

DIGITAL EMPOWERMENT AS CIVIC ENGAGEMENT: A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF PUBLIC RESPONSE TO THE SKILL UP IMO INITIATIVE ON FACEBOOK

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Abstract

This study examined how the Imo State Government's SkillUpImo digital empowerment initiative was communicated on Facebook and how citizens responded to that communication. Anchored on the Excellence Theory of Public Relations and the Dialogic Communication Theory, the study adopted a mixed-method content analysis design to examine communication themes, citizen engagement patterns, and public sentiment. Thirty-two official SkillUpImo Facebook posts published between May 2025 and July 2026 were purposively sampled and coded for post format, communication theme, tone, and communication function, while engagement metrics and the first ten to eleven publicly visible comments on each of thirty of these posts were coded for likes, comments, sentiment, and recurring issues. Findings show that government communication was overwhelmingly informational (87.5 percent) and dominated by registration, admission, and orientation announcements, with three-quarters of posts explicitly framing SkillUpImo as an empowerment initiative. Citizen engagement was substantial but reactive rather than dialogic, concentrated on posts announcing examinations, admission status, and technical procedures. Sentiment across coded comments was mixed and skewed negative to neutral (45.1 percent neutral, 29.9 percent negative, 25.0 percent positive), driven chiefly by recurring complaints about dashboard and portal errors, unclear eligibility status, and delayed laptop or kit delivery. The study concludes that although SkillUpImo's Facebook page functions as an active information channel, it falls short of the two-way, responsive communication that citizen engagement on government pages requires, and recommends that government communicators complement

informational posts with structured feedback mechanisms, timely technical support, and regular updates on unresolved citizen concerns.

Keywords: digital empowerment, government communication, citizen engagement, content analysis, social media, SkillUpImo

Introduction

The rapid transition from a predominantly degree-based economy to a digital economy has fundamentally transformed the nature of work across the world. While digital transformation has created new employment opportunities in areas such as software development, digital marketing, artificial intelligence, and e-commerce, it has also affected traditional labour markets, leading to job displacement and increasing demands for digital competencies. Consequently, governments around the world have increased investments in digital empowerment initiatives aimed at equipping citizens with the skills required to thrive in the evolving digital landscape.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, where high youth unemployment and limited access to economic opportunities remain persistent development challenges, digital empowerment programmes have become an important strategy for promoting economic inclusion and sustainable livelihoods. In Nigeria, both government and non-governmental organisations have implemented various digital skills initiatives to improve employability, foster entrepreneurship, and support the country's digital economy agenda.

Harnessing digital entrepreneurship for youth empowerment is not just a response to unemployment; it is a long-term investment in economic sustainability. By bridging the digital skills gap, Nigeria can take advantage of the full potential of its youth to drive inclusive growth and global competitiveness. Digital entrepreneurship skills among the youth enhance economic sustainability by enabling youth to work from home and possibly increase their earnings, creating self-employment opportunities, and boosting local content development in the region. It represents a strategic economic initiative and a means of unlocking the economic potential of a vibrant population in an increasingly digital world (Okegbe, 2025).

However, the success of government-sponsored digital empowerment initiatives depends not only on their implementation but also on how

effectively they are communicated to the public and how citizens perceive and respond to them. Public responses expressed through social media interactions, including comments, reactions, and discussions, provide valuable insights into citizens' awareness, expectations, concerns, and overall perceptions of these programmes. Examining these responses is therefore essential for evaluating the effectiveness of government communication strategies and improving future digital empowerment initiatives.

Statement of the Problem

Government-sponsored digital empowerment initiatives are increasingly promoted through social media, where citizens receive information, seek clarification, and publicly express their perceptions of these programmes. While considerable attention has been given to the implementation and outcomes of digital skills initiatives, less emphasis has been placed on examining citizens' responses to these programmes as reflected in their online interactions. Without empirical evidence on how the public engages with government digital empowerment campaigns, policymakers may be unable to determine whether their communication strategies effectively address citizens' information needs, concerns, and expectations. This knowledge gap limits the ability of government institutions to design communication strategies that promote transparency, trust, and meaningful public engagement. This study therefore investigates public responses to the SkillUpImo initiative on Facebook through a content analysis of official campaign posts and user interactions.

