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THE INFLUENCE AND USE OF FACEBOOK IN THE PRACTICE OF PUBLIC RELATIONS IN COUNTY GOVERNMENTS OF KENYA: A CASE STUDY OF BUNGOMA COUNTY

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A RESEARCH DISSERTATION PRESENTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS IN COMMUNICATION STUDIES, SCHOOL OF COMMUNICATION AND COMPUTER STUDIES, ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

OCTOBER, 2026

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DECLARATION

This dissertation is my own work and has not been presented previously in another institution. I consent that this dissertation may be available for reference at the discretion of the University.

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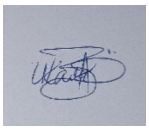
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

CIDP	County Integrated Development Plan
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
ISERC	Institutional Scientific and Ethics Review Committee
KII	Key Informant Interview
NACOSTI	National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation
PLWD	People Living With Disabilities
PR	Public Relations
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Sciences

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ABSTRACT

Public relations practice has transformed globally with the rapid adoption of social media. Facebook remains an instrumental platform for communication and engagement, owing to its widespread adoption and interactive affordances. Even so, a significant gap exists in understanding its strategic use as a public relations tool at the county level in Kenya. Anchored in Excellence Theory and the Dialogic Theory of Public Relations, this study examined Facebook's role in Bungoma County Government's public communication. The objectives were to (i) determine the challenges Bungoma County Government faces in using Facebook as a public relations tool; (ii) assess the level of citizen engagement on the county's official Facebook page; and (iii) examine Facebook's effectiveness as a public relations tool for communication. Data were collected through content analysis of 1,513 Facebook posts published between August 2022 and August 2025, key informant interviews, and focus group discussions. Findings show Facebook is used predominantly as a one-way information channel, with an overall engagement rate of 12.59% and a comment-reply rate of 17.16%, indicating limited dialogic interaction with citizens. Effectiveness is asymmetrical: most sampled citizens either distrust the page or are unaware of it. The study concludes that Facebook's public relations value in Bungoma County Government remains constrained by institutional and access-related gaps, falling short of the two-way symmetric model theorized in dialogic public relations. It recommends that the county set explicit targets for two-way engagement, pair Facebook with low-data trusted channels, and adopt a documented social media policy to move toward two-way symmetric practice. The study is justified by the need for county-level empirical evidence to guide evidence-based public relations policy in Kenya's devolved government communication, addressing a gap in literature dominated by national and Western government case studies.

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DEFINITION OF TERMS

Facebook: By definition, Facebook refers to a social networking platform in which individuals can engage, share, and connect with communities, family, and friends through status updates, videos, photos, and posts (Kontentino, 2025). In this study, Facebook is used to refer to Bungoma County Government's official Facebook page that it uses to communicate development updates, announcements, and public programs, interact with citizens, and share information.

Dialogic Communication: Refers to the creation of dialogue attempts between the audience and a public speaker (these attempts are made by a public speaker) (Men et al., 2018). In this study, dialogic communication refers to the two-way interaction between the citizens and Bungoma County Government through responses, feedback, and comments on the Facebook page of the county government.

Public Relations: As defined by the Public Relations Society of America, public relations are strategic communication processes that build mutually beneficial relationships between organisations and their publics (Wilcox et al., 2014). In this study, public relations refers to the strategic communication process that the County Government of Bungoma uses to establish and maintain mutual understanding and positive relationships with its publics through communication platforms such as Facebook.

One-way communication: One-way communication refers to a communication process where information flows from an organization to its audience without opportunities for feedback or interaction. In this study, one-way communication was operationalized by examining how Facebook is used by Bungoma County Government to post announcements, notices, and public information without facilitating or responding to citizen comments or engagement.

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Two-way communication: Two-way communication refers to an interactive communication process in which information flows between an organisation and its audience, allowing feedback, dialogue, and mutual exchange of ideas. In this study, two-way communication was operationalized by examining how Facebook enables Bungoma County Government to interact with citizens through replying to comments, responding to messages, and facilitating discussions on public issues.

County Government: Kenya adopted a new constitution that changed the public administration landscape, introducing devolution of power in 2010. There are two tiers of government: the national government headed by the president and 47 devolved units known as counties headed by governors. In this study, county government is defined as a devolved administrative and governance unit of authority over a specific county.

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CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

Communication practices have been transformed by the development of the technologies of Web 2.0, enabling networked, user-generated, and interactive forms of engagement (Darwish & Lakhtaria, 2011). Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) note that for organisational communication, Facebook has gained traction as one of the most utilised tools among various social networking platforms, something which they attributed to the platform's interactive features, multimedia capabilities and extensive reach. The practice of public relations has been significantly influenced by such affordances, thereby transforming it from a one-way dissemination of information to a communication that is dialogic and the building of relationships between individual organisations and their respective publics (Tong, 2021).

These affordances have significantly influenced public relations practice, shifting it from one-way information dissemination to dialogic communication and relationship building between organisations and their publics. In the spectrum of the public sector, governments in need of boosting the aspects of citizen participation, accountability, and transparency consider Facebook as a significant platform (Meru & Kinoti, 2022). There is a notable increase in the use of Facebook for relationship management with diverse stakeholders, engagement of citizens, and public information dissemination (Mergel, 2013). There is also a close link between legal and constitutional guidelines concerning information accessibility and public participation, as articulated in the County Governments Act (2012) and the Constitution of Kenya (2010).

Notably, there exists limited empirical evidence concerning the strategic use of Facebook as a public relations tool, especially at the county level, despite the widespread presence of official

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Facebook pages among various county governments. Thus, this chapter introduces the research by outlining the background, assumptions, scope, significance, definition of key terms, justification, research questions, objectives, purpose, problem statement, limitations, and delimitations. Essentially, this chapter situates the study within the broader discourse on public sector communication and digital public relations, zeroing in on the utilisation/use of Facebook by the county governments in Kenya.

This study argues that the use of Facebook as a public relations tool can significantly enhance citizen engagement, transparency, and dialogic communication between county governments and the public. Focusing on Bungoma County Government, the research examines how Facebook is utilised by county governments to facilitate public communication, disseminate information, and build relationships with citizens in line with the provisions of the Constitution of Kenya and the County Governments Act. The study further evaluates the effectiveness of Facebook in supporting public relations practice within devolved governance structures in Kenya.

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1.2 Background to the Study

Globally, the emergence of social media platforms and technological advancements in digital communication have resulted in a profound reshaping of public relations practice (Wang et al., 2021). Media relations, newsletters, press releases, top-down communication, and one-way communication were the primary bases of traditional public relations. However, the paradigm has experienced a major shift towards engagements that are relationship-oriented, dialogic, and interactive between the publics and their respective organisations, due to the rise of social media (Kent & Taylor, 2014). Seebach et al. (2013) note that entities are capable of sustaining relationships with stakeholders, managing organisational reputation, receiving real-time feedback, and disseminating information instantly through platforms such as Facebook. Hilbert et al. (2025) explain that, for instance, Facebook has been used by governments around the globe for direct

engagement, clarification of information, and provision of timely updates during crises like health emergencies or natural disasters.

Social media continues to be a fundamental tool, particularly in the public sector when it comes to enhancement of citizen participation, transparency, and governance (Oye, 2025). Globally, the Facebook platform is leveraged by governments to build trust, manage crises, engage citizens in decision-making, and communicate policies (Al-Omoush et al., 2023). For example, Facebook is used for the purposes of facilitating the resolution of citizens' complaints, soliciting feedback from the community, and providing updates on public services in the office of the Mayor of New York City (Cole, 2020). This provides a demonstration of how the aspects of accountability and trust are fostered through interactive engagement. Likewise, in Spain, Facebook has been utilized successfully to increase civic participation, collect public opinion through polls, and involve citizens in various decisions of urban planning by municipal governments (Guillaumie et al., 2024). Compared to other social media platforms such as LinkedIn and Instagram, Facebook is very efficient, and this is because of its interactive features such as reactions, live video, and comments, and its widespread adoption (Maulana & Harsada, 2025).

Regionally, Facebook has increasingly been adopted by African governments to address gaps in communication between citizens and public institutions. For instance, in South Africa, Facebook has been used for responding to complaints by citizens and disseminating information on service delivery by municipalities. Even so, it is worth noting that limitations persist regarding uneven engagement and limited rates of response (Matlala, 2025). To the same degree, public health initiatives like environmental awareness and vaccination drives have been promoted through Facebook campaigns in Nigeria, highlighting the role played by the platform in promoting civic engagement beyond the dissemination of information. In the Kenyan context, adoption of social media in communications by the government is linked closely to legal and constitutional

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frameworks, mandating accountability, transparency, and public participation. Freedom of expression, access to information, and public participation are recognised as pillars of good governance in the Constitution of Kenya (2010), particularly articles 232, 31 and 35. Moreover, county governments are obligated to establish mechanisms facilitating participation of citizens in the processes of governing by section 93 of the County Governments Act (2012). A practical avenue for fulfilling these obligations is presented by Facebook, enabling the county governments to enhance dialogue with citizens, provide service updates, solicit feedback, and disseminate policies.

Despite the availability of such frameworks, disparities in how social media is used by the county governments of Kenya for citizen engagement and public relations have been revealed by studies. Research shows that whereas some counties like Kisumu and Nairobi have integrated Facebook strategically into approaches to citizen engagement and communication, many other counties continue to exhibit utilisation of the platform mainly for information dissemination in a one-way manner, with little interactive engagement (Muchori & Reid, 2025). An active official Facebook page is maintained by Bungoma County Government, a semi-urban and rural county in western Kenya. However, the degree to which the platform is deployed strategically for the purposes of supporting functions of public relations, such as trust-building, relationship management, and dialogue, remains under-examined (Kanyi, 2020). Comprehending how Bungoma County Government utilizes Facebook contributes to enhancing citizen engagement in counties with similar infrastructural and socio-economic contexts and offers insights into the practical realities of digital public relations in devolved governance.

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1.3 Statement of the problem

Facebook has increasingly been adopted by county governments in Kenya as a platform for official communication. Even so, empirical evidence concerning effective utilisation of the

platform in supporting functions of public relations, such as relationship building, dialogue and citizen engagement, is limited. In Articles 31, 35, and 232 of the Constitution of Kenya (2010), freedom of expression, access to information and citizen participation are explicitly recognised as fundamental principles of governance. Additionally, counties are obliged to establish public participation mechanisms. These legal frameworks notwithstanding, challenges in citizen engagement persist.

