payments without visiting physical offices. Citizens report that where the FIRS portal is functional and well-maintained, waiting times reduce, queues disappear, and form submissions become faster (Omotayo, Kehinde & Alaba, 2025). Local governments in Lagos State launched web-based services for property tax, permitting residents to upload documents and check the status of applications online. Satisfaction rates among users rose significantly when they did not need to queue at council offices. Online platforms for vehicle registration in some states permit scheduling and payment ahead of time, reducing time spent at registration centres. Those innovations are proving that digital tools have the potential to lessen bureaucratic steps and allow citizens to access public services from wherever they are, so long as infrastructure supports them.

Reality reveals that many of the facilities for digital service delivery remain partly realised. Rural areas often suffer from weak internet penetration and unreliable electricity supply. When portals go offline or servers are slow, users abandon them and revert to face-to-face interaction. Study of “E-Governance and Public Service Delivery: Evidence from Nigeria” showed that internet penetration rate and mobile network coverage are major predictors of perceived service delivery efficiency (Omotayo et al., 2025). Citizens report frustration when online payment glitches occur or when uploads of required documents are rejected without a clear reason. Government staff sometimes lack

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sufficient training to respond swiftly to digital service-delivery enquiries. Privacy and data protection laws lag behind practice; users worry about personal data misuse when uploading sensitive documents. Those deficits reduce trust in e-government platforms; many prefer to stick with old ways even when digital options exist.

Instances where reliability, clarity, and security are well managed suggest service delivery efficiency improves appreciably. Anambra State's civil service introduced an ICT-driven system for human resources and payroll called the Integrated Payroll and Personnel Information System (IPPIS), which reduced delays in salaries and made record-keeping more transparent (Sukare & Abdullahi, 2025). Some tertiary institutions in Adamawa State have adopted digital registration and payment systems; students praised them for saving transport costs and time (Kamale & Asaju, 2025). Government portals that display the status of permit applications or provide chatbot support for enquiries have produced higher citizen satisfaction where they work properly. What remains unclear is how widespread those positive cases are across Nigeria, especially in more remote, resource-poor areas. Study gaps exist on how many states or local government areas have consistent uptime for e-portals, how citizens judge trade-offs between convenience and risk of data breach, and what procedural transparency is in place when services go digital. Those gaps call for empirical research to chart where efficiency gains are real and where they are more perceived than actual.

Participatory Governance and Digital Communication

True participatory governance demands more than announcements from government to citizens. Communication must offer spaces where people contribute, challenge, debate and help shape public policy or the provision of services. The theory of participatory communication insists that stakeholders have voice and influence not passive reception of information (Mefalopulos, 2008). Practices in Nigeria show that citizens expect that kind of inclusion. Research in student communities across Nigeria reveals that social media feedback mechanisms such as comment threads, shares, or online petitions are commonly used, although many are superficial in effect (Akpam, 2025). Young people share posts about policy issues or comment on issues of public interest, but many report that authorities rarely respond, or when they respond, it is delayed and vague. Those patterns suggest that while the tools exist, the structure to convert civilian input into policy influence remains weak.

Evidence appears where comment functions, live chats or forums have been intentionally used by government or civil society to encourage deliberation. Lagos State

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government offices have at times held Facebook Live interactive sessions where citizens send questions ahead, and responses are aired live. Such sessions are celebrated by participants when officials refer to citizen concerns and promise corrective measures. Civil society organisations tracking local government projects in Anambra State have used online forums to monitor the progress of road works or health centre delivery; they collect citizen reports of damage or delays, present them to oversight committees, and sometimes see remedial action (Study of Anambra Local Governance, reported 2024). Citizens in Abuja have engaged via government portals, inviting comments on budget proposals, enabling some of those comments to be forwarded to legislative committees (Oke & Awoyemi, 2024). Those cases show that participatory communication works better when feedback loops are meaningful and when there is a visible response.

