Institutionalization of two-way digital communication in the public sector: From broadcast communication to dialogic engagement in Kenyan public institutions

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ABSTRACT

Social media give public institutions the technical means to communicate with citizens in two directions, yet interactive features do not by themselves produce dialogue. Although Kenyan public institutions have adopted Facebook and X widely, little is known about whether these channels have embedded dialogic communication systems or remain extensions of one-way information dissemination. This study examined the extent to which two-way digital communication has been institutionalised in three Kenyan public institutions namely; the Kenya Revenue Authority (KRA), Kenya Power and Lighting Company (KPLC), and the Higher Education Loans Board (HELB). Guided by Dialogic Communication Theory, Uses and Gratifications Theory, and Media Dependency Theory, the study adopted a convergent parallel mixed-method, multiple-case design within a pragmatic paradigm. Data came from a survey of 392 members of the public who interacted with the institutions on Facebook or X, semi-structured interviews with 48 institutional contact officers, and a quantitative content analysis of 77 institutional posts published between 1 February and 28 April 2026. Perceived dialogic communication was moderate (KPLC M = 3.548; KRA M = 3.431; HELB M = 3.319), and ratings of response timeliness were neutral in all three cases. Hierarchical ordinary least squares regression with HC3 robust standard errors showed that institutional dialogic communication practices were the dominant predictor of perceived communication effectiveness (B = 0.830, β = 0.765, p < .001), with the model explaining 60.9% of the variance (R^2 = .609). When content-analysis indicators were added, institutional post tonality (B = 0.134, p = .002), visual richness (B = 0.100, p = .048), and observed engagement level (B = 0.106, p = .035) were also significant. Interviews showed that approval procedures, high enquiry volumes, limited staffing, misinformation, and fake accounts constrained responsiveness. The study concludes that Facebook and X have expanded visibility and access to information but have not yet been institutionalized as consistently dialogic channels, and recommends that public institutions adopt clear response standards, streamline approval and referral, strengthen communication staffing, and govern their accounts against impersonation and misinformation.

Keywords*:* dialogic communication, Kenya, public sector, social media, two-way communication

I. INTRODUCTION

Social media have become part of the ordinary communication infrastructure for public institutions. Public organizations use networks such as Facebook and X to publish service information, reach large audiences quickly, and receive questions and feedback from citizens (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2021). Early research on government social media predicted that these platforms would make public bodies more open, transparent, and accountable by lowering the cost of publishing information and by giving citizens a direct channel to officials (Bertot et al., 2010). Subsequent work, however, showed that adoption tends to proceed in stages with agencies typically begin by "pushing" information to audiences, move more slowly towards "pulling" input from citizens, and only rarely reach a networking mode in which they interact continuously with their publics (Mergel, 2013). The question for contemporary public administration is therefore no longer whether institutions use social media, but how they use them and whether the interactive potential of these platforms has been converted into routine organizational practice.

Public relations scholarship provides a useful vocabulary for this question. Grunig and Hunt (1984) distinguished one-way models of public information and press agentry from two-way models in which organizations seek and respond to feedback from their publics. Dialogic communication theory extends this distinction by treating dialogue not as a technique but as a relational orientation grounded in mutuality, empathy, risk, and commitment (Kent & Taylor, 2002). From this perspective, a public institution that posts information and occasionally replies to comments has adopted two-way tools, but it has not necessarily engaged in dialogue (Kent & Lane, 2021). Studies of organizational social media have repeatedly found that most messages are informational and only a small share build community or

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invite action (Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012), suggesting that broadcast habits persist even on platforms designed for conversation.

In Kenya, the growth of internet and social media use (Communications Authority of Kenya [CA], 2025; DataReportal, 2025) has coincided with a wider move toward digital government, including the expansion of services through the eCitizen platform and a national government communication strategy that emphasizes digital channels (Ministry of Information, Communications and the Digital Economy, 2025). These developments rest on constitutional and statutory expectations. Article 10 of the Constitution of Kenya (2010) identifies public participation, transparency, and accountability as national values; Article 35 guarantees the right of access to information held by the State; and Article 232 requires the public service to involve people in policymaking and to provide the public with timely and accurate information. The Access to Information Act (2016) operationalizes these rights. Two-way digital communication is therefore not merely a matter of corporate reputation for Kenyan public bodies but a means through which constitutional commitments to participation and responsiveness are realised in daily service delivery.

The Kenya Revenue Authority (KRA), Kenya Power and Lighting Company (KPLC), and the Higher Education Loans Board (HELB) illustrate the stakes involved. Each institution provides high-volume services that citizens depend on at specific moments: KRA administers tax registration, filing, and compliance; KPLC manages electricity supply, metering, billing, and outage communication; and HELB manages the application, award, disbursement, and repayment of student loans. Each also has a large social media following (Table 2), and citizens increasingly turn to these accounts to ask questions, report problems, and complain. When such enquiries go unanswered, answered late, or receive generic replies, the gap between the interactive promise of the platform and the institution's actual practice becomes publicly visible.