Research Questions

1. What are the dominant themes communicated in the official SkillUpImo social media posts?
2. What patterns of citizen engagement are generated by the SkillUpImo campaign on Facebook?
3. What sentiments are expressed by users toward the SkillUpImo initiative in their social media comments?

Significance of the Study

The findings will contribute to scholarship on government public relations, digital governance, and strategic communication by demonstrating how citizens respond to government digital empowerment campaigns on social media. The study will also provide practical insights for public relations practitioners, policymakers, and government communication managers seeking to improve citizen engagement and the effectiveness of digital public communication.

Literature Review

Digital Empowerment and Government Communication

The rapid growth of the digital economy has transformed labour markets and prompted governments to invest in digital empowerment as a strategy for employment creation, economic development, and social inclusion. In Nigeria, digital skills initiatives have become an important policy response to youth unemployment by promoting employability, entrepreneurship, innovation, and participation in the digital economy (Popoola et al., 2025; Idris & Maikomo, 2024; Okegbe, 2025).

Beyond providing digital skills, the success of these initiatives depends on effective government communication. Government communication functions as a public relations tool through which governments inform citizens about policies, encourage participation, and build public trust. Contemporary public relations emphasises two-way communication, where governments not only disseminate information but also receive feedback and engage citizens in dialogue. Consequently, the effectiveness of digital empowerment programmes depends not only on implementation but also on how they are communicated and perceived by the public.

DePaula, Dincelli, and Harrison (2018), through a content analysis of 2,893 Facebook posts from local government agencies in the United States, developed a typology of government social media communication comprising democratic information, symbolic communication, and self-presentation. Their findings revealed that although information provision remained the dominant communication practice, governments also relied extensively on symbolic and presentational content to build relationships with citizens. The study demonstrates that government social media serves not only as an information channel but also as a public relations platform for fostering transparency, participation, and engagement.

The rise of social media has strengthened this interactive approach by enabling governments to communicate directly with citizens while receiving immediate public feedback. Platforms such as Facebook have become important channels for promoting government initiatives, addressing public concerns, and encouraging civic participation (Johansson & Johansson, 2025). As a result, analysing government communication on social media provides valuable insights into the effectiveness of digital empowerment initiatives and citizens' responses to them.

Citizen Engagement through Social Media

The widespread adoption of social media has transformed government communication by creating interactive spaces where citizens can participate in public affairs and respond directly to government messages. Unlike traditional media, social media supports two-way communication through comments, reactions, and shares, making citizen engagement an important indicator of communication effectiveness and public participation.

Among these platforms, Facebook has become a major channel for government communication in Nigeria. Government agencies use official Facebook pages to publicise programmes, provide updates, respond to enquiries, and encourage public participation. The platform also enables governments to monitor public reactions through measurable engagement indicators and user comments, providing valuable insights into citizens' perceptions, expectations, and levels of trust in government programmes (Johansson & Johansson, 2025; Egwuagu et al., 2025).

Citizen engagement on social media extends beyond interaction to include public participation in governance. Through online discussions, citizens express opinions, seek clarification, and evaluate government initiatives, thereby shaping public opinion and providing feedback that can improve communication and policy implementation. Research indicates that citizens' engagement and trust are influenced by the credibility, transparency, and responsiveness of government communication (Akubuko & Adum, 2024; Nasidi et al., 2026), while active digital participation promotes transparency and accountability in governance (Abdullahi et al., 2026; Obiorah et al., 2024).

Citizen engagement on government social media is influenced not only by the availability of information but also by how messages are

presented. Amores et al. (2022) examined Facebook communication by local governments during the COVID-19 pandemic using quantitative content analysis and found that media richness and dialogic features significantly increased citizens' reactions, comments, and shares. The study concluded that government agencies can improve public participation by utilising interactive communication features that encourage dialogue and engagement. This finding reinforces the importance of Facebook as a platform for measuring citizens' responses to government communication.

Similarly, Hussin, Chin, and Sondoh (2025) analysed 1,264 Facebook posts from three Malaysian government ministries and found that although informational posts constituted the majority of government communication, symbolic communication generated significantly higher levels of citizen engagement. The study also reported that image-based posts attracted more public interaction than other media formats, while government responsiveness to citizens' comments remained relatively low. These findings suggest that the characteristics of government communication influence citizens' willingness to engage on social media.