In Kenya, many county governments receive complaints that are related to inadequate feedback on public inquiries, one-way communication, and limited responsiveness (World Bank, 2022). For instance, there is minimal evidence of interactive engagement, such as polls to solicit feedback, live Q&A sessions, and responses to comments by citizens on the official Facebook page of Bungoma County Government, which posts policy information and service updates. This suggests that rather than functioning as a tool for two-way dialogic communication, Facebook may function primarily as a broadcast channel (Kent & Li, 2020).

This study aimed to fill this gap through a systematic investigation of how Bungoma County Government uses Facebook as a public relations tool. The study is pivotal for the assessment of whether there is a meaningful contribution of Facebook to effective governance at the county level, accountability, and citizen participation.

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1.4 Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the influence of Facebook in the practice of public relations in Kenya's county governments, with specific reference to Bungoma County Government.

1.5 Objectives of the study

Specific Objectives

i. To evaluate the use of Facebook as a public relations tool for communication in Bungoma County Government.

ii. To examine the effectiveness of Facebook as a public relations tool for communication in Bungoma County Government.

iii. To determine the level of citizen engagement on Bungoma County Government's Facebook page.

iv. To determine the challenges faced by Bungoma County Government in using Facebook as a public relations tool for communication.

1.6 Research questions

i. To what extent does Bungoma County Government use Facebook as a public relations tool for communication?

ii. What is the level of citizen engagement on the official Facebook page of Bungoma County Government?

iii. What are the challenges faced by Bungoma County Government in using Facebook as a public relations tool for communication?

iv. What is the degree of effectiveness of the use of Facebook as a public relations tool for communication in Bungoma County Government?

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1.7 Justification of the study/rationale

The unprecedented rapid development of social media has profoundly transformed public relations practice by transitioning communication from the conventional information dissemination that was one-way to an engagement that is not only more relationship-oriented but also interactive. Manickam (2024) explained that this kind of shift is particularly significant for Kenya's county governments, considering the constitutional guidelines for access to information, transparency, and public participation. Therefore, to enhance engagement and communication between citizens

and county governments, it is vital to comprehend how social media platforms, especially Facebook, are utilized as tools of public relations (Jimin, 2023).

Despite the widespread adoption of Facebook by many county-level governments, the literature indicates limited research on the effectiveness and role of social media in public relations practice within Kenya's county governments. The main focus of the studies that are available is on general utilization of social media or national government institutions, with little attention to the Facebook social media platform as a strategic tool of public relations at county-level governments (Nyabera & Lando, 2022). In rural and semi-urban counties, where there may be variation in the dynamics of digital engagement from those of the metropolitan counties, this gap is more pronounced.

Thus, this study was essential as it sought to generate empirical evidence concerning how Bungoma County Government uses Facebook for public relations, including alignment with established public relations models, levels of citizen engagement, and the nature of communication. New knowledge was contributed to the academic discourse on social media and public relations by the findings of the study within governance systems that are devolved.

Practically, the study generated insights with the potential to inform practitioners of public relations, communication officers, and policymakers in Bungoma County Government and also other county governments within the country on how to improve public trust and citizen engagement by leveraging Facebook strategically. Bungoma County Government was selected because it offered a case study that was empirically relevant and appropriate for examination of the use of Facebook as a tool of public relations for communication in county governments in Kenya. By subjecting Bungoma County Government to an in-depth case study, the study served as a benchmark for similar counties that are determined to boost their respective Facebook

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utilization as an effective tool of public relations for communication in local or county governments (Nkangi et al., 2024).

1.8 Significance of the Study

In Kenya's county governments, the use of Facebook in the practice of public relations has been understudied. Thus, the significance of this particular study lay in benefiting differentiated groups by shedding scholarly light on this matter. For instance, insights on how PR practices in county governments are driven by Facebook and the utilization of such insights as theoretical advancement as well as a basis for further research, were gained by scholars. The best practices in the use of Facebook were discovered by practitioners of PR in county governments, and also, public administrators learned how to effectively engage with audiences through the use of Facebook. On the part of the citizen, they learnt to engage more actively with county governments by exploiting Facebook in better ways. In a nutshell, Hussein et al. (2025) state that such study findings are pivotal in fostering efficient utilization of Facebook by Kenya's county governments.

To amplify the significance of the study, Bungoma County Government was selected because it offered a case study that was empirically relevant and appropriate for examination of the use of Facebook as a tool of public relations for communication in county governments in Kenya. Bungoma County maintains an official Facebook page that is active, through which it shares information on executive communications, updates on service delivery, public notices, and development projects. Thus, Bungoma County Government was made suitable for analysis of public relations practices and systematic observation conducted through social media platforms by this sustained level of activity (Babu & Otteng, 2024). This sustained level of activity made Bungoma County Government suitable for systematic observation and analysis of public relations practices conducted through social media platforms such as Facebook.

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1.9 Assumptions of the study

When human beings learn that they are being investigated, their human behaviour is deliberately adjusted, making this one of the difficulties encountered by the researchers of social science. According to Roulston and Halpin (2022), a significant degree of bias results from the fact that individuals tend to provide responses that benefit them in interviews. This study assumed that respondents in the key informant interviews and focus group discussions would provide accurate, truthful, and honest responses regarding the use of Facebook, their awareness of, engagement with, and trust in Bungoma County Government's Facebook page. This assumption was central to the credibility of findings on citizen distrust and limited awareness, since these findings relied on self-reported perceptions rather than observable content data. The other assumption of the study was that the broader population would be represented by the target population. Lastly, the study assumed that Facebook is actively utilised by the County Government of Bungoma, as part of its official communication strategy, and that basic digital communication skills that are essential for managing social media platforms were possessed by the county government's PR staff.

1.10 Scope of the study

The scope of this study was limited to the County Government of Bungoma, which is located in western Kenya. Bungoma County Government was chosen because it provided an institutional setting that was appropriate as a result of its active utilisation of digital platforms for citizen engagement and dissemination of public information, and a structured communication department.

This study mainly assessed Bungoma County Government's use of Facebook from August 2022 to August 2025. Facebook platform was considered because it is the most publicly accessible and consistently used social media platform by the county government, permitting the evaluation of engagement patterns and communication practices systematically. Other social media platforms, such as Instagram and LinkedIn, are acknowledged as part of the broader digital communication

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framework by the county but are not subjected to in-depth analysis. The study did not examine detailed public audience perceptions and individual political actors, and was limited to institutional communication practices.

1.11 Limitations and delimitations

The first limitation of the study was that the findings could not be representative of other county governments. The delimitation alongside this limitation was geographical; that is, strictly, the study was conducted in Bungoma County. The second limitation is that the study did not capture the views of all the members of the public or employees of the County Government of Bungoma. The corresponding delimitation was that participation was limited to individuals (county government officials) directly involved in public communication on the Facebook page of the County Government and selected interest groups in the county.

1.12 Summary

Both in the government spectrum and private spheres, contemporary corporate communication has been revolutionized by Facebook. As such, adjustments and shifts in the practices of public relations are called for by its nature, which is interactive. Particularly in countries that are still developing, there is no proper documentation of Facebook in public relations in governments, while its contribution in the private sector in the spheres of public relations is well documented. This study sought to undertake an exploration of Facebook's application in less developed countries at the local government levels.

The background of the study has been presented in this chapter, noting how reforms in PR practice and the rapid growth of social media use in Kenya have been influenced by Web 2.0's interactive applications. The statement of the problem, in which the study has noted limited research concerning the application of Facebook in the practice of PR in county government

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contexts in Kenya as a gap that the study aimed to fill, has also been presented in the chapter. Definition of terms, limitations and delimitations of the study, scope, assumptions, significance, justification, research questions, objectives of the study and the purpose of the study have further been outlined by the chapter. To form the basis of the study, theoretical and empirical literature are reviewed in the next chapter.

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CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a review of the literature that is relevant to the utilisation of the Facebook social media platform as a communication tool for public relations, with a specific focus on government institutions. Various main sections are used to organise the review. Foremost, it assesses/examines the study's underpinning theoretical frameworks alongside principles such as strategic communication, two-way communication, relationship management, and value-driven communication, which provide the basis for comprehending how public relations in government settings are supported by Facebook. Next, it subjects empirical studies conducted internationally, within the African continent, and in Kenya to review, highlighting major findings and identifying gaps in research. Lastly, the literature review chapter presents the conceptual framework that guides the research, providing an illustration of the link or relationship between public relations practices in county governments and Facebook usage. This review sets the scholarly foundation for the research and provides justification for further investigation within Bungoma County government's context.

2.2 General Literature

Internationally, utilisation of social media has significantly reshaped public relations practice, especially within institutions of governance by enhancing citizen engagement, transparency, and communication. Interactions between citizens and governments have been revolutionized by social media technologies, enabling information dissemination using interactive digital platforms and eliminating traditional communication barriers. According to Taprial and Kanwar (2013), social media encompasses all web applications that enable users to not only create

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and exchange content that they have generated but also interact among themselves. Similarly, Ahmed et al. (2022) describe social media as tools facilitating the open exchange of information online via conversational interaction and user-generated content exchange. These tools include social networking sites, video sharing sites, blogs, photo sharing platforms, podcasts, and message boards (Jones & Park, 2023). Other scholars consider social media to be "platforms that enable any person to publish digital creative content, provide and obtain real-time feedback through online discussions, commentary, and evaluations, and incorporate changes or corrections to the original content" (Kim & Lim, 2020, p. 3).

Tagi et al. (2025) point out that social media provides governments with appropriate channels since they can facilitate dialogue with citizens through participatory communication, promote accountability, and improve access to public information. This is simply to say that social media platforms such as Facebook can be effective public relations tools for PR practitioners in government. The practice of PR encompasses the various methods, strategies, tactics, and activities that PR professionals use to achieve their communication goals. Usually, this practice involves a mix of strategic planning, relationship-building, content creation, and media engagement to effectively manage an organization's communication and reputation (Wilcox et al., 2014). Stated differently, PR practice is the application of theories, concepts, and principles of PR to real-world situations.

The PR function in the realm of government is primarily concerned with providing information to the public (Wilcox et al., 2014) because public information forms part of the fundamental elements of transparency and accountability in government (Lee et al., 2021). Governments all over the world are formed to provide services to their citizens. They therefore engage in active dissemination of information to the public to promote their policies and services, answer public inquiries, educate the public, motivate citizens to support government policies, and

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educate them on various issues such as public health and safety. This implies that governments cannot function efficiently unless they communicate effectively with their citizens. Public relations functions in government therefore helps in the circulation of information that is clear, efficient, and reaches the largest number of citizens. It is necessary for governments to inform their citizens so that they are enabled to make informed choices, judgments, and evaluations of the policies, activities, and actions of the government. According to Wilcox et al. (2014), governments disseminate information to the public hoping that their citizens will be equipped with the necessary background to enable them to take part in the formulation of government policies. If done right and carefully, PR in government can improve efficiency in public administration by improving implementation of a given government agency's mission and by meeting the democratic obligations and responsibilities that are inherent to government (Lee et al., 2021). Therefore, the importance of PR in government is evident.