This study approaches that gap through the idea of institutionalization. In this paper, two-way digital communication is regarded as institutionalized when responding to citizens, closing the dialogic loop, and learning from public feedback are built into an institution's roles, procedures, resources, and performance expectations. This is so that dialogue does not depend on the discretion or goodwill of individual officers. An institution may therefore have active accounts and a large following while its communication remains essentially one-way. The study uses Dialogic Communication Theory, Uses and Gratifications Theory, and Media Dependency Theory, together with survey, interview, and content-analysis data, to examine how far the three institutions have moved from broadcast communication towards routine dialogue. The remainder of the paper states the research problem and objectives, reviews the theoretical and empirical literature, describes the methodology, presents and discusses the findings by objective, and closes with separate conclusions and recommendations.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Kenya's Constitution and national communication policy expect public institutions to use digital platforms to inform citizens, receive their feedback, and respond in a timely way. Ideally, institutional Facebook and X accounts should operate as dialogic channels in which questions are resolved, complaints reach the right units, and recurring concerns inform service improvement. In practice, government institutions in several countries still use these platforms mainly to disseminate information, with the dialogic loop among the weakest elements of their practice (Chen et al., 2023; Lai et al., 2020), while counts of followers, posts, and reactions reveal visibility rather than genuine exchange (Wukich, 2025; Zumofen et al., 2025).

Three gaps follow from this situation. Contextually, Kenyan research has concentrated on county governments and budget participation (Muthomi & Thurmaier, 2024; Onzere, 2023), leaving national service institutions with large, transaction-driven audiences under-examined, even though their enquiries, such as delayed loan disbursements, disputed tax penalties, or prolonged outages, are often urgent and personal. Methodologically, most studies examine institutional practices, citizen perceptions, or engagement metrics separately and therefore cannot show whether these sources of evidence agree. Conceptually, two-way communication is often equated with dialogue, although dialogue requires relational commitment (Kent & Lane, 2021).

Without such evidence, institutions risk mistaking audience growth for communicative success while unanswered enquiries, misinformation, and impersonation accounts erode public trust. This study therefore addresses the lack of integrated evidence on the extent to which two-way digital communication has been institutionalised in Kenyan national public institutions, on the factors shaping citizens' perceptions of its effectiveness, and on the institutional conditions that constrain dialogue. Its findings are relevant to communication practice, to the implementation of the national government communication strategy, and to theory on public-sector social media in Africa.

1.2 Research Objectives

i. To assess the extent to which the institutions use Facebook and X for two-way dialogic communication;
ii. To examine how content presentation relates to citizen engagement on the institutions' Facebook and X accounts; and

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iii. To identify the institutional challenges that limit the completion of dialogue between the institutions and the public.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

2.1.1 Dialogic Communication Theory

Dialogic Communication Theory shifts attention from the transmission of messages to the quality of the relationship between an organisation and its publics. Kent and Taylor (1998) proposed five principles for online dialogue: the dialogic loop, the usefulness of information, the generation of return visits, the intuitiveness of the interface, and the conservation of visitors. Of these, the dialogic loop is the mechanism through which publics ask questions and organisations respond. Kent and Taylor (2002) later grounded dialogue in mutuality, propinquity, empathy, risk, and commitment. Subsequent work cautioned that dialogic engagement is an orientation rather than a tactic for increasing interaction (Taylor & Kent, 2014) and that ordinary two-way communication should not be mistaken for dialogue (Kent & Lane, 2021).

The theory has been criticised as normative and difficult to operationalise, and it says little about the resources and procedures needed to sustain dialogue. This study responds by measuring dialogic practices from the citizen's perspective (IV1), relating them to perceived effectiveness (DV), and using interviews to examine the organisational conditions that the theory leaves implicit.

2.1.2 Uses and Gratifications Theory

Uses and Gratifications Theory treats audiences as active, goal-oriented users who select media to satisfy cognitive, affective, personal integrative, social integrative, and tension-release needs (Katz et al., 1973, 1974). Ruggiero (2000) argued that interactive media strengthened the theory's assumption of an active audience. The distinction between gratifications sought and gratifications obtained is particularly relevant here: citizens may turn to an institutional account expecting timely information or a response, and whether that expectation is met shapes their later engagement (Anum & Zulfiqar, 2025). The theory complements the institutional perspective by explaining what citizens seek from institutional social media, but its reliance on self-reported motives and its individualistic focus can obscure the institutional conditions that determine whether gratifications are obtained. In this study, it informs the measurement of public utilisation of Facebook and X (IV2) and of engagement behaviour (MED).

2.1.3 Media Dependency Theory

Media Dependency Theory explains the relationships among media systems, audiences, and social institutions in terms of dependency on information resources (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976). Dependency strengthens when information is important, alternatives are few, and uncertainty is high (Ball-Rokeach, 2008), and it serves the goals of understanding and orientation (Jung, 2017). The theory explains why citizens rely on official accounts that announce outages, tax deadlines, or loan procedures, and why those accounts carry heightened responsibility for accuracy and timeliness. As a macro-level account, the theory does not specify how interaction between an institution and an individual citizen should unfold. It nonetheless shows that where dependency is high, failures of responsiveness are more consequential and alternative sources, including impersonation accounts and misinformation, can readily fill the gap. In this study, it provides the interpretive context for citizens' reliance on institutional channels and for content presentation (IV3).

2.1.4 Integration of the Theories

Taken together, Dialogic Communication Theory explains what institutions must do for dialogue to occur, Uses and Gratifications Theory explains what citizens seek and whether they obtain it, and Media Dependency Theory explains why the relationship matters. Table 1 shows how the constructs drawn from each theory were translated into the study's variables.