Given Facebook's interactive nature, analysing citizens' comments, reactions, and shares provides valuable evidence of public engagement and sentiment towards government initiatives. Accordingly, this study examines citizens' responses to the SkillUpImo Facebook page to evaluate how government communication influences public engagement and perceptions of a digital empowerment programme.

Empirical Review

Digital Empowerment, Youth Development and Government Initiatives

Empirical evidence consistently demonstrates that digital empowerment initiatives contribute significantly to employment generation, entrepreneurship, and economic development, particularly among young people. Using an ex post facto research design and time-series data from the National Bureau of Statistics, Idris and Maikomo (2024) found that the digital economy significantly reduces youth unemployment in Nigeria, with digital economy indicators explaining a substantial proportion of variations in youth unemployment. Similarly, Okegbe (2025), through a cross-sectional survey of 514 youths in Southeast Nigeria, reported that digital entrepreneurship enhances economic sustainability by creating self-employment opportunities, increasing income generation, and promoting local content development. The study

further identified government interventions such as subsidised digital devices, community innovation hubs, and digital skills integration into educational curricula as effective strategies for youth empowerment. Likewise, Popoola et al. (2025) argued that Nigeria's transition towards a digital economy requires sustained investments in digital skills, workforce reskilling, technological innovation, and supportive government policies to ensure long-term job sustainability. Collectively, these studies establish the economic importance of digital empowerment initiatives. However, their primary emphasis remains on employment outcomes, entrepreneurship, and economic sustainability, with limited attention given to how governments communicate these initiatives or how citizens respond to such communication on digital platforms.

Government Communication, Social Media and Citizen Engagement

Recent empirical studies indicate that social media has become an indispensable platform for government communication and citizen engagement. In a Swedish case study, Johansson and Johansson (2025) found that social media has evolved from a supplementary communication tool into an integral component of government communication, reshaping institutional routines, communication strategies, and interactions between governments and citizens. Extending the literature on government communication, Hussin et al. (2025) investigated the influence of government Facebook content characteristics on citizen engagement using content analysis of 1,264 Facebook posts from Malaysian ministries. The study found that symbolic communication generated the highest engagement despite information provision being the most frequently used communication strategy. Similarly, Wukich (2025) examined Facebook posts from 62 American cities and reported that communication objectives such as transparency, citizen participation, customer service, and reputation management significantly influenced the number of reactions, comments, and shares generated by government posts. These studies demonstrate that both communication content and communication objectives play significant roles in shaping public engagement on government social media platforms.

Similarly, in Nigeria, Akubuko and Adum (2024) reported that social media has overtaken traditional media as the principal source of governmental communication among residents of South-East Nigeria. Their findings further revealed that citizens' perceptions of government messages are influenced less by promotional communication and more

by the credibility of government actions and programme outcomes. Focusing on crisis situations, Nasidi et al. (2026) employed content analysis of government Facebook and X posts and found that public trust in government communication varies according to message consistency, transparency, and perceived credibility. Government communication during the COVID-19 pandemic generated relatively balanced public reactions, whereas communication surrounding the #EndSARS protests attracted predominantly negative responses, reflecting public distrust. Likewise, Egwuagu et al. (2025), using a descriptive survey, established that Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram significantly enhance citizen participation, promote transparency, and strengthen accountability in governance within Enugu State. Collectively, these studies demonstrate that while social media has transformed government communication into a more interactive and participatory process, the effectiveness of such communication depends largely on credibility, transparency, responsiveness, and citizens' perceptions. Nevertheless, these studies focus primarily on governance, political communication, or crisis management, leaving government-led digital empowerment initiatives relatively underexplored.

Citizen Participation, Public Opinion and Public Policy

Empirical evidence further suggests that effective governance depends not only on government communication but also on citizens' active participation in public policy processes. Drawing on documentary sources, Obiorah et al. (2024) found that public opinion serves as an important link between citizens and government in democratic societies. However, the study observed that public concerns often have limited influence on policy formulation and implementation in Nigeria, with governments tending to respond more readily to organised public protests than to routine citizen feedback. Similarly, Abdullahi et al. (2026), through a qualitative analysis of policy documents and secondary data, reported that although institutional frameworks exist to facilitate citizen participation in public policy, meaningful engagement is constrained by limited access to information, inadequate participatory mechanisms, and low political literacy among citizens. The authors consequently advocated greater transparency, improved access to policy information, and stronger participatory structures to promote informed civic engagement. Collectively, these studies affirm that citizen participation and public opinion are essential to democratic governance and policy effectiveness. Nevertheless, they examine participation from broad governance and policy perspectives without exploring how citizens

engage with specific government development programmes through interactive digital platforms such as Facebook, where immediate feedback, public discussions, and public sentiment provide valuable insights into citizens' perceptions of government initiatives.