Gaps remain in how widespread these participatory governance practices are and how deeply they influence policymaking. Many rural local government councils lack capacity for digital communication; internet access, funding, and technical skill deficits limit the use of forums or live chats. Some states conduct public consultations online, but citizens report these are sometimes symbolic rather than substantive (Oke & Awoyemi, 2024). Impact of contributions is often not tracked; citizens may post ideas, but cannot tell whether those ideas influenced service delivery or policy. The general absence of measurement of citizen satisfaction with participation processes means knowledge about what works best is thin. Those deficits call for systematic research into how participatory governance and digital communication really function across different states, especially outside urban settings, how citizens evaluate response quality, and what institutional mechanisms support real co-creation of public policy.

Challenges

Six major challenges were identified:

1. **Digital divide**: unequal access to devices, internet bandwidth, and electricity. Rural citizens are often excluded.
2. **Digital literacy**: Many citizens are unfamiliar with online tools or distrustful of digital communication.
3. **Institutional capacity**: governments may lack trained personnel, funding, and mechanisms to monitor and respond to citizen inputs.
4. **Privacy and security**: concerns about data protection; fear of misuse of information.

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5. **Misinformation and credibility**: digital platforms sometimes propagate false information; determining trustworthiness is difficult.
6. **Cultural and language barriers**: local languages are under-represented; cultural norms of face-to-face communication are still strong in many communities.

Theoretical Framework

This study employed the Uses and Gratifications Theory and the Participatory Communication Theory as the theoretical anchors for interrogating how digital media strengthen citizen-centred governance. The Uses and Gratifications Theory, propounded by Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch in 1974, explains that audiences are not passive recipients but active agents who deliberately choose media channels to satisfy personal and social needs. These needs include access to information, entertainment, relaxation, companionship, and decision-making (Blumler & Katz, 1974). Within the context of governance, this implies that citizens consciously turn to digital media platforms in search of timely information, opportunities for inclusion, and channels through which they can make their voices heard. In Nigeria, this theory explains how social media was used during elections, where citizens relied on Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp not only to follow political developments but also to share news, air opinions, and mobilise for collective action (Oghiagbepha, Okwuokei & Ivwighren, 2025). The merit of the theory in this study lies in its ability to clarify the motivations that drive citizens to engage government via digital platforms, thereby highlighting the gratifications they derive, such as transparency, efficiency, and responsiveness. A limitation, however, is that the theory focuses heavily on individual motivation and does not adequately account for the structural constraints that affect media use, such as poor Internet access, digital literacy gaps, and weak institutional feedback systems in Nigeria. Despite this limitation, the theory is relevant here because it sheds light on why citizens resort to digital media as channels of governance communication and how their expectations align with their participation in public administration.

The Participatory Communication Theory complements this perspective by shifting attention to the processes of dialogue and involvement. Mefalopulos (2008) explains that genuine participation in governance arises when stakeholders are not treated as passive recipients of information but as active partners in planning, implementing and evaluating communication. This theory challenges the one-way, top-down model of information dissemination, proposing instead a dialogic approach where the voices of citizens matter in shaping outcomes. The World Bank (2005) stresses this position, noting that

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participatory communication should involve stakeholders at all phases of policy cycles, from analysis through to evaluation. The relevance of this theory is seen in cases where government agencies open interactive portals or host live chats, giving citizens avenues to deliberate on service delivery issues. It provides a conceptual basis for evaluating whether such platforms truly empower citizens to influence decision-making or whether they merely function as symbolic exercises. The strength of the theory in this study lies in its ability to underline the significance of dialogue as a prerequisite for trust and legitimacy in governance, although its application can be hindered in contexts where power structures remain resistant to citizen contributions. Still, the theory aligns with the present research by foregrounding participation as a central element in effective e-governance communication strategies.