Just like in private practice, public relations professionals within governments engage in strategic communication for relationship building. They endeavor to establish beneficial relationships between different government ministries, departments, and agencies with the public. They communicate government activities and policies to various publics. PR practitioners in government therefore "…facilitate the free flow of information between the government and the people so that citizens can make informed decisions about public policy matters that affect them" (Ferguson, 2013, p.351). Principally, PR practitioners in government are concerned with achieving effective public trust and support, as well as cooperation in government policies and programs. They also manage internal information and communication, facilitate media relations, and support community and nation building. According to O'Donnell (2023), government officials are obligated to show their records of achievement and effectively communicate this to their key publics. It is the PR function that facilitates reporting on the achievements of the government and

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its policy directions to the citizens to ensure that the government earns citizen support for its programs and cooperation and participation in governance. According to Lee et al. (2021), PR in government has about eight purposes which can be democratic in nature, pragmatic, or political. In terms of democracy, the purpose of government PR is to facilitate public sector reporting, manage media relations, and encourage government responsiveness public needs. Pragmatic purposes of PR in government include public service campaigns and public education to increase utilization of government services and products, getting the public to comply with laws and regulations voluntarily, and having the public act as the government's eyes and ears. On the other hand, the political purpose of government PR is to increase public support of the government. Thus, public administrators seek to engage in PR as a way of indirectly improving the popularity of their agencies or departments with the citizenry. If citizens are to take part in governance, then they need to be involved in public affairs through the supply of timely and accurate information. This is where the contribution of PR professionals is needed most. Its main purpose is to serve as a mechanism through which organizations can listen to and understand their stakeholders and learn approaches to making sound managerial decisions with minimal adverse consequences to stakeholders (Grunig, 2009). Social media tools such as Facebook provide platforms on which government officials can connect with citizens where they can give prompt commentary on specific events (O'Donnell, 2023).

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2.3 Empirical Literature Review

Globally, studies show that there is increased adoption of social media platforms by governments for purposes of fostering institutional communication with the public. However, despite this potential, many governments at the local level still underutilize the dialogic potential of Facebook, even though it represents a cost-effective communication tool. Schwartz et al. (2024) conducted a study focused on the examination of Israel's municipal Facebook pages and

highlighted that government pages are followed by a large proportion of citizens. However, it was noted that the use of the platform is characterized by a weak two-way communication practice and low responsiveness, which continue to limit meaningful engagement.

In the United States of America and many European countries, Facebook is utilized for dissemination of information concerning delivery of services, updates on policies, and government programs (Magnusson et al., 2012). Likewise, Burgoon et al. (2021) noted that traditional media announcements are increasingly being replaced by Facebook pages as official communication channels by government agencies. This growing use of Facebook by government institutions is largely attributed to the interactive and participatory nature of social media platforms. Unlike traditional communication channels that mainly allow one-way dissemination of information, Facebook enables two-way communication between governments and citizens (Mugil & Kenzie, 2025). Through features such as comments, reactions, and message functions, citizens are able to provide feedback, ask questions, and express opinions regarding government policies and services.

This form of engagement enhances transparency, accountability, and responsiveness in governance. Furthermore, Facebook provides government agencies with the ability to reach a large and diverse audience in real time while also monitoring public perception and emerging public concerns (Oye, 2025). As a result, many governments are increasingly integrating Facebook into their public relations and communication strategies to strengthen citizen engagement, improve service delivery communication, and build stronger relationships with the public. Even so, empirical findings highlight that, largely, communication remains informational rather than relational. Although interactive features such as live discussions, messaging, and comments are provided by Facebook, many public entities primarily utilize the platform for making announcements. This deviates from a structured public relations communication approach, which is desirable (Špaček, 2018).

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In Africa, the adoption of social media platforms such as Facebook by local governments has been associated with improved outcomes of governance at an increasing level, more so stakeholder satisfaction and transparency branding. Barasa et al. (2025) observe that in decentralized governance systems, in which a central role is played by county governments in economic development and delivery of services, it is essential to have transparent communication strategies. In the same vein, Oginni and Moitui (2015) reveal that the use of Facebook for communicating administrative decisions and developmental initiatives by government institutions is increasing across the continent. Nevertheless, there is often a lack of professional planning of public relations in communication practices, which limits the strategic use of the platform.

In Kenya, Facebook is increasingly embraced by county governments as a tool for service delivery and communication, following devolution. Babu and Otteng (2024) conducted a study in Kisumu County and established that Facebook facilitates interaction and information sharing between county officials and citizens, thereby enhancing government service delivery. Policy environments, demographic characteristics, infrastructure, and internet penetration were further identified by the study as major factors that influence the effective use of Facebook. The study's findings stress the need for investment in digital communication and connectivity by the counties to maximize the outcomes of public engagement.

Institutionally, a structured framework for engagement of stakeholders through coordinated communication systems is provided by the Bungoma County Assembly Communication Policy. Bungoma County Assembly Service Board (2023) highlights that in this particular policy, internal communication is emphasized as the foundation for effective external relations, ensuring that there is an alignment between consistent information management and the core values, mission, and vision of the organization.

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These findings inform the first objective directly by demonstrating that, whereas the adoption of Facebook is largely for communication, inconsistency remains in terms of its use as a structured public relations tool, subsequently justifying assessment within Bungoma County. Global empirical literature associates consistency of engagement, clarity of messaging, and responsiveness with the effectiveness of social media communication. When social media is updated regularly, and the content is citizen-centred, the effectiveness of government communication improves (Hao et al., 2022). Studies carried out in democracies that are developed indicate that public trust, institutional reputation, and transparency are enhanced by effective Facebook communication.

Furthermore, effective use of Facebook by government institutions has been shown to strengthen interaction between public agencies and citizens (Bangero, 2025). When government communication is timely, transparent, and responsive to public concerns, citizens are more likely to perceive the institution as open and accountable (Aryal et al., 2024). Regular engagement through comments, feedback mechanisms, and prompt responses to inquiries helps governments build stronger relationships with the public.

In addition, consistent communication on Facebook allows institutions to clarify policies, address misinformation, and keep citizens informed about ongoing government activities. Consequently, the strategic use of Facebook as a public relations tool contributes significantly to improved communication effectiveness, greater public participation, and enhanced trust between governments and the communities they serve.

Bhanye et al. (2023) observed that in Africa, even though active social media presence is maintained by governments, limited monitoring mechanisms and weak content management strategies significantly undermine effectiveness. Rather than measuring success through

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communication outcomes like satisfaction, trust and understanding, many institutions measure success through metrics of visibility such as followers.

Ndavula (2018) expresses that studies conducted in Kenya have mainly concentrated on political mobilization and e-government communication. Instead, these studies need to focus on a public relations perspective to examine effectiveness. Consequently, there continues to remain limited empirical evidence investigating whether intended public relations outcomes such as institutional credibility and improved public awareness are achieved by Facebook communication. This particular gap supported the second objective of the study, which intended to evaluate how effective Facebook communication practices are within Bungoma County Government.

A central theme in global social media governance studies is represented through citizen engagement. Research indicates that when governments encourage dialogue through interactive content and respond promptly to public comments, engagement increases (Guo et al., 2025). According to Magnusson et al. (2012), participatory communication increases citizens' democratic involvement and also strengthens their trust.

Burgoon et al. (2021) highlight that despite these revelations, the dominance of one-way communication, in which there is active interaction by citizens with minimal government responses, has been reported by several studies. Likewise, African studies also indicate that publicity is the main reason why social media is often used rather than engagement. Osman (2024) notes that this results in weak dialogues between citizens and governments.

In the Kenyan context, empirical evidence concerned with the examination of how county government communication officers practically manage engagement remains scarce. Research in existence overlooks indicators of measurable engagement such as interaction frequency, feedback handling, shares, and comments, while emphasizing information dissemination. Thus, by assessing

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the actual level of citizen engagement on Bungoma County Government's official Facebook page, the third objective of this study addresses a significant empirical gap.

While much of the literature on Facebook and public relations emphasizes its potential for dialogic, two-way communication, a growing body of empirical work cautions against treating this potential as automatically realized. For example, Schwartz et al. (2024), in their study, found that despite high follower awareness of local government Facebook pages (81%), actual citizen engagement remained low, with only 26% of residents engaging actively and just 31.8% of citizen inquiries receiving a response from municipal administrators. Notably, the study also found a negative correlation between posting frequency and engagement, suggesting that municipalities that posted more often did not necessarily foster greater citizen interaction, and may in some cases have diluted it. These findings challenge the assumption that Facebook use alone translates into dialogic relationship-building, and instead point to a persistent gap between platform reach and meaningful two-way engagement.

This pattern is corroborated by longer-term, large-scale evidence. Baltz (2023), analyzing approximately 50,000 Facebook posts from 23 Swedish municipalities over eight years (2010–2017), found that local governments used Facebook predominantly to inform citizens, while opportunities for dialogue and discussion were largely absent or directed elsewhere. Despite the platform's technical capacity for interaction, municipal communication practice remained oriented toward one-way dissemination rather than genuine social exchange, suggesting that this pattern is not a temporary or context-specific anomaly, but a durable feature of how local governments have adapted Facebook to established, one-directional communication routines.

Beyond concerns about engagement metrics and one-way content patterns, other empirical work identifies structural and organizational barriers that constrain Facebook's dialogic potential

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from the outset. Guillaumie et al. (2024), in a narrative review of the scientific and gray literature on municipal Facebook use, found that the main challenges municipalities face fall into four categories: a deficient Facebook strategy (e.g., posting content that fails to engage citizens or prioritizing follower counts over meaningful interaction), organizational reluctance to use the platform (driven by a lack of qualified staff and financial resources, and fear of negative comments or public criticism), reluctance to actively solicit citizen participation, and, notably, citizens' own reluctance to interact with municipalities on the platform, stemming from limited awareness of municipal pages, restricted access to technology, and low trust in the authenticity or responsiveness of official content.

Across Africa, empirical studies identify operational and structural challenges consistently affecting the use of social media by the government. Notable institutional limitations include resource constraints, insufficient communication policies, a lack of social media strategies, and inadequate digital skills (Oginni & Moitui, 2015; Adoyo, 2021). Additionally, Bhanye et al. (2023) identify more challenges such as the absence of professional social media management frameworks, limited internet access among citizens, and digital inequality.