Theoretical Framework and Research Gap

This study is anchored on the Excellence Theory of Public Relations (Grunig & Hunt, 1984), which advocates two-way communication between organisations and their publics to promote mutual understanding and relationship building. Complementing this is the Dialogic Communication Theory (Kent & Taylor, 1998), which emphasises dialogue, responsiveness, and citizen participation through digital communication platforms. Together, these theories explain how governments can use social media not only to disseminate information but also to engage citizens and encourage meaningful public interaction.

Research Gap

The reviewed literature shows that previous studies have examined digital empowerment from economic and employment perspectives (Idris & Maikomo, 2024; Okegbe, 2025), government communication in relation to credibility, governance, and crisis communication (Akubuko & Adum, 2024; Johansson & Johansson, 2025; Nasidi et al., 2026), and citizen engagement through social media (Hussin et al., 2025; Wukich, 2025; Amores et al., 2022). However, few studies have specifically examined how a government-led digital empowerment programme is communicated on Facebook and how citizens engage with and respond to such communication in Nigeria. This study fills that gap by using mixed-method content analysis to examine the communication strategies, citizen engagement, and public sentiment surrounding the SkillUpImo initiative on Facebook, thereby contributing to the literature on government communication, digital public relations, and civic engagement.

Methodology

This study adopted a mixed-method content analysis design to examine government communication and citizens' responses to the SkillUpImo initiative on Facebook. Quantitative content analysis was used to examine communication themes, engagement metrics, and public sentiment, while qualitative analysis explored recurring issues and

contextual meanings in users' comments. This approach is consistent with previous studies on government communication and citizen engagement on Facebook (DePaula et al., 2018; Amores et al., 2022; Hussin et al., 2025).

The study focused on the official SkillUpImo Facebook page, covering posts published between May 2025 and July 2026. Using purposive sampling, posts relating to major programme activities, including announcements, registration, training, examinations, orientation, graduations, and kit or laptop distribution, were selected. Each Facebook post served as the unit of analysis. Thirty-two posts were coded for post format, communication theme, tone or orientation, communication function, and whether the post explicitly framed the activity as a government empowerment initiative, answering Research Question One. For Research Question Two and Research Question Three, engagement metrics (likes and comment counts) and the first ten to eleven publicly visible comments (sorted by Most Relevant) were retrieved and coded for thirty of the sampled posts; complete engagement and comment data could not be retrieved for the remaining posts because some generated no visible public reactions or comments at the time of coding, and this is treated as a limitation of the study.

Data were collected manually using a structured coding sheet. Government posts were coded based on communication theme, post format, communication objective, and call-to-action, while citizens' comments were coded for sentiment (positive, negative, or neutral) and recurring issue raised. Quantitative data were analysed using frequencies and percentages, whereas qualitative data on recurring issues were analysed thematically. Since the study relied solely on publicly available Facebook content, no direct interaction with participants occurred, and all identifiable user information was excluded from reporting.

Results

This chapter presents the findings of the content analysis, organised according to the study's three research questions. Thematic coding (post format, communication theme, tone, function, and empowerment frame) covered thirty-two official SkillUpImo Facebook posts published between May 2025 and July 2026 and answers Research Question One. Engagement metrics and comment-level sentiment coding could be reliably retrieved for thirty of the sampled posts and form the basis for Research Questions Two and Three.

Research Question One: Dominant Themes in Official SkillUpImo Posts

Table 1: Distribution of Post Format (N = 32)

Format	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Image/Text	24	75.0
Carousel/Text	4	12.5
Video/Text	3	9.4
Text/Image	1	3.1

Source: Field survey, 2026.

Table 2: Distribution of Primary Communication Function (N = 32)

Function	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Informational	28	87.5
Motivational	2	6.3
Testimonial	1	3.1
Promotional	1	3.1

Source: Field survey, 2026.