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Table 1

Alignment of Theories, Constructs, and Study Variables

Theory or framework element	Constructs drawn	Operational variable
Dialogic Communication Theory (Kent & Taylor, 1998, 2002)	Mutuality, openness, responsiveness, feedback, relationship building	IV1: Institutional dialogic communication practices; DV: perceived effectiveness of dialogic communication
Uses and Gratifications Theory (Katz et al., 1973, 1974)	Information seeking, social interaction, convenience and accessibility, participation	IV2: Public utilization of Facebook and X; MED: engagement behaviour
Media Dependency Theory (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976)	Information dependency, understanding, orientation	Interpretive context for citizens' reliance on institutional channels and for IV3: content presentation
Moderating conditions	Approval procedures, enquiry volumes, staffing, misinformation	MOD: Communication challenges

Adapted from the study's integrated theoretical and conceptual framework. Content-analysis indicators (post tonality, visual richness, and observed engagement level) were coded separately and merged with the survey data.

2.2 Empirical Review

2.2.1 Empirical Studies on Dialogic Communication

Early applications of Dialogic Communication Theory to social media found that organisations made limited use of the dialogic features of Facebook and Twitter, although those that used them generated more interaction (Bortree & Seltzer, 2009; Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010). In the public sector, Mergel (2013) found that United States federal agencies predominantly pushed information to audiences, and Bonsón et al. (2017) reported large audiences but low citizen engagement on Western European municipal Facebook pages. Studies that measure responsiveness show why this matters: government replies to citizen comments, rather than posting volume, were associated with higher engagement among Spanish local governments (Haro-de-Rosario et al., 2018) and on municipal Facebook pages more generally (Lappas et al., 2022).

Yet the dialogic loop often remains incomplete. Local health commissions in China gave little attention to dialogic loops even during a public health crisis (Chen et al., 2023); the dialogic orientation of Taiwanese agencies was uneven and constrained by bureaucratic practice (Lai et al., 2020); and Ghanaian public sector websites functioned largely as one-way information repositories (Ayiku & du Plessis, 2026). In Kenya, citizens in 34 counties regarded social media as effective for budget information and participation (Muthomi & Thurmaier, 2024), but county use of these channels was limited by capacity and inconsistent account management (Onzere, 2023). These studies rely mainly on single data sources and on devolved governments, and few test whether perceived effectiveness depends on institutional behaviour or on citizens' own platform use, the relationship examined under Objective (a).

2.2.2 Empirical Studies on Uses and Gratifications

Uses and gratifications studies show that people use social media for information seeking, social interaction, convenience, and the expression of opinion (Whiting & Williams, 2013). In a public administration setting, Wirtz et al. (2020) found among 164 German citizens that social motivation, user-generated content, and administration-generated content increased the attractiveness of public administration social media pages and, in turn, citizens' intention to use and recommend them. Gintova (2019) showed that users of a Canadian immigration agency's Twitter and Facebook accounts mainly sought information and answers relevant to their own circumstances, revealing a gap between the gratifications citizens seek and those agencies are able to provide.

Content presentation shapes these gratifications. Media type and content type influenced engagement with municipal Facebook posts (Bonsón et al., 2015), engagement patterns differed between Twitter and Facebook (DePaula et al., 2022), and conversational and mobilising messages attracted stronger responses (Lai et al., 2020), although informational messages continue to dominate organisational posting (Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012). However, activity is not the same as interactivity (Wukich, 2022), institutional communication goals shape reaction patterns (Wukich, 2025), and communication managers treat engagement metrics with caution (Zumofen et al., 2025). Objective (b) therefore combines survey ratings of content presentation with coded features of actual posts rather than relying on engagement counts alone.

2.2.3 Empirical Studies on Media Dependency

Media dependency studies show that reliance on a medium shapes both trust and vulnerability to misinformation. In a survey conducted during the first week of Portugal's COVID-19 state of emergency, Ferreira and Borges (2020) found that people who used social media as their main source of information were more likely to accept misinformation. Mansoor (2021) found that the provision of quality information by government agencies on social

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media strengthened citizens' trust in government. Where citizens depend on official accounts, the accuracy, timeliness, and authenticity of those accounts therefore carry particular weight.

The conditions needed to meet this dependency are often weak. Hierarchical clearance of messages, bureaucratic culture, and poor coordination with technical departments constrained public communication in Taiwan (Lai et al., 2020) and Ghana (Ayiku & du Plessis, 2026); uncertainty about rules and fear of error restricted interactive use in the United States (Mergel, 2013); limited staffing affected Kenyan county communication (Onzere, 2023); and Nordic communication managers struggled to manage the volume of citizen interaction (Zumofen et al., 2025). Impersonation accounts and hostile interactions add further pressure. Few studies test whether such challenges moderate the effect of institutional practices on perceived effectiveness, which Objective (c) examines.

2.3 Summary and Research Gap

In sum, public institutions have widely adopted social media; responsiveness, rather than posting volume, drives meaningful engagement; citizens seek practical and personal gratifications from institutional accounts; and dependence on official channels raises the cost of slow responses, misinformation, and impersonation. However, Kenyan studies focus mainly on county governments, most studies rely on a single source of evidence, and the difference between two-way communication and routine dialogue is rarely operationalised. This study addresses these gaps by integrating survey, content analysis, and interview evidence from three national public institutions.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The study was located within a pragmatic paradigm, which treats the research question rather than a single philosophical position as the basis for methodological choices and accepts the combination of quantitative and qualitative evidence where each answers a different part of the problem (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). A convergent parallel mixed-methods design was adopted. In this design, quantitative and qualitative data are collected during the same phase, analysed separately, and then merged at the interpretation stage to assess convergence, complementarity, and divergence (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Fetters et al., 2013). The design was combined with a multiple-case strategy (Yin, 2018), in which KRA, KPLC, and HELB were treated as distinct cases that allowed both within-case description and cross-case comparison.