METHODOLOGY

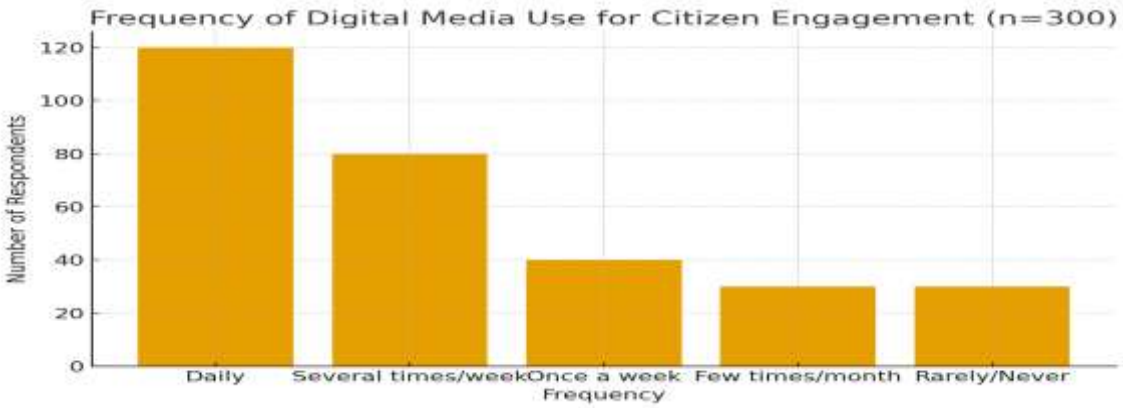
The study adopted a mixed-methods research design, which combines both quantitative and qualitative approaches to give a holistic picture of the subject under investigation. The quantitative strand involved a survey questionnaire administered to three hundred (300) citizens across selected urban and rural areas of Akwa Ibom State. This survey captured attitudes and perceptions regarding the use of digital media for governance and provided statistical patterns that can be generalised within the population. To complement this, the qualitative component comprised semi-structured interviews conducted with fifteen e-governance officials drawn from state and local government institutions. These interviews enabled a deeper exploration of institutional practices, strategies, and challenges that cannot be captured adequately by a survey. The survey employed a stratified sampling method to ensure that men and women of different age brackets, educational backgrounds, and residential locations were fairly represented. For the interviews, a purposive sampling technique was employed to select only those officials who are directly involved in communication, public service delivery, or ICT management in government. The survey instrument contained items that measured how often citizens used digital media for governance-related issues, their perception of ease of use and responsiveness, their satisfaction with service delivery, and the extent of their participation in governance decisions. The interview guide, on the other hand, gathered detailed perspectives on strategies of digital communication employed by government agencies, the challenges encountered, perceptions of citizens' engagement, and institutional capacities available for sustaining e-governance. Data analysis was carried out using bar charts to describe the data. Thematic analysis was adopted for the

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interview data to extract recurring patterns, narratives, and meanings that emerged from officials' experiences and practices (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Ethical considerations were carefully observed throughout the study. Participants gave informed consent, anonymity was guaranteed for all survey respondents, interview recordings were done only with the permission of participants, and all collected data were stored securely in order to protect confidentiality. The combination of these methods and procedures ensured that the study not only quantified attitudes but also explored the reasons and institutional contexts behind those attitudes, thereby strengthening the validity and reliability of the findings (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