Table 3: Distribution of Tone/Orientation of Posts (N = 32)

Tone/Orientation	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Informational/Instructional	9	28.1
Informational	5	15.6
Informational/Career	3	9.4
Informational/Opportunity	2	6.3
Informational/Recruitment	2	6.3
Informational/Positive	1	3.1
Motivational/Positive	1	3.1

Tone/Orientation	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Positive/Empowerment	1	3.1
Informational/Safety	1	3.1
Motivational	1	3.1
Informational/Support	1	3.1
Testimonial/Positive	1	3.1
Informational/Problem-solving	1	3.1
Informational/Engagement	1	3.1
Celebratory/Positive	1	3.1
Promotional/Opportunity	1	3.1

Source: Field survey, 2026.

Table 4: Government/Programme Empowerment Frame (N = 32)

Empowerment Frame	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes — directly framed as empowerment	24	75.0
No — not directly framed as empowerment	8	25.0

Source: Field survey, 2026.

Tables 1 to 4 show that SkillUpImo's official Facebook communication was overwhelmingly informational and text- or image-based rather than symbolic or interactive. Image/Text posts accounted for three-quarters of all sampled posts, and an informational function dominated to a similar degree (87.5 percent), with motivational, testimonial, and promotional content appearing only occasionally. The tone/orientation breakdown further shows that instructional and procedural communication (registration steps, exam instructions, admission verification) was the single largest tone category, at 28.1 percent, considerably ahead of purely motivational or celebratory tones. Nonetheless, three in four posts explicitly framed the activity as part of a government empowerment

programme, indicating that the empowerment narrative was consistently present even in posts whose immediate purpose was procedural or administrative.

Research Question Two: Patterns of Citizen Engagement

Table 5 presents engagement volume (likes and comments) across the broad thematic categories of the thirty posts for which engagement data were retrieved.

Table 5: Citizen Engagement (Likes and Comments) by Communication Theme

Theme Category	No. of Posts	Total Likes	Mean Likes	Total Comments	Mean Comments
Testing & Assessment Notices	3	185	61.7	206	68.7
Safety/Scam Alerts	1	51	51.0	45	45.0
Registration & Admission Updates	7	1,681	240.1	306	43.7
Orientation & Logistics	6	460	76.7	232	38.7
Success Stories / Testimonials	2	154	77.0	42	21.0
Card/Kit Distribution	3	54	18.0	40	13.3
Motivational/Symbolic Content	4	147	36.8	34	8.5
Promotional/Engagement Events	3	49	16.3	8	2.7

Source: Field survey, 2026. Based on 29 of 30 coded posts with complete likes and comment counts; one post's like count was not retrievable. Registration & Admission totals are strongly influenced by one high-reach registration post (1,100 likes).

Table 6: Posts with the Highest and Lowest Citizen Engagement

Post Theme	Likes	Comments
Cohort 4 Timetable Announcement (highest)	208	159
Pre-Admission Exam Instructions	47	118
Registration Support / Troubleshooting	192	114
Course Verification Notice	173	73
Mop-Up Test Notice	23	67
Competition Announcement (lowest)	12	0
Admission List Ready	7	1
Motivational Post (New Week)	20	1

Source: Field survey, 2026.

Across the thirty posts with retrievable engagement data, total likes reached 2,781 and total comments reached 913, an average of about 30 comments per post, but this average masks a sharp divide. The five most-commented posts (Table 6) were all procedural or administrative in nature: a class timetable, exam instructions, a registration-support notice, a course-verification notice, and a mop-up test notice. By contrast, purely motivational and promotional posts, including the Cohort 4 content competition, generated the lowest engagement, several attracting one comment or none at all. This pattern suggests that citizen engagement on the SkillUpImo page is driven less by the appeal of the message itself and more by citizens' need for clarification or resolution when a post touches directly on their access to the programme.

Research Question Three: Sentiment Expressed in User Comments

Table 7: Overall Sentiment Distribution across Coded Comments

Sentiment	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Positive	46	25.0
Negative	55	29.9
Neutral	83	45.1

Sentiment	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Total coded comments	184	100.0

Source: Field survey, 2026. Based on 184 individually sentiment-coded comments across 29 of the 30 sampled posts.