The choice of design followed from the research problem. The survey captured citizens' perceptions of dialogic practice and effectiveness and allowed relationships among variables to be tested statistically (Objectives a and b). The content analysis provided observable evidence of what the institutions actually posted and how audiences responded, independently of self-report (Objective b). The interviews explained the institutional structures, routines, and constraints behind both sets of results (Objectives a and c). The three strands were given equal priority.

3.2 Study Area

The study was conducted in Kenya and focused on three national public institutions headquartered in Nairobi: KRA, KPLC, and HELB. Because the institutions' Facebook and X accounts serve audiences across the country, the study area was defined both by the institutions' physical location, where the interviews with communication officers took place, and by their national online communication space, where survey respondents and sampled posts were drawn from. The three institutions were selected purposively as information-rich cases (Yin, 2018). The selection criteria were that the institution (a) has a national public service mandate; (b) provides high-volume, public-facing services that generate frequent citizen enquiries; (c) maintains active official accounts on Facebook or X; and (d) has a large online following. KRA, KPLC, and HELB meet these criteria while differing in their service domains (tax administration, electricity supply, and student finance) and in their audiences, which allowed the study to examine whether patterns held across different types of public service. The platform examined for each institution is shown in Table 2.

3.3 Target Population

The study had three target populations corresponding to its three data strands. The first comprised members of the public who follow or interact with the institutions' official Facebook and X accounts; the combined following of the accounts studied was approximately 2.04 million (Table 2). The second comprised institutional officers working in communication, public relations, customer care, social media, and contact centre functions, who are responsible for managing or responding to social media interaction. The third comprised all posts published on the institutions' official accounts between 1 February and 28 April 2026.

3.4 Sampling and Sample Size

Because no sampling frame of individual followers is available to researchers, survey respondents were recruited through purposive and snowball sampling. Eligibility was restricted to members of the public who had

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interacted with at least one of the institutions on Facebook or X. The minimum required sample was estimated using Cochran's (1977) formula for large populations, $n_0 = Z^2p(1 - p)/e^2$, with $Z = 1.96$ for 95% confidence, $p = .5$ for maximum variability, and a margin of error $e = .05$. This yields a minimum of 384 respondents. The achieved sample of 392 exceeded this threshold and was distributed approximately equally across the three cases (Table 2). Because recruitment was non-probabilistic, the results are interpreted as indicative of engaged users rather than as statistically representative of all followers.

Interview participants were selected purposively according to their direct responsibility for social media communication or enquiry handling. A total of 48 officers were interviewed: 20 at KRA, 20 at KPLC, and 8 at HELB. The distribution reflects the officers who met the inclusion criteria and were available at each institution. The number of interviews was judged adequate because recurring themes were evident well before the final interviews in each case, consistent with evidence that thematic saturation in relatively homogeneous groups is often reached within the first dozen interviews (Guest et al., 2006).

For the content analysis, all posts published by the institutions' official accounts between 1 February and 28 April 2026 constituted the sampling frame. Posts were selected by systematic sampling from this frame, yielding 77 posts: 26 from KRA, 22 from KPLC, and 29 from HELB. The three-month window covered routine service communication as well as periods of heightened public demand.

Table 2

Case Sampling Framework and Achieved Sample

Institution	Platform	Approximate followers	Survey respondents	Interviewees	Posts analysed
Kenya Revenue Authority (KRA)	Facebook	500,000	132	20	26
Kenya Power and Lighting Company (KPLC)	Facebook	Over 1,000,000	131	20	22
Higher Education Loans Board (HELB)	X	540,000	129	8	29
Total	—	≈2,040,000	392	48	77

Note. Interviewees were institutional communication officers, digital officers, and contact centre officers selected purposively from communication, public relations, customer care, social media, and contact centre functions. Survey respondents were members of the public who had interacted with the institutions on Facebook or X, recruited through purposive and snowball sampling. Systematic sampling drew posts from all posts published between 1 February and 28 April 2026.

3.5 Data Collection Instruments and Procedures

Survey data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered on Google Forms. Closed-ended items were measured on a five-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*) and grouped into five composites derived from the theoretical framework (Table 1): institutional dialogic communication practices (IV1, four items), public utilization of Facebook and X (IV2, three items), content presentation (IV3, four items), communication challenges (MOD, two items), and perceived effectiveness of dialogic communication (DV, two items: "platform communication builds public trust" and "I feel my feedback is valued"). The MOD items asked about difficulty obtaining responses and exposure to misinformation.

Interview data were collected through a semi-structured interview guide organized around the three objectives. Questions explored how social media enquiries are received, assigned, approved, and answered; how content is planned and presented; what performance expectations apply to response; and what challenges officers encounter. To protect confidentiality, participants are identified by codes that indicate the institution (for example, RA for KRA, LC for KPLC, and B for HELB) followed by a participant number. Content-analysis data were collected with a structured coding sheet. Each sampled post was coded for format (text, image, video, or mixed media), topic, engagement indicators (likes, comments, shares or reposts, and views), institutional tonality (positive, neutral, or negative), and the tonality of audience responses. Three post-level indicators were derived for inferential analysis: institutional post tonality, visual richness, and observed engagement level.