According to Swart and Verwey (2022), studies in Kenya equally highlight barriers in organisations such as weak feedback management systems, limited integration between decision-making structures and public relations departments, and unclear strategies of communication. Such limitations inhibit full exploitation of the dialogic and relationship-building capabilities of Facebook by county governments. Although there is acknowledgement of general social media challenges by previous studies, very few studies particularly examine the challenges in the application of the Facebook social media platform as a public relations management tool at the county government level. Therefore, addressing this particular limitation is in alignment with the

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study's fourth objective, which sought to determine the challenges experienced by the county government of Bungoma in utilizing Facebook for public relations communication.

Taken together, these studies suggest that the barriers to dialogic communication on Facebook are both persistent over time and operate on both sides of the communication relationship: local governments often default to informational, one-way content and lack the strategic capacity, staffing, or institutional will to foster genuine dialogue, while citizens frequently lack the awareness, access, or trust needed to engage meaningfully even where such dialogue is invited. This reinforces the position that Facebook's public relations value cannot be assumed based on adoption alone, but must be empirically assessed against the specific institutional and citizen-side conditions present in each context. It is this empirical gap (between Facebook's theorized dialogic potential and its demonstrated organizational and citizen-side limitations) that the present study addresses by examining these dynamics within Bungoma County Government, guided by the Dialogic Theory of Public Relations and Excellence Theory.

2.4 Theoretical Framework

The main theory guiding this study is the Excellence Theory of public relations. However, it was complemented by the Dialogic Theory of communication. Collectively, the two theories explain how Facebook can be utilised as an effective public relations platform by the County Government of Bungoma to enhance relationships, engagement, and communication with its publics.

The Excellence Theory was formulated by James Grunig in 1960, but it was in the 1980s and 1990s that its development gained traction through in-depth research led by James E. Grunig, Larissa A. Grunig, and David Dozier (Grunig & Grunig, 2008). The emergence of the theory was linked to an international investigation intended to help identify aspects that make public relations effective within entities. Communication practices across various institutions were examined by

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the researchers, and they reached the conclusion that when communication is relationship-oriented, participatory, and strategic, there is a direct contribution to organisational effectiveness by excellent public relations (Hargie, 2016). This theory stresses that rather than functioning as merely publicity or a technical function, public relations should function as a management role. The theory advocates for a system of communication enabling organisations to engage in interactions that are meaningful with their publics, allowing decision-making processes to be influenced by feedback.

Excellence Theory can be applied in institutional public relations, government communication, and organisational communication, where the relationship with stakeholders is instrumental (Lock, 2019). Particularly, in the context of county governments, the theory applies to public accountability and transparency, reputation and trust management, citizen participation in governance, and strategic dissemination of public information. Environments that require constant interaction with citizens characterize county governments' operations. Platforms like Facebook provide an excellent opportunity for the implementation of principles of excellence through public engagement and real-time communication by the county governments (Hand & Ching, 2011).

Practically, the Excellence Theory was used in the field of communication to examine how responsible PR practices that make organizations excellent can be adopted by public relations professionals, considering the vital role played by PR in communication in organizations and the larger social system (Luttrell et al., 2025). Likewise, the theory was used in the field of communication in a partnership between the research team and The Alberta Energy Regulator (AER) organization to explore and understand the multi-dimensional nature of public relations practice within the AER organization (Thurlow et al., 2017). To examine how responsible PR practices that make organizations excellent, given PR's critical communications role in the

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organization and larger social system, can be adopted by public relations professionals, the principle of Excellence Theory is integrated in this study.

In this particular study, the theory explains how Facebook can be utilized as a strategic public relations tool for communication by the County Government of Bungoma, rather than being used as just a platform for broadcasting information. The theory guides the examination of whether effective government-citizen relationships are supported by Facebook communication practices. Particularly, the Excellence Theory informs the research through its core principles, with the first notable principle being strategic communication (Bowen et al., 2016). County communication objectives like crisis response, policy communication, and service awareness should be in alignment with Facebook communication. As such, rather than Facebook becoming casual posting, it becomes an integral part of structured governance communication (Neely & Collins, 2018).

The other principle through which the theory informs the study is two-way communication. Symmetric communication is promoted by the Excellence Theory. Essentially, this refers to a situation whereby the actions of the governments are significantly influenced by feedback from the citizens. Dialogue between the county government and the residents is enabled through the messaging, reactions, and commenting functions of the Facebook social media platform (Grunig, 2013).

Next, the Excellence Theory informs the study through its relationship management principle. Grunig and Grunig (2008) explain that often, the focal point of effective public relations is engaging stakeholders in building long-term relationships. As such, there are differentiated ways in which the county governments can strengthen the aspects of legitimacy and public trust. The

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first way is through transparency on Facebook. The second way is through responsiveness, and lastly through consistent engagement.

The last principle is value-driven communication. Public interest should be served by communication through promotion of inclusivity, accountability, and openness. Facebook social media platform aids in the dissemination of emergency communication, service information, and developmental updates that directly benefit the citizens (UNDP, 2024). Thus, the theory helps the researcher examine whether professional and effective public relations practices capable of enhancing governance outcomes are reflected in Bungoma County Government's Facebook usage.

However, whereas the Excellence Theory provides a broad explanation of strategic organisational communication, the Dialogic Theory of Public Relations delves into digital environments' interactive communication. In 1998, Michael Kent and Maureen Taylor advanced the Dialogic Theory, which was informed by the need to explain how dialogue is used for relationship building by organisations rather than one-way transmission of information (Kent & Taylor, 2014). The development of the theory was also informed by the need to respond to internet-based communication that is growing, acknowledging that opportunities for continuous interaction between organisations and their publics are created by digital platforms (Gebremariam et al., 2024). According to this theory, the creation of dialogic loops encouraging sustained engagement, mutual understanding and participation is significant for realizing successful public relations. There are various empirical areas where Dialogic Theory has been applied. For instance, it has been used to examine the People's Republic of China's public diplomacy communication on Twitter during its Two Sessions in the annual meeting of the country's top lawmakers (Alsancak et al., 2022). Also, the Dialogic Theory has been used to evaluate how employees can be encouraged to engage in safety behaviours during the COVID-19 pandemic via heightened

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efficacy and perceived threat, through dialogic communication, as a type of strategic internal communication, in the United States (Lee, 2022).

2.4.1 Application in the Study

Particularly, Dialogic Theory applies to this study because, rather than Facebook operating as a traditional media channel, it operates as an interactive online communication platform. The theory helps in explaining how relationships between citizens and county governments are fostered by online engagement (Shanmugam et al., 2025). Therefore, within this study, the theory examines the capacity of the Facebook platform to create online relationships that are sustained, the degree to which mechanisms of online feedback are encouraged and responded to, how participation is promoted by tools of engagement like replies, live sessions, shares, and comments, and how conversations between the citizens and Bungoma County Government are enabled by Facebook (Lu et al., 2025).

Camilleri (2021) emphasises that dialogic communication focuses on mutual exchange and responsiveness as opposed to traditional models of communication by the government emphasising announcements. When the public expresses concerns, asks questions, or comments on the county government posts, there occurs meaningful engagement only if feedback is integrated into the practices of communication and if there are responses by the county government (Datta, 2011). Therefore, this theory highlights the role played by Facebook in transitioning public relations from dissemination of information to engagements that are interactive, permitting citizens to take part in the communication processes of governance actively. The theory therefore highlights Facebook's role in transforming public relations from information dissemination to interactive engagement, allowing citizens to actively participate in governance communication processes.

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The integration of Dialogic Theory and Excellence Theory renders a comprehensive theoretical ground for the research. Excellence Theory provides an explanation of how there should be strategic functioning of public relations in the county governments, whereas Dialogic Theory provides an explanation of how interactive and relationship-centred online communication is facilitated by Facebook (Paquette et al., 2015). Jointly, these theories enable the researcher to examine whether or not Facebook is utilized for the promotion of transparent and participatory governance, the building of sustainable relationships between the county government and citizens, utilized as a two-way communication platform, and strategically for public relations management (Schwartz et al., 2024). Consequently, the framework aids the assessment of Facebook as a modern tool of public relations with the capacity of enhancing effective communication in Kenya's county governments, with specific focus on Bungoma County Government.

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2.5 Conceptual Framework

Facebook (Independent Variable). Influences/enhances. PR Practice (Dependent Variable).

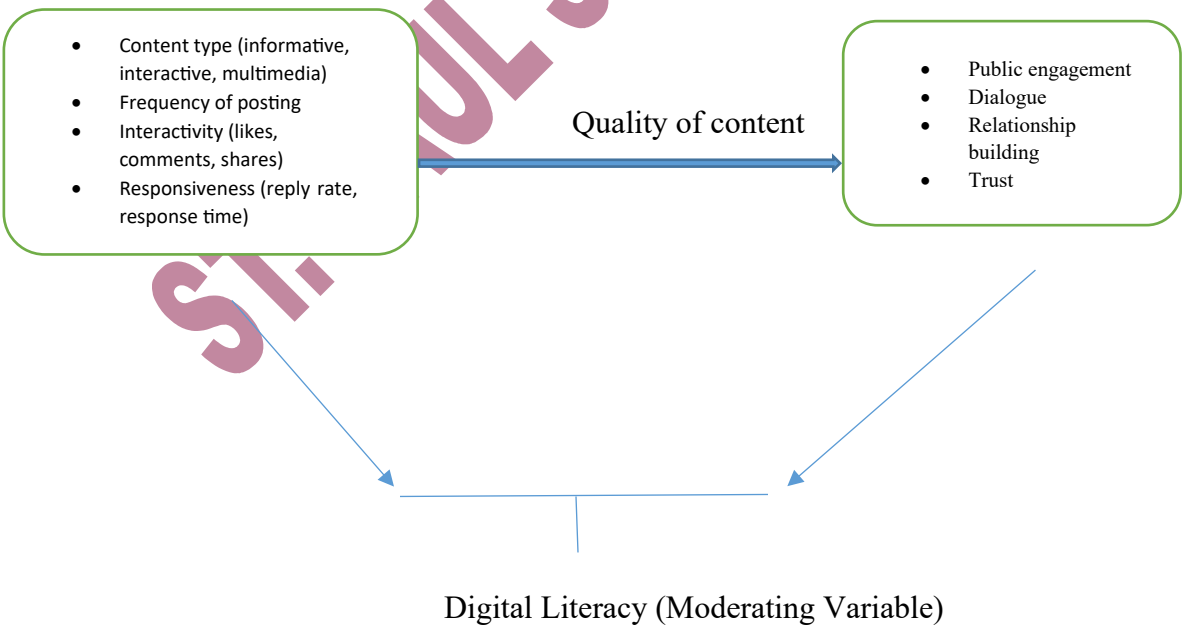


Figure 1: Conceptual framework

A conceptual framework in research provides a foundational structure for understanding, organizing, and analysing complex phenomena (Sage Publications, 2021). It serves as a systematic framework that guides research endeavours by delineating key concepts, relationships, and variables under study. According to Smith and Jones (2018), a conceptual framework supports researchers not only in developing hypotheses and designing methodologies but also in interpreting findings within a coherent theoretical framework.