Table 8: Dominant Sentiment by Post

Dominant Sentiment	No. of Posts	Percentage (%)
Neutral	12	41.4
Positive	7	24.1
Negative	6	20.7
No clear dominant sentiment (no/very few comments)	4	13.8

Source: Field survey, 2026. N = 29 posts with codable comments.

Table 9: Recurring Issues Raised in Citizen Comments

Recurring Issue	Frequency of Mention
Congratulatory/celebratory remarks	29
Technical or portal access issues	17
Dashboard/eligibility status errors	17
Training centre inquiries	14
General acknowledgement	8
Laptop/kit delivery delays	6
Name missing from beneficiary list	6
NIN/BVN verification difficulties	4
Registration process inquiries	3
Expressions of gratitude	3

Source: Field survey, 2026. Counted from the issue coded for each of the individually sentiment-coded comments; a comment could raise only one primary issue.

Sentiment across the 184 individually coded comments leaned negative-to-neutral rather than positive: neutral comments, largely clarification requests, formed the largest share (45.1 percent), followed by negative comments (29.9 percent) and positive comments (25.0 percent). At the post level, neutral sentiment was dominant on 41.4 percent of posts, positive sentiment on 24.1 percent, and negative sentiment on 20.7 percent. The recurring-issues analysis (Table 9) shows that, after celebratory remarks on success-story posts, the two most frequently mentioned issues were technical/portal access problems and dashboard or eligibility status errors, together accounting for 34 of the 191 coded issue mentions. Complaints about delayed laptop or kit delivery and beneficiaries' names missing from distribution lists were also recurrent. These findings indicate that where negative sentiment appeared, it was concentrated in specific, resolvable service-delivery and platform-access problems rather than in opposition to the programme itself.

Discussion of Findings

Dominant Themes in Official SkillUpImo Communication

The finding that informational content dominated SkillUpImo's Facebook communication (87.5 percent of posts, Table 2), with instructional and procedural tone the single largest tone category (Table 3), aligns with DePaula et al. (2018), who found that information provision remained the dominant government social media practice even where symbolic and self-presentational content coexisted with it. It also mirrors Hussin et al. (2025), who reported that informational posts constituted the majority of Malaysian government ministries' Facebook communication. However, the finding departs from Hussin et al.'s (2025) conclusion that symbolic communication generates the highest citizen engagement: on the SkillUpImo page, it was informational and procedural posts, not motivational or symbolic ones, that generated the greatest engagement volume (Table 5, Table 6). This suggests that in a context where citizens' primary interest is direct access to a life-changing opportunity, information and instruction, not inspiration, are what draw the public's attention and comments. The consistently high empowerment framing (75 percent of posts, Table 4) also supports Okegbe's (2025)

view that digital empowerment communication in Southeast Nigeria is deliberately positioned as a strategic economic intervention rather than a routine administrative exercise.

Citizen Engagement Patterns

The concentration of engagement on procedural posts, exam instructions, timetables, registration support, and admission verification, rather than on motivational or promotional content (Table 5, Table 6), extends Amores et al. (2022), who found that media richness and dialogic features increase citizen reactions, comments, and shares on government pages. In the SkillUpImo case, however, the driver of high comment volume appears to be need rather than message design: citizens comment heavily when a post determines whether they can access training, sit an examination, or collect a benefit. This is consistent with Wukich's (2025) finding that communication objectives tied to customer service and transparency significantly shape reaction, comment, and share counts. It also qualifies the Excellence Theory's expectation of two-way symmetrical communication (Grunig & Hunt, 1984): comment volume on SkillUpImo's page reflects citizens actively initiating contact, but as the following section shows, this initiative was not consistently met with visible responsiveness from the page administrators, a gap the Dialogic Communication Theory (Kent & Taylor, 1998) identifies as central to effective government-citizen dialogue.

Public Sentiment toward the SkillUpImo Initiative

The near-even but negative-leaning sentiment split (45.1 percent neutral, 29.9 percent negative, 25.0 percent positive; Table 7) and the concentration of negative sentiment around technical and eligibility problems (Table 9) resonate with Nasidi et al. (2026), who found that public trust in Nigerian government communication varies with message consistency, transparency, and perceived credibility, and with Akubuko and Adum (2024), who reported that citizens' perceptions of government communication in South-East Nigeria are shaped more by the credibility of government actions than by promotional messaging. The pattern here suggests that citizens' frustration was directed not at the SkillUpImo programme's goals, evidenced by the high volume of celebratory and congratulatory comments on success-story posts, but at recurring service-delivery friction: dashboard errors, unclear eligibility status, and delayed kit or laptop distribution. This distinction matters for government communicators: it indicates that negative sentiment here is a solvable

operational signal rather than a rejection of the underlying policy, consistent with Deng and Liu's (2025) observation that sentiment analysis of online public opinion can surface specific, actionable public concerns rather than generalised opposition.