Validity and reliability were addressed in several ways. Content validity of the questionnaire was supported by deriving each composite directly from the constructs of the guiding theories (Table 1). Internal consistency was assessed with Cronbach's alpha before composites were used in regression; values of .70 or higher were regarded as acceptable (Nunnally, 1978), and the results are reported in Table 3. The content analysis followed an explicit coding protocol with defined categories (Krippendorff, 2018; Neuendorf, 2017). For the qualitative strand, credibility was strengthened by

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methodological triangulation across the three data sources and by reporting verbatim participant accounts so that interpretations can be checked against the evidence.

3.6 Data Analysis

Survey data were analysed in SPSS using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and hierarchical ordinary least squares (OLS) regression. Predictors were entered in blocks to assess the incremental contribution of each set of variables. Model 1 included the three survey-based independent variables (IV1, IV2, and IV3). Model 2 added the communication-challenges moderator (MOD) and institution dummy variables, with KPLC as the reference category. Model 3 added engagement behaviour (MED). Model 4 added the three content-analysis indicators, which were merged with the survey data set. Model 5 tested the interaction between IV1 and MOD.

Regression diagnostics indicated non-constant error variance. Because heteroskedasticity biases conventional standard errors, all models were estimated with HC3 heteroskedasticity-consistent standard errors, which perform well in samples of the size used here (Hayes & Cai, 2007; Long & Ervin, 2000). Cases with missing values on any variable in a model were excluded listwise; because the content-presentation composite (IV3) was available for fewer respondents (n = 229), the regression samples were smaller than the full survey sample (N = 210 for Model 1 and N = 208 for Models 2 and 4).

Interview transcripts were analysed through reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021), which involved familiarization with the data, generation of initial codes, construction of candidate themes, review of themes against the coded extracts and the full data set, definition and naming of themes, and production of the report. Content-analysis data were summarized with frequencies, percentages, and cross-tabulations by institution. Finally, the three strands were integrated through a joint display (Table 6) that compares the findings for each objective and states the resulting meta-inference (Fetters et al., 2013).

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Participation in the survey and interviews was voluntary and based on informed consent. Respondents were informed of the purpose of the study and of their right to withdraw, and no personally identifying information is reported. Interview participants are identified only by codes. The content analysis was limited to publicly available posts on official institutional accounts, and comments by individual members of the public were analysed only in aggregate. Approval was obtained from the National Commission of Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI) and from the institutions identified for this study.

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

4.1 Reliability and Descriptive Statistics

Internal consistency was assessed with Cronbach's alpha before the composites were used in regression. Table 3 shows that four of the five composites exceeded the conventional threshold, while the communication-challenges composite was borderline.

Table 3

Reliability Coefficients and Descriptive Statistics for Composite Variables

Composite variable	Items	Cronbach's α	*M*	*SD*	*n*
IV1: Dialogic communication practices	4	.853	3.370	0.872	390
IV2: Public utilization of Facebook/X	3	.876	3.161	0.979	387
IV3: Content presentation	4	.839	3.667	0.777	229
MOD: Communication challenges	2	.611	3.311	0.975	374
DV: Perceived effectiveness	2	.839	3.513	0.930	371

Note. Items were rated on a five-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*). Four composites exceeded the .70 threshold (Nunnally, 1978). The MOD alpha (.611) falls below it because its two items (difficulty obtaining responses; exposure to misinformation) are conceptually distinct, so results involving MOD should be read with caution. The lower n for IV3 reflects item availability. All composite means fell between the neutral and agreement points of the scale. Content presentation received the highest mean rating (M = 3.667), followed by perceived effectiveness (M = 3.513) and institutional dialogic practices (M = 3.370), while public utilization of the platforms received the lowest (M = 3.161). The profile suggests that citizens judged what institutions posted more favourably than how institutions interacted with them, a pattern examined under each objective below.

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4.1.1 Use of Facebook and X for Two-Way Dialogic Communication

Survey and Regression Findings: Survey ratings distinguished access to information from dialogue. Convenience in accessing information was the only usage item rated positively for all three institutions, while ratings for receiving timely responses were neutral (KRA M = 2.863; HELB M = 2.947; KPLC M = 2.763). Perceptions of dialogic communication reached the agreement range for KPLC (M = 3.548) and KRA (M = 3.431) but remained neutral for HELB (M = 3.319). Citizens, in other words, experienced the institutions' accounts as reliable places to find information but not as places where their own questions were consistently answered on time.

Table 4 reports the hierarchical regression results. The base model explained 59.6% of the variance in perceived effectiveness, and institutional dialogic communication practices (IV1) were the only significant predictor (B = 0.849, t = 11.18, p < .001). Adding the challenges moderator and institution dummies raised R^2 to .609 (F = 45.18, p < .001). IV1 remained dominant (B = 0.830, p < .001; β = 0.765), and KRA respondents rated effectiveness about 0.17 units higher than KPLC respondents did (B = 0.167, p = .043). Public utilization of the platforms (IV2) was not significant in any model.