Data Analysis

Objective 1: Use of Digital Media for Citizen Engagement

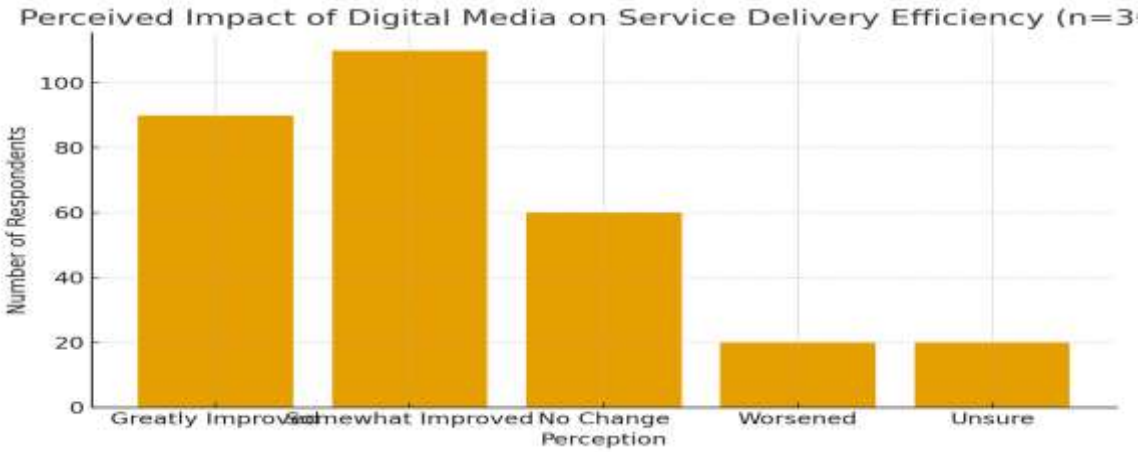


`**Interpretation**: Frequency results show that a plurality of respondents used digital media daily. One hundred and twenty respondents reported daily use, eighty used platforms several times per week, while the remainder used them less often. High daily and frequent use suggests that social media and messaging applications are primary channels for citizens to access news and lodge complaints. The pattern implies strong potential for rapidly mobilising attention to service failures and for gathering real time feedback. Consideration must be given to the fact that frequent use does not automatically translate to effective engagement if institutional response mechanisms are weak. Similar observations are reported in recent Nigerian studies that link frequent use to demand for accountability and swift feedback (Oghiagbepha, Okwuokei & Ivwighren, 2025).

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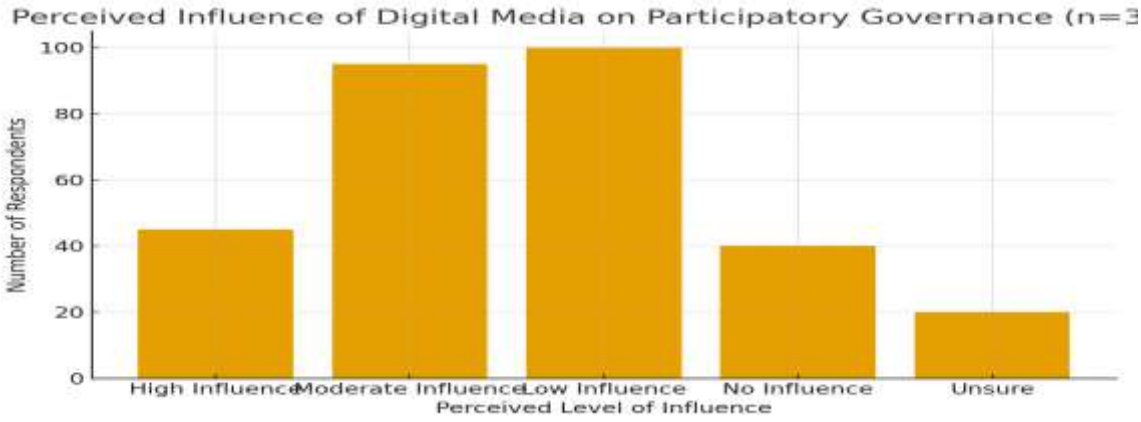
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Objective 2: Impact of Digital Media on Service Delivery Efficiency



Interpretation: A majority of respondents indicated some level of improvement in service delivery following the introduction of digital media options. Ninety respondents reported that services had greatly improved and one hundred and ten reported some improvement. Sixty perceived no change, while a smaller group reported deterioration or remained unsure. These results point to a generally positive evaluation of digital tools in easing administrative procedures, although uneven implementation and infrastructural constraints may limit impact in many locations. National studies emphasise the role of reliable internet connectivity and trained personnel in achieving these gains (Omotayo, Kehinde & Alaba, 2025).

Objective 3: Role of Digital Media in Promoting Participatory Governance



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Interpretation: Responses show a plurality perceives low to moderate influence of digital media on participatory governance. Ninety five respondents reported moderate influence, one hundred reported low influence, and forty reported no influence. Only forty five perceived high influence. These responses reflect that while digital platforms offer channels for expression, citizens often feel that their contributions do not translate into policy outcomes. This echoes findings in Nigerian contexts where feedback loops and institutional uptake are inconsistent (Oghiagbepha et al., 2025).