Taken together, the three sets of findings suggest that SkillUpImo's Facebook page operates predominantly as a one-way informational channel that occasionally succeeds in generating engagement, but has not yet become the dialogic, responsive space that both the Excellence Theory and the Dialogic Communication Theory associate with effective public relations. Citizens are willing to engage, often extensively, but their comments are frequently requests for help that appear to go unanswered in the visible thread, a gap consistent with Hussin et al.'s (2025) observation that government responsiveness to citizen comments on Facebook remains comparatively low even where citizen engagement itself is high.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, and in line with the study's three research questions, the following recommendations are made.

1. Given that instructional and procedural content dominates SkillUpImo's communication while symbolic and motivational content is comparatively rare (Research Question One), government communicators should deliberately diversify the content mix by pairing every procedural announcement with periodic outcome-focused and testimonial content, so that the empowerment narrative is carried by evidence of results and not only by administrative notices.

2. Given that citizen engagement is concentrated on posts where access to the programme is at stake and is driven by unresolved practical needs rather than message appeal (Research Question Two), the SkillUpImo team should institute a structured feedback and response mechanism, such as a dedicated helpdesk comment-reply protocol, a pinned frequently-asked-questions post, or a WhatsApp/USSD support line, so that high-engagement posts translate into resolved citizen problems rather than accumulating unanswered comments.

3. Given that negative sentiment is concentrated around recurring, specific service-delivery issues, dashboard and eligibility errors, portal access failures, and delayed kit or laptop distribution (Research Question Three), programme administrators should prioritise fixing the underlying

technical and logistics processes generating these complaints and should proactively post status updates when known issues arise, rather than allowing citizens to discover and report them independently in the comments.

Limitation of the Study

This study is limited to the official SkillUpImo Facebook page and therefore does not capture citizens' responses expressed on other social media platforms such as Instagram, WhatsApp, or X. In addition, only publicly available posts and comments were analysed, excluding private interactions and offline perceptions. Complete engagement metrics and codable comment threads could be retrieved for thirty of the thirty-two sampled posts; the remaining posts generated few or no visible public reactions at the time of coding and were therefore excluded from the engagement and sentiment analysis, which may understate overall engagement volume. Comments were also drawn from Facebook's "Most Relevant" sort order rather than strict chronological order, which the platform itself filters and ranks, meaning the coded comments may not represent the complete population of comments on each post. Finally, the study analysed comment volume and sentiment rather than tracking whether individual citizen complaints were subsequently resolved, so the analysis cannot confirm the eventual outcome of the service-delivery issues citizens raised.

Conclusion

This study set out to examine how the SkillUpImo digital empowerment initiative was communicated on Facebook and how citizens responded to that communication. The findings show that SkillUpImo's official communication is overwhelmingly informational and procedural, consistently framed around empowerment, and delivered mainly through static image or text formats rather than richer symbolic or motivational content. Citizen engagement, while substantial, is reactive rather than dialogic: it clusters around posts that determine citizens' access to training, examinations, or benefits, and is driven by practical need rather than by the appeal of the message. Sentiment across citizen comments is mixed and tilts toward neutral and negative rather than positive, with dissatisfaction concentrated in specific, recurring service-delivery problems, technical access failures, eligibility confusion, and distribution delays, rather than in opposition to the programme's goals. Read through the Excellence Theory of Public Relations and the Dialogic Communication Theory, these findings indicate that SkillUpImo has

established an active one-way information channel but has not yet realised the two-way, responsive communication that these theories identify as necessary for building citizen trust and meaningful civic engagement around government digital empowerment programmes. Closing this gap, primarily by responding visibly to citizen comments and resolving the recurring technical and logistical issues identified in this study, represents the clearest opportunity for strengthening both the communication and the public perception of the SkillUpImo initiative going forward.

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