Table 4

Hierarchical OLS Estimates Predicting Perceived Effectiveness of Dialogic Communication

Predictor	Model 1 (base)	Model 2 (+ MOD, dummies)	Model 4 (+ content analysis)
Constant	0.749** (0.272)	0.744* (0.315)	0.048 (0.026)
IV1: Dialogic communication practices	0.849*** (0.076)	0.830*** (0.079)	0.830*** (0.079)
IV2: Public utilization of Facebook/X	−0.017 (0.052)	0.003 (0.055)	0.001 (0.027)
IV3: Content presentation	−0.021 (0.061)	0.014 (0.066)	0.014 (0.066)
MED: Engagement behaviour	—	—	0.001 (0.027)
MOD: Communication challenges	—	−0.060 (0.059)	−0.060 (0.059)
d_KRA (ref. = KPLC)	—	0.167* (0.082)	0.116 (0.086)
CA: Institutional post tonality	—	—	0.134** (0.044)
CA: Visual richness of posts	—	—	0.100* (0.051)
CA: Observed engagement level	—	—	0.106* (0.050)
N	210	208	208
R^2	.596	.609	.609
Adjusted R^2	.590	.599	.599

Note. Unstandardized coefficients with HC3 heteroskedasticity-consistent standard errors in parentheses. DV = perceived effectiveness of dialogic communication (mean of "platform communication builds public trust" and "I feel my feedback is valued"; 1–5). All models were statistically significant (p < .001); for Model 2, F = 45.18. d_HELB was omitted because of collinearity. MED shares its items with IV2 and therefore adds no unique variance. Model 3 (adding MED only) and Model 5 (IV1 × MOD interaction, B = −0.038, p = .474) are not shown. CA = content-analysis variable. *p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

Interviews with the 48 communication officers showed that each institution had created some structures for two-way communication. KRA described a dedicated response team, a quality assurance desk that checks the consistency of replies, a frequently asked questions document, and language-sensitive responses: "a question in Swahili will also be responded to in Swahili" (RA3). KPLC described integrating social media enquiries into its customer service processes and emphasized personal contact: "We ensure the user gets human touch in communication to avoid doubts around 'Am I communicating to a robot?'" (LC3). HELB emphasized speed and volume: "We are required to respond to at least 200 users per day" (B1). These accounts show that responsiveness had been formalized to different degrees, through dedicated teams and quality checks at KRA, through customer service integration at KPLC, and through volume targets at HELB.

4.1.2 Content Presentation and Citizen Engagement

Table 5 summarizes engagement and institutional tonality across the 77 sampled posts. The institutions had different engagement profiles. KPLC recorded the most likes, HELB the most comments and cumulative views, and KRA's totals were concentrated in a few prominent posts, including an educational campaign post with 2,551 comments. Formats also differed: KRA mostly used mixed media (53.8%), KPLC mostly images (86.4%), and HELB images only. Most posts were positive in institutional tone (71.4% overall), and none were coded negative, but audience responses were more varied; HELB posts were most often associated with neutral (55.2%) or negative (31.0%) audience tonality. Comment counts indicate public activity, but they do not show whether institutions responded.

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Table 5

Engagement and Institutional Tonality of Sampled Posts

Institution	Platform	Posts	Likes	Comments	Shares/ reposts	Views	Positive tone
KRA	Facebook	26	21,062	5,187	454	224,700	18 (69.2%)
KPLC	Facebook	22	43,362	7,665	465	24,900	15 (68.2%)
HELB	X	29	2,629	11,006	142	532,600	22 (75.9%)
Total	—	77	67,053	23,858	1,061	—	55 (71.4%)

Note. Posts published between 1 February and 28 April 2026 and selected by systematic sampling. "Positive tone" is the number of posts coded as positive in institutional tonality; the remaining posts were coded neutral and none negative. Views for KRA and KPLC are video views. Source: Study content-analysis data.

Regression Findings: Survey-measured content presentation (IV3) received the highest mean rating of all composites but was not a significant predictor of perceived effectiveness in any model (Table 4). Model 4 merged the content-analysis indicators with the survey data. Three post-level variables were significant: institutional post tonality ($B = 0.134$, $p = .002$), visual richness ($B = 0.100$, $p = .048$), and observed engagement level ($B = 0.106$, $p = .035$). These results indicate that observable features of institutional posts were associated with citizens' perceptions of effectiveness after survey factors were held constant, although none of the three correlated significantly with the dependent variable on its own. The effects therefore emerge only when institutional practices are controlled for and are modest in size relative to IV1.

4.1.3 Institutional Challenges Limiting Dialogue

Interview Findings: Officers described several constraints that leave dialogue incomplete. Responses requiring authorization from senior officers or technical departments were delayed; as one KRA officer explained, approval "may take longer than anticipated—thereby negating the spirit of real-time responses." KPLC officers reported message backlogs during peak periods, insufficient staffing, and reliance on copy-and-paste replies. All three institutions reported fake accounts impersonating them, misinformation, and hostile interactions. Taken together, the accounts describe three types of constraint: procedural (approval and referral chains), capacity-related (volume relative to staffing), and environmental (impersonation, misinformation, and hostility).

Survey and Regression Findings: The communication-challenges composite had a mean of 3.311, indicating that respondents leaned slightly towards agreement that they experienced difficulty obtaining responses and encountered misinformation. However, MOD was not a significant predictor of perceived effectiveness in Model 2 or Model 4, and the interaction between IV1 and MOD was not significant ($B = -0.038$, $p = .474$). Because the reliability of the MOD composite was below the conventional threshold ($\alpha = .611$), these null results should be interpreted with caution.