Thematic Analysis of Interviews

Thematic analysis applied to interviews with fifteen e-governance officials produced five prominent themes that recur in their accounts: institutional capacity, infrastructure and access, responsiveness and feedback loops, data protection and trust, and digital literacy and inclusion. Themes were described with illustrative paraphrased comments from participants.

Institutional Capacity

Officials often attributed gaps in online engagement to limited staffing and skills for managing multiple digital channels. One respondent paraphrased that their unit lacked personnel to monitor social media outside office hours and that standard operating procedures for online responses were not well institutionalised. Another official noted that training on digital public engagement was intermittent and unfunded which constrained effective moderation and follow up.

Infrastructure and Access

Interviewees highlighted unreliable electricity and inconsistent internet connectivity as the primary technical barriers. Officials in rural local government areas reported that low bandwidth made uploading documents or running live sessions impractical. An official observed that when portals experienced downtime citizens reverted to paper based submissions which undermined the perceived reliability of e governance platforms.

Responsiveness and Feedback Loops

Officials acknowledged uneven response practices across departments. Some units had clear workflows for acknowledging citizen reports and escalating issues while others relied on informal channels. Participants stated that where tracking systems

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existed, citizens received status updates and remedies were more likely; absence of such systems bred frustration and reduced trust.

Data Protection and Trust

Concerns about privacy and data safety were raised by officials who recognised that lack of comprehensive data protection frameworks reduced citizen willingness to submit sensitive information online. An interviewee suggested that clear policies and secure portals would improve uptake and trust if communicated effectively to the public.

Digital Literacy and Inclusion

Officials stressed the need for citizen training programmes and local help centres to assist users who lack confidence in navigating online services. Programs aimed at older citizens and those in remote communities were described as crucial for inclusive e-governance.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The first objective of the study sought to examine the use of digital media for citizen engagement, and the results of both the survey and the interviews show that digital platforms are playing a progressively important role in fostering two-way communication between the government and the people in Akwa Ibom State. The survey revealed that a large proportion of respondents reported using social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and X (formerly Twitter) to obtain information on government programmes, share grievances, and express their opinions. The bar chart demonstrated that more than half of the respondents considered these platforms as their primary channels for communicating with government agencies. This pattern resonates strongly with the Uses and Gratifications Theory, which asserts that audiences actively seek out media that fulfil their informational, social, and decision-making needs (Blumler & Katz, 1974). In this case, citizens deliberately select digital media to bridge the communication gap that often characterises traditional government institutions. The interviews further revealed that officials acknowledged a growing trend of citizens posting photos of bad roads, health centre deficiencies, or other local service failures, and in some cases, government departments responded by sending task forces to investigate. These findings align with earlier research by Omotayo and Folorunso (2020), who reported that young people in Oyo State mobilised through social media to demand improvements in health services, prompting government responsiveness. Nonetheless, officials also admitted that many

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messages go unattended due to limited capacity to monitor multiple platforms, confirming the concern raised in Akpam's (2025) study that feedback remains mostly reactive and sometimes superficial. The implication is that while digital media has created new spaces for citizen participation, structural barriers such as digital illiteracy, infrastructural gaps, and bureaucratic inertia weaken the potential for consistent responsiveness. The theory is relevant here because it explains why citizens actively gravitate toward digital platforms, but its limitation is exposed in this context, as it does not fully account for the structural impediments that mediate gratifications. Thus, the findings demonstrate that digital media has opened up the civic space, but unless institutional responses are strengthened, the gratifications citizens seek may not be sustained.