Additionally, a conceptual framework facilitates the integration of existing knowledge and the generation of new insights. Through its explicit delineation of theoretical constructs and their interconnections, a conceptual framework enhances the rigour and clarity of scholarly inquiry, ultimately advancing the cumulative knowledge base within a discipline (Lim, 2025). In this study, Facebook usage and public relations practice in government can be linked diagrammatically as shown in Figure 1 above.

The conceptual framework provides an illustration of the relationship between the independent variable (Facebook usage) and the dependent variable (public relations practice) in county governments. Cvijikj et al. (2011) state that elements such as responsiveness, interactivity, frequency of posting, and content type operationalize the independent variable (Facebook usage). These elements provide a representation of how the platform is utilized by the county government.

Likewise, the conceptual framework illustrates how public relations practice is influenced by the usage of Facebook by the county government. Facebook usage indicators correspond to the research questions and objectives that examine content strategies, responsiveness, interactivity, and posting frequency. The public relations outcomes reflect the study's focus on trust, relationship building, dialogue, and engagement (Mahmood & Yasin, 2019).

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On the other hand, public relations practice (the dependent variable), is reflected through trust between the public and the county government, relationship building, dialogue, and levels of engagement. The assumption of the framework is that strategic and effective utilization of Facebook enhances the outcomes of public relations by fostering positive relationships and meaningful interactions with the citizens.

2.6 Research gap analysis

Based on the foregoing literature review, it is clear that scholarship focused on public relations and social media within the context of governance has increased steadily both locally and globally. However, multiple vital gaps remain, more so when the focal point is narrowed to Facebook as a tool for public relations in Kenya's county governments.

Globally, research that focuses on the utilization of social media, particularly Facebook, in public relations in the public sector has mainly concentrated on middle-income and developed countries. For example, Graham et al. (2015) investigated the use of social media in local governance in the United States, Asamoah (2019) focused on Ghana, Faber et al. (2020) focused on the Netherlands, and Samijadi (2017) focused on Suriname. Whereas valuable insights into how social media is adopted by public institutions for engagement and communication are drawn from these studies, their findings are grounded in institutional, technological, and political contexts that do not align well with the devolved system of governance in Kenya.

In Kenya, existing studies on social media use in government communication mainly concentrate on national government agencies, departments and ministries (Ndeta, 2016). Such studies inefficiently interrogate the county government level context, which functions under a governance structure that was uniquely devolved with distinct operational challenges, citizen expectations and communication needs. There is only one study in the public domain by Mulama (2021) in which

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the author examined the use of social media within the County Government of Kakamega. However, it is notable that rather than focusing on the specific domain of public relations practice, the study was conducted within a broader scope of county governance. Consequently, empirical evidence on how county governments in Kenya, specifically Bungoma County, use Facebook as a public relations tool is limited (Macharia, 2019).

Thematically, most studies in Kenya portray and emphasize social media as information dissemination channel, such as government achievements, public notices, and announcing policies (Mugazia, 2024). There is little attention to the role played by Facebook in facilitating relationship building, stakeholder engagement, two-way communication, and dialogue, which are core principles of public relations practice in contemporary societies (Olinski & Szamrowski, 2021). There remains under-exploration of primary public relations functions such as trust-building, online reputation management, responsiveness to citizen feedback, and issue management. This particular study addresses the gap by investigating Facebook not just as a platform for sharing information, but as a strategic public relations tool within county governments (An, 2024).

Methodologically, there is increased adoption of descriptive designs by many studies in existence, which also rely heavily on analysis of the content of self-reported survey data and social media posts, without triangulation in many cases (Rashed, 2025). Limited studies integrate the views of the communication officers at the county government levels and inadequately assess engagement management practices, interactivity, and responsiveness. Additionally, there is a clear lack of operationalization of public relations indicators in some studies, thereby complicating the linking of PR outcomes to Facebook use (Olanrewaju et al., 2023). This study sought to address these weaknesses through adoption of a more robust strategy, integrating multiple indicators of public relations practice and Facebook usage.

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2.7 Summary

Significant insights on the utilization of Facebook within government settings are provided by the foregoing literature. The idea that the Facebook platform can create a two-way communication channel between citizens and governments is a consensus that has emerged among scholars. Facebook is used by governments for public information in a version that is one-way with little to no citizen interactivity, especially in developing countries that are less democratic. On the other hand, there is more interaction between governments and citizens in more democratic and developed countries because two-way communication characterizes the use of social media platforms such as Facebook. However, the low number of African studies focusing on local governments' usage of Facebook for public relations practice is the primary gap that emerged from the literature review. Even though there is an increase in scholarly interest in Facebook usage in government in Kenya, there is still very little focus on the use of Facebook in county governments' PR practice. Thus, this contextual gap was bridged by this study, subsequently contributing to knowledge in this government's public relations sub-sector.

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CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The framework within which the study was conducted is outlined in this chapter. As such, aspects like the sample size, sampling techniques, the population of the study and the research design are specified. Issues of ethical considerations in research, data analysis plan, procedures, and data collection instruments are also discussed in this chapter.

3.2 Philosophical underpinnings

Pragmatism is a philosophical, problem-solving paradigm that concentrates on "what works" for the best understanding of research problems (Creswell, 2023). Elgeddawy and Abouraia (2024) explain that it is anchored on the assumption that the research problem should be the primary driver of research inquiry, with no strict adherence to a single epistemological or ontological position. This study acknowledges that citizen engagement and government communication are social realities with high-level complexities that cannot be understood just by using qualitative or quantitative approaches in isolation (Kaleli et al., 2021). Therefore, pragmatism is used in the study to allow the researcher to integrate interpretivist and positivist philosophical assumptions (Allemang et al., 2021). Liu and Hu (2024) posit that the quantitative component is supported by the positivist orientation by enabling objective measurement of phenomena that can be observed, like perceptions of county communication effectiveness, frequency of interaction, accessibility of public information, and level of Facebook usage.

3.3 Research design

A concurrent mixed-methods approach was adopted by this study. This is an approach to research whereby both quantitative and qualitative data are collected at the same phase of the study by the

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researcher and separately analysed to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the research problem by integrating or comparing the results (Ahmed et al., 2024). The study adopted a case study design. This is a qualitative (and sometimes mixed-method) approach used to investigate a specific case in-depth within its real-life context (Bell & Warren, 2023).

A research design refers to a plan for conducting a research study that is comprehensive, helping in the organization and analysis of data, collection of data, and formulation of research questions by acting as a guide for the researcher (Creswell & Creswell, 2022). Essentially, it acts as the framework linking procedures used in gathering and analysing data and the research questions (Bhuvanasri et al., 2025). The quantitative component incorporated the use of key informant interviews administered to the participants to generate data on the levels of public engagement, accessibility of information, and the extent of Facebook use by Bungoma County Government.

At the same time, focus group discussions with People Living with Disability, women empowerment groups, youth groups, and activists were used to obtain qualitative data, to provide in-depth insights into experiences, challenges, and strategies in utilizing Facebook as a public relations tool for communication. Triangulation of findings was enabled by the concurrent collection of both datasets, allowing the researcher to integrate numerical trends, complement and compare with detailed explanations, subsequently providing a comprehensive understanding of how Facebook supports public relations functions in Bungoma County Government.

Lastly, the study area was Bungoma County Government, one of Kenya's forty-seven (47) counties, established under the devolved system of governance as provided for in the Constitution of Kenya (2010). This is a county that is located in the western part of Kenya, bordering the Republic of Uganda and Busia, Kakamega, and Trans-Nzoia counties. The headquarters of the

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county government is in Bungoma town and is responsible for public engagement, service delivery, and coordination of governance within the county.

Specifically, the study focused on Bungoma County Government's departments that engage in the dissemination of public information to manage public relations functions, information dissemination, media relations, and public communication. By focusing on the communication aspects in departments of the county, this research assesses the use of Facebook within the institutional unit with direct responsibility for public relations practices, qualifying Bungoma County Government as a relevant and appropriate context for investigating Facebook as a public relations tool for communication in county governments in Kenya (Babu, 2025).

3.4 Population

Population refers to the entire group of entities or individuals to which the research findings were generalised (Creswell & Creswell, 2022). Kenya's devolved system of government is made up of 47 counties (Mbithi et al., 2018). The counties considered as units form a population that can be studied (Koehler, 2018). Concerning the topic of this research, the population then implies the 47 departments that are in charge of communication/public relations, and also the people within the organization.

3.5 Target population

The target population in Bungoma County Government was one senior officer per department. The County Government has 10 departments, including Agriculture, Livestock, Irrigation, Fisheries & Co-operative Development, Education & Vocational Training, Water, Natural Resources, Environment, Tourism and Climate Change, Finance & Economic Planning, Gender, Youth, Culture & Sports, Public Service Management Administration & ICT, Roads, Transport, Infrastructure & Public Works, Health and Sanitation, Lands, Housing, Urban & Physical

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Planning, and Trade, Energy and Industrialization. The head of each department was selected for key informant interviews. Further, the study used focus group discussions (4 groups): activists, youth, Muanda Women Group, and Persons Living with Disability, totalling 42 participants.

Additionally, the target population for the content analysis component of this study also includes all posts on the official Facebook page of Bungoma County Government, including live-streams, videos, images, and posts generated and managed by the county's Department of Communication, and published between August 2022 and August 2025 for the purposes of measuring the extent to which Facebook is used in Bungoma County Government. Creswell and Creswell (2022) define target population as a population subset that is defined more particularly, to which there can be direct application of the findings of the research. Significant insights can be provided by the study's findings that similar contexts may find relevant in terms of applicability. Bungoma County Government headquarters, where respondents are based, is where this study was conducted.

3.6 Sampling techniques

In the design of a case study, a two-step process involving the selection of a particular case for study and settling on sources of data in the case that has been selected constitutes the process of sampling. In both cases, quota considerations, common sense, theory, and prior research may inform the selection criteria (Mayrhoyer, 2022). Ease of access to social media platforms and people is the reason as to why Bungoma County Government is selected purposively in this study.