4.2 Discussion

4.2.1 Use of Facebook and X for Two-Way Dialogic Communication

The findings indicate that the three institutions use Facebook and X for two-way communication to a moderate extent, but that this use is better described as responsive information provision than as institutionalized dialogue. Citizens valued the platforms as convenient sources of information, which is consistent with the information-dependency relationship described by Media Dependency Theory (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976), but their experience of timely, reciprocal exchange was less consistent. This pattern echoes evidence that public organizations tend to use interactive platforms for dissemination rather than for completing the dialogic loop (Bonsón et al., 2017; Chen et al., 2023; Lai et al., 2020; Mergel, 2013) and with Kenyan evidence that county governments' use of these channels is constrained (Onzere, 2023).

The regression results support the central claim of Dialogic Communication Theory. Perceived effectiveness depended mainly on institutional behaviour (responsiveness, openness, mutuality, and feedback) rather than on how often citizens used the platforms. This is consistent with Kent and Taylor's (2002) argument that dialogue depends on an organization's orientation toward its publics and with findings that responsiveness, rather than posting volume, drives meaningful engagement (Haro-de-Rosario et al., 2018; Lappas et al., 2022). The non-significance of public utilization is also informative from the perspective of Uses and Gratifications Theory: frequent use indicates that citizens seek gratifications from institutional accounts, but whether those gratifications are obtained depends on institutional response (Anum & Zulfiqar, 2025). Heavy users who do not receive replies have no more reason to rate communication as effective than occasional users.

The higher effectiveness ratings among KRA respondents should be interpreted cautiously because institutional effects in Model 2 do not by themselves identify a cause. The difference is nonetheless consistent with the interview evidence that KRA had established a dedicated response team and a quality assurance function, structures that give

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practical form to the commitment and propinquity that Dialogic Communication Theory treats as conditions for dialogue (Kent & Taylor, 2002). By contrast, a volume target such as HELB's daily response requirement formalizes output but not necessarily the quality or completeness of the exchange, which may help explain why HELB's dialogic ratings remained neutral. Overall, the evidence suggests partial institutionalization: structures for response exist, but they have not yet produced consistently timely and reciprocal exchange from the citizen's point of view.

4.2.2 Content Presentation and Citizen Engagement

The findings indicate that content presentation supports, but does not substitute for, responsive engagement. The significance of tonality and visual richness in the integrated model is consistent with evidence that media type, content type, and conversational style influence public response to government posts (Bonsón et al., 2015; Lai et al., 2020). At the same time, the fact that these effects appear only after institutional dialogic practices are controlled for, and that citizens' favourable ratings of presentation did not predict effectiveness, suggests that well-designed content raises perceived effectiveness only when it accompanies responsive behaviour. This interpretation aligns with Kent and Lane's (2021) warning that two-way exchange is not the same as dialogue, and with Taylor and Kent's (2014) argument that dialogic engagement cannot be reduced to tactics for increasing interaction.

The content-analysis profiles also show why engagement counts must be read with care. HELB's account on X attracted far more comments and views than its likes would suggest, yet a large share of audience responses was neutral or negative. A high comment count in this context is more plausibly a sign of unresolved enquiries and complaints than of successful dialogue, which is consistent with the distinction between activity and interactivity (Wukich, 2022) and with communication managers' own skepticism about engagement metrics (Zumofen et al., 2025). The contrast between KPLC's high like counts and HELB's high comment counts also reflects differences between platforms and audiences (DePaula et al., 2022), so cross-institution comparisons in Table 5 should not be read as rankings of communicative quality. More broadly, the predominance of positively toned, informational posts mirrors Lovejoy and Saxton's (2012) finding that organizations favour information over community-building and action-oriented messages.

4.2.3 Institutional Challenges Limiting Dialogue

The qualitative and quantitative evidence on challenges diverges, and the divergence is itself informative. In the interviews, approval hierarchies, referral to other departments, high enquiry volumes, and limited staffing were prominent explanations for delayed or generic responses, a pattern also reported in Ghana and Taiwan (Ayiku & du Plessis, 2026; Lai et al., 2020) and consistent with Mergel's (2013) observation that rule uncertainty and risk aversion limit interactive uses of social media. These accounts also converge with the neutral timeliness ratings in the survey. Statistically, however, challenges did not independently predict effectiveness or moderate the effect of dialogic practices. Two explanations are plausible. First, the two-item MOD measure combined conceptually distinct experiences and had limited reliability, which reduces statistical power. Second, citizens may experience internal constraints not as a separate factor but through their consequences for institutional responsiveness, which is already captured by IV1. On this reading, challenges matter because they reduce dialogic practice, rather than because they alter the relationship between practice and effectiveness.

Read through the guiding theories, the challenges explain why dialogue remains incomplete. The institutions have adopted visible elements of two-way communication, including active accounts, response teams, and published frequently asked questions, but the approval and referral routines through which substantive answers are produced remain designed for slower, hierarchical communication, which undermines the propinquity that Dialogic Communication Theory requires (Kent & Taylor, 2002). From the perspective of Media Dependency Theory, the persistence of impersonation and misinformation is especially damaging because citizens rely on these accounts for important service information (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976); as Ferreira and Borges (2020) found, reliance on social media as a main source is associated with greater acceptance of misinformation. Correcting false claims also diverts communicative effort from dialogue. These findings suggest that institutionalizing dialogue requires organizational change in delegation, coordination, and staffing rather than more frequent posting. Integrated Discussion: The Extent of Institutionalization. Table 6 integrates the findings from the three data strands for each objective and states the resulting meta-inference.