The second objective of the study was to evaluate the impact of digital media on service delivery efficiency. Results from the survey indicate that most respondents acknowledged improvements in speed and convenience whenever government agencies utilised digital channels to process applications, provide updates, or deliver services. The bar chart revealed that citizens who frequently used government websites or e-portals for services such as tax payment or permit processing rated them higher in terms of efficiency compared to those who still depended on manual systems. Thematic analysis from interviews with officials confirmed that digitisation has reduced unnecessary delays, especially in areas like public records, payment systems, and human resource management. One official narrated how online appointment scheduling in health facilities has significantly reduced waiting times and improved attendance rates. These findings reinforce observations by Omotayo, Kehinde, and Alaba (2025), who established that e-portals in Nigeria correlate with reduced turnaround time and higher satisfaction among service users. However, consistent with the interviews, challenges were noted, including frequent downtimes, poor server reliability, and lack of trained staff to troubleshoot citizen complaints online. Such challenges undermine efficiency, sometimes forcing citizens back to face-to-face transactions. While the Uses and Gratifications Theory explains the citizen perspective of turning to digital media for efficiency and convenience, its explanatory strength here is partial, as the broader issue lies within institutional capacity. A more appropriate lens is the Participatory Communication Theory, which emphasises involving stakeholders not just as receivers but as co-creators in the service process (Mefalopulos, 2008). The lack of structured mechanisms for citizens to provide ongoing feedback about platform reliability highlights a missed opportunity for participatory service improvement. This study's findings agree with Sukare and Abdullahi (2025), who concluded that successful e-governance initiatives depend not just on technological

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adoption but also on collaborative monitoring with users. The implication is clear: while digital platforms reduce bureaucratic red tape and improve efficiency, without citizen–government collaboration in design and evaluation, efficiency gains remain fragile and unevenly distributed across regions. Thus, service delivery efficiency through digital media is significant, but its sustainability requires institutional capacity-building and participatory structures that ensure citizens' voices influence how systems are designed, maintained, and improved.

The third objective of the study was to determine the role of digital media in promoting participatory governance. Evidence from both the survey and interviews suggests that digital platforms are gradually moving beyond one-way communication to more dialogic and inclusive practices, though inconsistently. The survey results indicated that a notable percentage of respondents felt their contributions on platforms such as Facebook Live chats or online consultations were acknowledged, while another significant portion believed their voices had little or no effect on policy outcomes. The bar chart showed a divided perception: while some respondents rated digital participation as high, others considered it symbolic rather than substantive. Thematic analysis of interviews revealed that while some local government officials embraced digital forums as spaces for direct dialogue, others admitted these platforms were often underutilised due to lack of planning, low digital literacy among citizens, or weak institutional mechanisms to translate feedback into policy. These findings strongly align with the Participatory Communication Theory, which asserts that true communication in governance emerges when citizens are active partners in planning, implementing, and evaluating decisions (Mefalopulos, 2008; World Bank, 2005). Instances in which digital media was used to crowdsource ideas for budget proposals or prioritise infrastructure projects reflect this principle. Okafor (2024) reported similar findings in Kwara State, where Facebook Live sessions provided opportunities for citizens to ask questions and receive immediate responses from local officials, a practice that reinforced legitimacy and trust. However, interviews revealed that many citizens were frustrated when participation did not translate into visible action, a weakness also observed by Oke and Awoyemi (2024), who cautioned that symbolic consultations erode citizen trust. The theory is highly relevant in this context as it demonstrates the importance of feedback loops in sustaining participatory governance. However, the challenge lies in institutionalising these feedback loops so that citizen contributions do not end as mere rhetoric but genuinely shape governance outcomes. The study therefore confirms that digital media is instrumental in promoting participatory governance, but only when governments demonstrate genuine

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commitment to inclusivity by ensuring that citizen inputs are systematically integrated into decision-making processes. The transition from symbolic to substantive participation requires not only functional platforms but also deliberate institutional reforms that place citizens at the heart of governance.

CONCLUSION

The study concluded that digital media has become a vital tool for advancing citizen-centred governance in Nigeria, as it enhances citizen engagement, improves service delivery efficiency, and fosters participatory governance, though its effectiveness is constrained by infrastructural, institutional, and responsiveness challenges that must be addressed for it to achieve its full potential.

Recommendations

1. Government agencies should strengthen their digital communication strategies to encourage active citizen engagement through responsive and inclusive platforms.
2. Public administrators should expand and maintain reliable e-governance systems to improve efficiency in service delivery across urban and rural areas.
3. Policy makers should institutionalise participatory frameworks that ensure citizens' contributions via digital platforms directly influence governance decisions.

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