Equally, the researcher comes from this very area, with the hope of acquiring an in-depth comprehension of the usage of Facebook in public relations in order to improve the practice by making practical recommendations. To eliminate bias, the researcher relied on clearly defined standardized content analysis coding procedures and research instruments, which were applied

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consistently, and this significantly reduced the influence of prior experiences or personal opinions on data interpretation (Baldwin et al., 2022).

Likewise, the researcher did not focus on personal familiarity with the county context but instead focused on study objectives and variables by maintaining professional detachment during data collection. In the case of Bungoma County government, the study conducted a census inquiry of the departmental Chief Officers. A census inquiry involves a complete enumeration of all the items or individual members that make up the target population (Ronit Nirel & Glickman, 2009).

The study utilized purposive sampling. According to Campbell et al. (2020), purposive sampling refers to a non-probability sampling approach in which there is a deliberate selection of participants by the researcher based on their relevance, experience, and knowledge of the research problem, rather than using random selection. In this study, this technique was used for the selection of key informants within Bungoma County Government's departments, particularly for the qualitative component of the study. This technique involves the deliberate selection of respondents based on their direct involvement, roles, and knowledge of Facebook-based public relations engagements (Tao et al., 2021).

The study purposively selected digital media coordinators, senior public relations officers, and department heads because they oversee Facebook communication, formulate policy, and make strategic decisions. The purposive sampling technique was relevant for this study because it helps the researcher to obtain valuable insights from people who possess specialized knowledge that is relevant to the study's objectives.

Similarly, this study used systematic sampling of Facebook posts. For the component of content analysis, Facebook posts published on the Bungoma County Government Facebook page from August 2022 to August 2025 were selected using systematic sampling. First, there was

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identification of the total number of Facebook posts within the timeframe, after which each post was selected guided by a sampling interval. This methodology captures variations in communication patterns, engagement levels, and content type, reduces selection bias, and ensures even distribution of posts across the study period (Alfardan, 2025).

3.7 Sample size

The number of data points or individual observations from a larger population for a research study implies a sample size. Creswell and Creswell (2022) note that, in essence, a subset of the population utilized in making inferences as well as drawing conclusions about the whole population is represented by a sample size. The sample size of this study was 52 participants (10 department heads' census + 42 FGD participants, purposively selected across the four citizen categories). Ten participants, each head of the department from the ten departments of Bungoma County Government, were subjected to key informant interviews, and 42 participants. The same purposive logic above applied, with a per-group rationale of a fixed number per group of 8 to 12; from People Living with Disability, activists, women empowerment groups, and youth groups were engaged in focus group discussions. For Facebook content analysis, the sample size included posts ranging from August 2022 to August 2025, with the total number of posts selected being 1,513 posts. Using a web-based scraping tool, a systematic sample of 303 posts (every 5th post) was drawn, subsequently coded against the 17-category framework. The August 2022 to August 2025 period was chosen because a window of three (3) years balances keeping data collection/coding manageable with capturing contemporary Facebook practice.

3.8 Data collection instruments

Key informant interview guides were used for the collection of primary data in this study. All the interviews were conducted through face-to-face interactions. Focus group discussions were also incorporated. These were conducted with select groups to facilitate in-depth discussion on strategic

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considerations, challenges, engagement practices, and the use of Facebook in public relations. This methodology permits participants to engage in interactions and build on one another's views, subsequently generating deeper insights than individual interviews (Bachtiar et al., 2024).

For systematic capturing of key variables like audience engagement, responsiveness, level of interactivity, frequency of posting, and content type, a content analysis schedule was developed for the content analysis. The unit of analysis consisted of the Facebook posts published on the official Facebook page of Bungoma County Government from August 2022 to August 2025. Systematic sampling was used to select posts, in which every 5th post within the study period was included to reduce selection bias and to ensure even representation across time.

3.9 Validity

Validity refers to the truthfulness and accuracy of the findings of research (Markus & Smith, 2022, p. 283). It can also be defined as qualitative research's trustworthiness and credibility (Flick, 2022). Peer debriefing, prolonged engagement, and reflexivity are conducted by researchers to foster validity in studies that are qualitative. Approaches such as triangulation, member checking, and clarification of researcher bias can also be used to enhance validity. Likewise, this study utilized peer debriefing, involving the engagement of experts and colleagues to critique and review the process of the study and findings, to enhance validity. This subjected the research to external checks. It also returned findings to participants for feedback and verification by conducting member checking to ensure accurate capturing of their respective perspectives.

3.10 Reliability

Krippendorff (2022) states that the replicability of a research process elsewhere implies reliability. According to Hsu and Sandford (2022), from the research instruments' perspective, the degree to which a particular instrument of research can undertake the measurement of what it was designed

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to measure consistently in a way that it renders consistent results is reliability. Reliability provides information about the scores observed from the research instrument's replicability (Gushta & Rupp, 2022). Training and calibration, software, and methodological transparency are all utilized by researchers to ensure reliability.

Utilization of techniques like carrying out inter-coder agreement, taking detailed field notes, and leaving an audit trail also enables achievement of reliability. Inter-coder reliability was established using Cohen's Kappa, calculated on a sample of 303 Facebook posts independently coded by two researchers. The resulting Kappa coefficient of 0.83 was interpreted using McHugh's (2012) benchmark scale, indicating a strong level of agreement. By clearly documenting the research design, data collection methods, and analysis procedures, this study strived for methodological transparency to enhance reliability. Relevant and applicable computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software such as SPSS was also used in the study.

3.11 Data collection procedures

For key informant interviews, an interview guide comprising open-ended questions relevant to the study objectives was developed. To refine the questions and enhance clarity, the guide was piloted with 3 individuals similar to the target population, and adjustments were made based on the pilot's feedback. A total of 7 key informant interviews were conducted with departmental heads from 7 departments of Bungoma County Government, purposively selected because of their direct responsibility for Facebook public information dissemination. The researcher obtained permission from the County Secretary and visited the offices of identified participants to schedule interviews, obtain informed consent, and explain the study's purpose. Interviews were conducted in English in a quiet, comfortable environment chosen by the participant, typically lasting 50 minutes. Responses were recorded using a mobile phone audio recorder and summary notes. The audio recordings were later transcribed for analysis.

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Four focus group discussions were conducted with the following citizen groups: Muanda Women's Group (11 participants aged between 30 and 60 years), Youth (12 participants aged between 18 and 30 years), Persons Living with Disabilities (9 participants aged between 30 and 60 years), and Activists (10 participants aged between 30 and 60 years). Permission to engage participants was obtained from the County Commissioner. The participants were selected through snowball sampling via community leaders. Each FGD was held in the community at local churches where venues were available free of charge and lasted approximately one hour, facilitated by the researcher. Discussions were guided by semi-structured FGD guides. Sessions were recorded using a mobile phone audio recorder, complemented by notes, transcribed, and translated from Luhya/Swahili (where necessary), before being organized thematically for analysis.

Content analysis of Bungoma County Government's official Facebook page proceeded in three steps. First, the page was identified and selected, and all posts published between August 2022 and August 2025 were retrieved using Apify, yielding a total population of 1,513 posts. From this population, a sample of 303 posts was drawn for analysis using systematic sampling, where every fifth post was selected. Second, a coding framework was developed, comprising themes and categories aligned with the study's objectives, and piloted on a smaller sample of 30 posts to refine clarity and consistency. Third, the sample of 303 posts was coded independently by two coders, with inter-coder reliability assessed using Cohen's Kappa.

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3.12 Ethical considerations Foundational principles that govern the ethical conduct involving animals or people for their protection as subjects of scientific research are research ethics (Herrera, 2022). The paramount significance of respecting the welfare, rights, and dignity of the participants is emphasized by these principles, thus making sure that there is transparency, honesty, and dignity throughout the process of research. Some of the major ethical considerations

include minimization of potential harm, protection of the confidentiality of the participants, and obtaining informed consent.

For the purposes of maintaining public trust, preserving scientific integrity, and upholding the well-being of the people involved in the research process, ethical guidelines established by institutional review boards and regulatory bodies must be adhered to by the researchers. It is fundamental to comply with the guidelines so that the research findings can be societally relevant and that there can also be aspects of reliability as well as validity.

The researcher applied for and acquired permission from ISERC of St. Paul's University and NACOSTI. Likewise, the researcher respected the confidentiality and privacy of the respondents by excluding personal information from the study. It is for the purpose of the study that data collected from the respondents was used. It was used only for the study with no third-party disclosures. Moreover, only participants who had given informed consent were subjected to the interview. A consent form was signed by the respondents before taking part in the research.

3.13 Analysis summary

An integrated data analysis consistent with the concurrent mixed methods research design, whereby there was separate analysis of qualitative and quantitative data, and later merged, was employed in this study. SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) was used to code and analyse quantitative data collected through structured questionnaires. Patterns relating to perception of communication effectiveness, citizen engagement levels, accessibility of information, and Facebook usage were summarized using descriptive statistics such as standard deviations, means, percentages, and frequencies (Eburu et al., 2023). Inferential techniques such as correlation analysis were employed for examination of relationships between the use of

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Facebook and outcomes of public relations like stakeholder participation, responsiveness and transparency.

Thematic analysis was applied to analyse qualitative data obtained from key informant interviews. The responses from the interviews were transcribed, coded, and organized into emerging themes aligning with the objectives of the study (Criado & Villodre, 2021). Systematic stages involving development of thematic interpretations, categorization of patterns, generation of codes, and familiarization with data were followed in the analysis.

After independent analyses, results obtained from qualitative and quantitative datasets were merged at the interpretation stage through triangulation. To strengthen validity and to enhance explanation of results, divergence and convergence between qualitative insights and quantitative findings were examined. For the data collected through the content analysis schedule, thematic analysis was also performed to identify and interpret significant themes and patterns in the content. Sentiment analysis of the posts and comments was conducted to determine whether the posts are positive, negative, or neutral so as to understand the public perception. Qualitative content analysis of the qualitative themes and patterns observed was provided. The findings were summarized and reported in alignment with the research objectives.

Therefore, the combined analysis approach offered both contextual understanding and measurable evidence essential for evaluating the effectiveness of Facebook as a public relations tool for communication in Bungoma County Government, subsequently informing suggestions for enhanced practices of social media communication within Kenya's county governments (Nchabeleng et al., 2018).

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3.14 Summary

This chapter has outlined the methodological framework that guided the study. This study adopted a concurrent mixed methods approach, embedded within a case study design, to enable simultaneous collection and independent analysis of quantitative and qualitative data on Facebook's use as a public relations tool in Bungoma County Government. The study was anchored in a pragmatist philosophical paradigm, which allowed the researcher to draw on both positivist and interpretivist assumptions rather than being confined to a single epistemological position.