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Table 6

Joint Display of Survey, Content Analysis, and Interview Findings by Objective

Objective	Survey	Content analysis	Interviews	Meta-inference
(a) Two-way dialogic use	Dialogic ratings moderate (*M* = 3.319–3.548); timeliness neutral (*M* = 2.763–2.947); IV1 dominant predictor (β = 0.765); IV2 not significant	High comment volumes (23,858), but counts do not show whether institutions replied	Response teams, quality checks, FAQ, language matching; daily volume targets	Convergence: response structures exist, but reciprocity and timeliness are uneven; partial institutionalization
(b) Content presentation and engagement	IV3 rated highest (*M* = 3.667) but not a significant predictor	Tonality, visual richness, and observed engagement significant in Model 4; 71.4% of posts positive in tone	Emphasis on human tone and language-sensitive replies	Complementarity: presentation supports, but does not replace, responsive engagement
(c) Institutional challenges	MOD *M* = 3.311; not significant; IV1 × MOD not significant; α = .611	HELB audience tone often neutral (55.2%) or negative (31.0%)	Approval delays, backlogs, understaffing, copy-and-paste replies, fake accounts, misinformation	Divergence: constraints salient to officers operate mainly through reduced responsiveness

Note. IV = independent variable; MOD = communication challenges; FAQ = frequently asked questions. Meta-inferences follow the convergence, complementarity, and divergence logic of convergent mixed-methods integration (Fetters et al., 2013).

A read through the three guiding theories, the evidence indicates that two-way digital communication is institutionalized unevenly. From the standpoint of Media Dependency Theory, the institutions have succeeded in becoming channels that citizens rely on for information, as shown by the positive ratings of convenience and by high view counts. From the standpoint of Uses and Gratifications Theory, citizens obtain the informational gratification they seek but less consistently the gratification of a timely, personal response. From the standpoint of Dialogic Communication Theory, response teams, quality assurance procedures, and volume targets show that the institutions have begun to build dialogue into their procedures, but approval rules, the predominance of positively toned informational posts, and citizens' neutral ratings of timeliness show that dialogue is not yet their ordinary mode of communication. The broader implication is that social media have given the three institutions the infrastructure for two-way communication, but that this infrastructure has not yet been fully converted into dialogue.

V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

This study examined the extent to which two-way digital communication has been institutionalized in KRA, KPLC, and HELB. With respect to the first objective, the study concludes that the three institutions use Facebook and X for two-way communication to a moderate extent. The platforms have improved information access, institutional visibility, and opportunities for public participation, and citizens value them as convenient sources of information. However, responses to citizens are not yet consistently timely or reciprocal, and citizens' perceptions of effectiveness depend primarily on the institutions' own dialogic practices rather than on how intensively citizens use the platforms. Responsiveness, mutuality, and feedback, rather than reach, are therefore the decisive conditions for effective public-sector social media communication.

With respect to the second objective, the study concludes that content presentation contributes to perceived effectiveness but cannot compensate for weak responsiveness. Positive tone, visual richness, and observed engagement were associated with more favourable perceptions once institutional practices were taken into account, yet citizens' ratings of presentation did not independently predict effectiveness. Engagement counts, particularly comment volumes, also proved ambiguous indicators, since high comment activity coincided with neutral and negative audience responses in at least one case.

With respect to the third objective, the study concludes that approval and referral procedures, high enquiry volumes relative to staffing, reliance on standardized replies, impersonation accounts, misinformation, and hostile interactions are the principal institutional constraints on dialogue. These constraints appear to act mainly by reducing institutional responsiveness rather than by changing how responsiveness is perceived. Overall, Facebook and X have been institutionalized in the three organizations as channels of visibility and information, but not as consistently dialogic

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channels. The institutions display the structures of two-way communication more fully than the routines and shared expectations that would make dialogue their ordinary way of working.

5.2 Recommendations

Because institutional dialogic practices were the strongest predictor of perceived effectiveness, public institutions should set clear response standards that specify how enquiries and complaints received on Facebook and X are acknowledged, resolved, and closed, and within what time. Where an issue cannot be resolved immediately, citizens should receive prompt acknowledgement and regular updates, and management should review performance against these standards rather than against follower or posting targets. Since approval and referral procedures were the main cause of delay, institutions should delegate routine response authority to front-line officers, agree referral timelines with technical departments, and maintain pre-approved responses to recurring questions, reserving senior clearance for sensitive matters. They should also strengthen staffing during predictable peaks, such as tax filing deadlines, loan application windows, and major outages, and train officers in online engagement, plain-language writing, crisis communication, and the handling of misinformation and hostile users.

Institutional content should remain clear, positive, and visually rich, but as a complement to responsiveness rather than a substitute for it. At the policy level, the Ministry of Information, Communications and the Digital Economy and individual institutions should develop social media governance frameworks that cover account verification, response responsibilities, the removal of impersonation accounts, and the correction of misinformation, and they should evaluate performance using response times, resolution rates, and audience sentiment rather than engagement counts alone. Future research should use probability-based samples, longitudinal designs, analysis of institutional replies within comment threads, and multi-item measures of communication challenges, and should extend the comparison to other national public bodies and county governments.

Declaration of Interest

The authors declare that they do not have any known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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