The population comprised the ten heads of department at Bungoma County Government and members of four citizen categories: Persons Living with Disability, the Muanda Women's group, youth, and civic activists, alongside all official Facebook page posts published between August 2022 and August 2025. A census inquiry was conducted of the ten department heads; purposive sampling was used to select 42 focus group discussion participants across the four citizen categories, and systematic sampling was applied to draw 303 Facebook posts from a total of 1,513, yielding an overall respondent sample of 52 alongside the coded post sample. Data were collected using key informant interview guides, focus group discussions, and a content analysis schedule, with validity and reliability safeguarded through triangulation, member checking, piloting of instruments, inter-coder agreement, and methodological transparency. Ethical clearance was obtained from St. Paul's University's ISERC and NACOSTI, and informed consent was secured from all participants.

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS through descriptive and inferential statistics, while qualitative data from interviews and content analysis were subjected to thematic and sentiment analysis. Findings from both strands were subsequently merged through triangulation

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to produce an integrated interpretation. This methodological approach provides the basis for the presentation, analysis, and interpretation of findings in Chapter Four.

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CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 Introduction

This chapter provides the presentation, analysis and interpretation of the empirical data collected in pursuit of this study's four guiding objectives: identifying the challenges the County Government faces in using the platform for public relations; assessing the level of citizen engagement; evaluating the use of Facebook as a public relations tool for communication in Bungoma County Government; and examining its effectiveness. Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with county government department heads and FGDs (Focus Group Discussions) with four citizen categories purposively selected: PLWDs (Persons Living with Disabilities), a women's empowerment group (Muanda Women's Group), youth, and civic activists, were used to collect data.

To organize the data into recurrent patterns, a thematic analysis guided by the Dialogic Theory of Public Relations and the Excellence Theory was used. The presentation of findings is in an objective-by-objective manner, supported by summary tables and verbatim excerpts, interpreted against the study's reviewed literature and conceptual framework. To allow traceability while preserving confidentiality of respondents, quotations from key informants are attributed by department only, such as (KII – Lands, Housing & Urban Planning), and only groups such as (FGD – PLWDs) have been used to attribute quotations from focus group discussants, consistent with the anonymity assurance given during data collection.

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4.2 Presentation, Analysis and Interpretation

4.2.1 Content Analysis of the Official County Government Facebook Page (August 2022 – August 2025)

A content analysis of the county's official Facebook page, administered by the Governor's press unit, was conducted as the quantitative arm of the concurrent mixed-methods design. The page had been mentioned by 28,063 Facebook users, carried an 86% recommendation rating from 26 reviews, followed 385 accounts, and had approximately 124,000 followers at the time of analysis. Within the study period of August 2022 to August 2025, posts published totaled 1,513, from which a systematic sample of 303 posts (every fifth post) was drawn using Apify (a web-based scraping tool) and coded for posting engagement, content category, and frequency. Content was coded using the framework in Appendix F (coding categories and example excerpts), which operationalized each of the seventeen thematic categories reported in Table 2.

As shown in Figure 3, posting activity averaged approximately 42 posts per month, with February 2023 recording the highest peak of 87 posts, and falling to a low of 6 posts in September 2022. The frequency remained broadly consistent with departmental officers' self-reports of "very frequent" or "regular" posting, although frequency fluctuated across the period, providing a behavioral confirmation of the high volume of activity reported qualitatively under Objective one that is independent.

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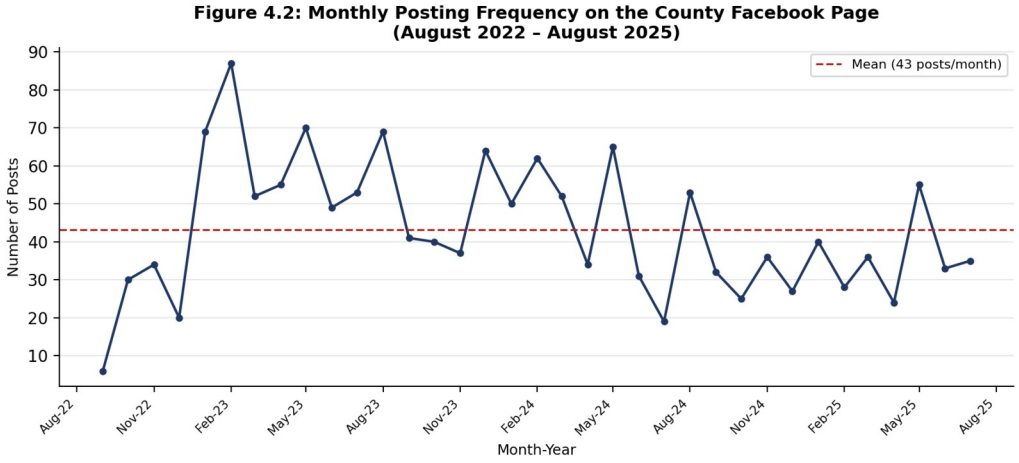


Figure 3: Monthly Posting Frequency on the County Facebook Page (Aug 2022 – Aug 2025)

The content coded fell into thematic categories totaling seventeen (Table 2). Women Empowerment content only accounted for 0.5% –and Persons with Disabilities for only 0.1% of posts – a single post across the entire three-year period. At the opposite end, Youth Empowerment dominated, accounting for 22.8% of all posts, followed by County Administration (13.8%), Health (12.5%), and Agriculture (11.4%).

The concentration of tertiary institutions and youth-targeted programmes like NYOTA project and the Hustler Fund in the county, as well as the visibility of the boda-boda sector is a likely reflection of the dominance of youth-related content, while the disability FGD's central complaint of institutional neglect is substantiated by the near-absence of disability-related content, at the level of actual published output.

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Table 1: Content Category Distribution on the County Facebook Page (n=1,513 posts)

Content Category	Frequency	Percentage
Youth Empowerment	345	22.8%

Content Category	Frequency	Percentage
County Administration	209	13.8%
Health	189	12.5%
Agriculture	173	11.4%
Others	172	11.4%
Education	157	10.4%
Infrastructure	98	6.5%
Economic Development	38	2.5%
Sports & Recreation	26	1.7%
Public Participation	22	1.5%
Water & Sanitation	21	1.4%
Environment	17	1.1%
Finance & Budget	15	1.0%
Events & Ceremonies	8	0.5%
Tourism & Culture	8	0.5%
Women Empowerment	8	0.5%

Content Category	Frequency	Percentage
Disaster Management	6	0.4%
Persons with Disabilities	1	0.1%

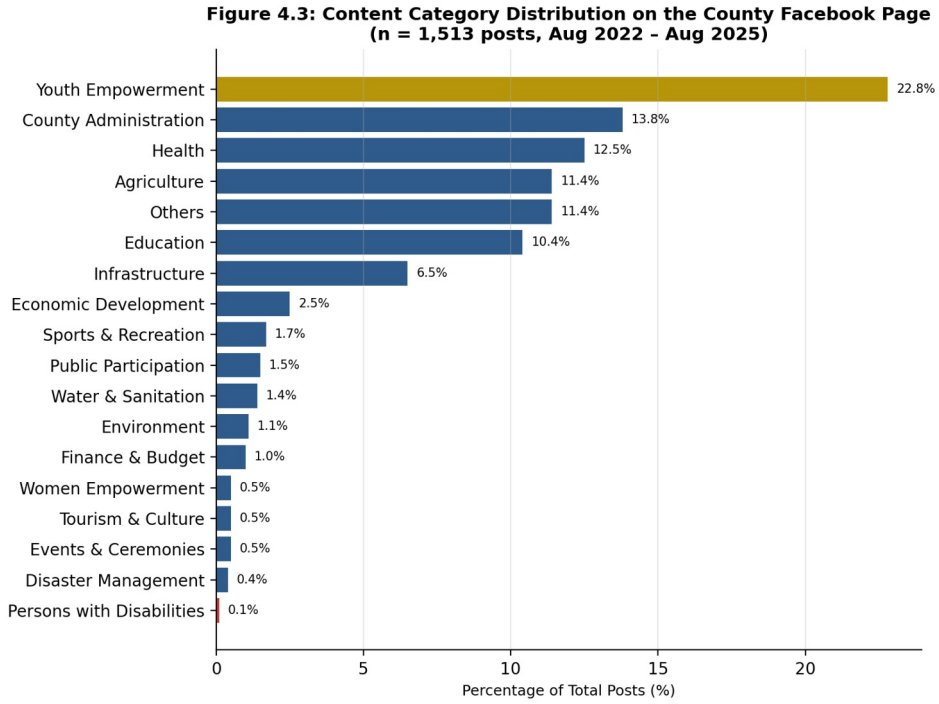


Figure 4: Content Category Distribution on the County Facebook Page (n = 1,513 posts)

4.2.2 Response Rate

Key Informant Interviews were conducted to triangulate the observations from the content analysis of the Bungoma County Government's Facebook page. Seven of the ten targeted heads of department participated in key informant interviews. This yielded a 70% response rate: Public Service Management and Administration; Lands, Housing and Urban Planning; Health and Sanitation; Finance and Economic Planning; Trade, Energy and Industrialization; Education and

Vocational Training; and Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock. All the focus group discussions planned (four in total) were conducted successfully with PLWDs (Persons Living with Disabilities), the women's group, youth, and activists, thereby fulfilling the qualitative arm of the concurrent mixed-methods design. According to Creswell and Creswell (2022), this response profile is perceived as adequate for thematic saturation in a case study of this nature, and the seven departments participating span both administrative/fiscal functions (Lands, Public Administration and Finance), and citizen-facing service delivery (Trade, Health, Education and Agriculture), providing a reasonable functional breadth despite the three non-responding departments.

4.2.3 Use of Facebook as a Public Relations Tool for Communication

Bungoma County Government maintains an active official Facebook page, posted to "regularly", "very frequently," or "very often," depending on the department as confirmed by all the seven participating departments. The analysis related to the reasons given by the departments for using the platform, summarized in Table 1, indicates that all seven respondents cited public awareness and information dissemination (100%), while six respondents (86%) explicitly prioritized promotion or publicity of county achievements. Only the Education Department explicitly named citizen feedback solicitation as a stated purpose, and the two departments of Public Administration and Finance cited transparency and accountability framing.

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Table 2: Departmental Use of the Official Facebook Page (n=7)

Department	Frequency of Posting	Cited Primary PR Reason(s)	Emphasis of interaction vs. Publicity
Agriculture,	Very often	Citizen awareness:	Publicity prioritized

Department	Frequency of Posting	Cited Primary PR Reason(s)	Emphasis of interaction vs. Publicity
Irrigation & Livestock		Dissemination	(model farmers, achievements)
Education & Vocational Training	Very frequently	Feedback; awareness; dissemination	Prioritization of promotion of bursaries/achievements
Trade, Energy & Industrialization	Very frequently	Business information dissemination; trader awareness	Publicity explicitly prioritized over engagement
Finance & Economic Planning	Regularly	Awareness of public accountability	Prioritized promotion of fiscal management
Health & Sanitation	Very often	Public health awareness: dissemination	Prioritized promotion of health achievements
Lands, Housing & Urban Planning	Very often (incl. live coverage)	Policy advisory/Programme/project publicity	"considerable" interaction also noted /Publicity prioritized

Department	Frequency of Posting	Cited Primary PR Reason(s)	Emphasis of interaction vs. Publicity
Public Service Management & Administration	Regularly	service awareness /Administrative transparency	Prioritized promotion of responsive service

"The Education and Vocational Training department's characterization of posting frequency as 'very frequently' (see raw response, Appendix H) is consistent with the summary presented in Table 4.1." This pattern shows that in Bungoma County, Facebook is used principally as an image-management and broadcast channel rather than a platform for dialogic engagement. This tension was captured directly by the Lands, Housing and Urban Planning officer, observing that "most updates on Facebook are about publicity of county government programs and events," while acknowledging "a considerable degree of citizen interaction through comments and feedback" (KII – Lands, Housing & Urban Planning).

Across the departments, the types of content reported were similarly one-directional – achievement stories, budget highlights, recruitment notices, deadlines and advisories – with comparatively little mention of structured mechanisms like scheduled feedback windows, live Q&A sessions and polls. A live coverage of public events was reported only by Lands, Housing and Urban Planning, and only the Education Department framed feedback collection as a stated objective of its Facebook use rather than an incidental by-product explicitly. This is consistent with the pattern of one-way, publicity-oriented use reported in comparable county-level studies (Babu & Otteng, 2024;

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Bangero, 2025), thereby providing a direct answer to the first research question: The use of Facebook by Bungoma County is extensive for communication purposes, but the extent of that use is concentrated in reputational and informational functions rather than participatory ones.

A bar chart illustrates that information dissemination/awareness (7/7) and publicity/promotion (6/7) dominate departmental reasons for Facebook use, while accountability framing (2/7) and feedback solicitation (1/7) are markedly less common.

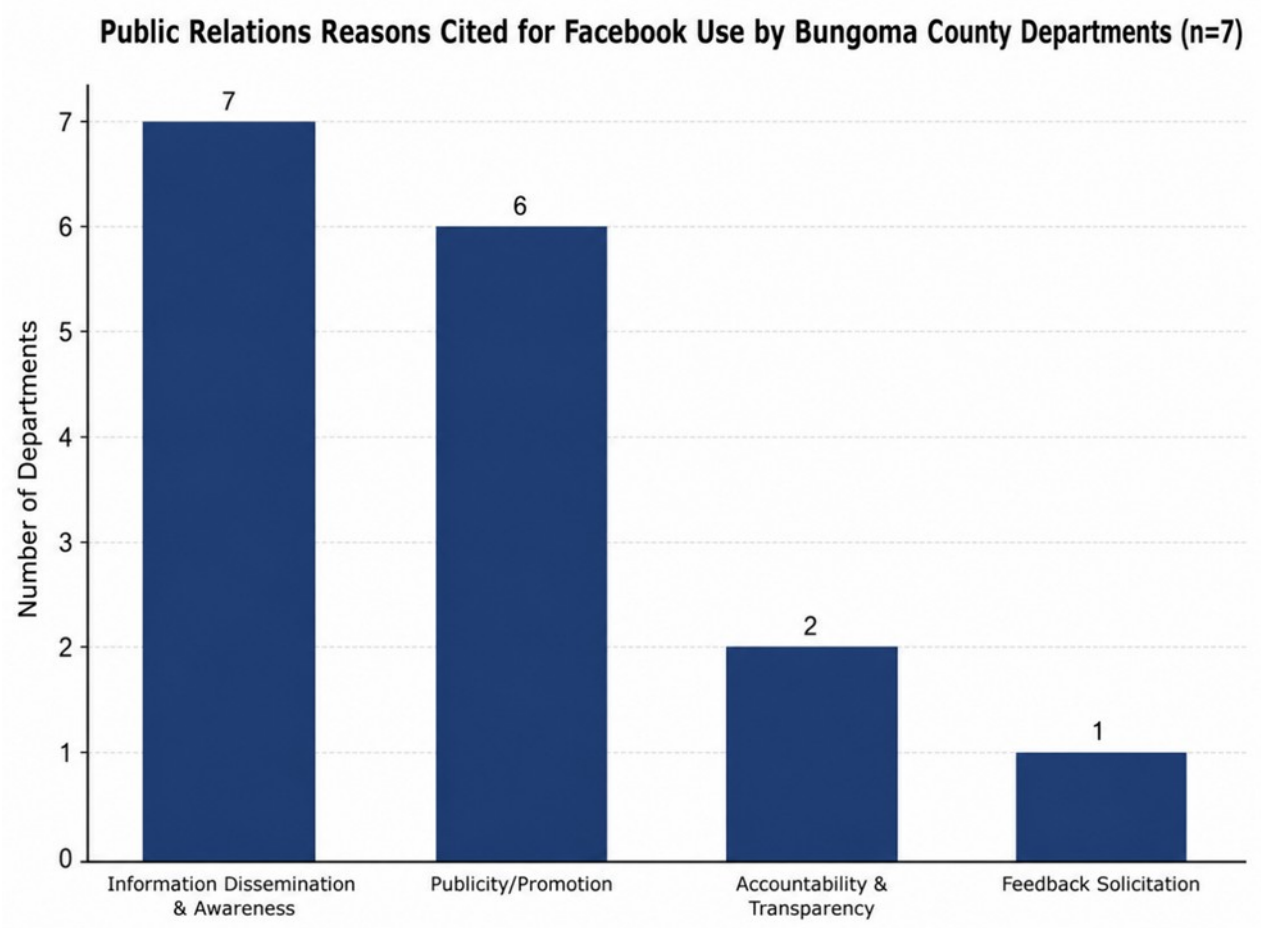


Figure 2: Public Relations Reasons Cited for Facebook Use by Bungoma County Departments (n = 7)

From the foregoing, the researcher noted that taken together, the content analysis sharpens and confirms the KII-based finding under Objective One: Facebook is used frequently and

mostly for one-way informational and image-building purposes, but that is also distributed unevenly across the population groups in the county, with the content relevant to smaller and hard-to-reach constituencies such as women's groups and Persons Living with Disabilities being crowded out by youth-related and general administrative content.

4.2.4 Effectiveness of Facebook as a Public Relations Tool for Communication

Officers across departments uniformly described their responsiveness to comments as prompt. Finance & Economic Planning reported that its "communication team responds promptly" (KII – Finance & Economic Planning). Public Service Management & Administration informant indicated that officers respond "immediately upon comment" (KII – Public Service Management & Administration). Health & Sanitation informant said they "respond promptly during working hours" (KII – Health & Sanitation). All seven departments reported that Facebook-received citizen feedback leads to at least moderate adjustments. These adjustments include input-distribution points, budget reallocations, market operating times, and revised clinic hours. However, no department reported major policy changes as a result of this feedback.

This self-reported effectiveness sharply contrasts with evidence from the citizen side. Awareness of the county's Facebook page varied markedly by group. The Muanda Women Group was not asked directly about awareness. However, their reliance on the chief's *baraza* and radio for county news suggests similarly low awareness (see Table 3). Youth are generally active Facebook users, but they reported that they do not follow the county's specific page. One participant said simply, "I have never seen it" (FGD – Youth). PLWDs reported that "most have never heard" of the page. One participant stated, "I have never heard of the county having a page" (FGD – PLWDs). Activists, by contrast, were broadly familiar with it (FGD – Activists).

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Where citizens were aware of the page, trust was conditional rather than automatic. A youth participant said they would need to verify content "through the chief or ward office" before considering it credible (FGD – Youth). A participant from the Muanda Women Group put it differently: "I only trust if I see the county stamp on a letter, not on a phone screen" (FGD – Muanda Women's Group). This points to a perception gap. Officials rate the platform as reasonably effective for internal operations. Yet it remains limited in credibility and reach among the citizens it is meant to serve.

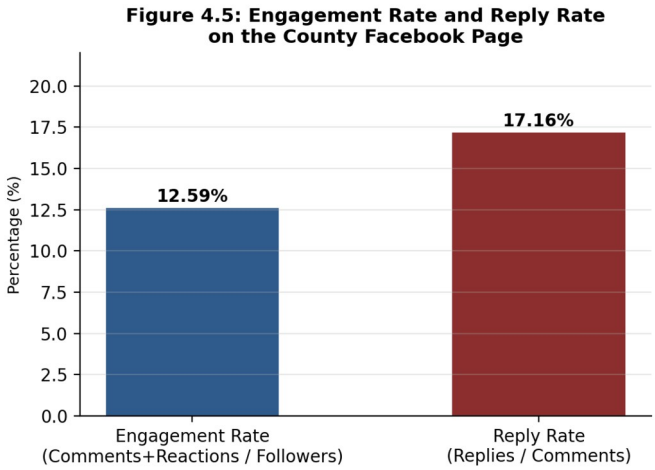
A further nuance concerns the adjustments officers described as moderate: budget lines, market timings, and clinic hours. These are mainly reversible, operational decisions. They are not the kind of resource allocation or policy shifts that would signal genuine, relationship-based citizen influence over county priorities. This mirrors the disjuncture between institutional social media activity and measurable outcomes documented by Bhanye et al. (2023) and Schwartz et al. (2024). It also responds to the second research question: Bungoma County's Facebook effectiveness is real but bounded. It is strong on responsiveness toward citizens who are already engaged, but weak on trust and reach among those who are not.

The page's own engagement statistics corroborate this qualitative perception gap. Engagement — reactions, comments, shares, likes, and saves as a share of total followers — was 12.59% across the sampled posts. Only 17.16% of citizen comments received any response (Figure 5). In practice, fewer than one in five citizen comments received a reply from page administrators or other users. Fewer than one in eight followers interacted with a typical post. These figures provide independent, behavioral confirmation of the pattern seen in both the FGDs and KIIs. Facebook communication by Bungoma County Government functions predominantly as a one-way

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broadcast channel. Its self-assessed effectiveness of "moderate" must be read against a reply rate that leaves roughly five out of every six citizen comments unanswered.

Figure 5: Engagement rate and reply rate on the County Facebook page



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4.2.5 Level of Citizen Engagement on the County Facebook Page

Table 3 summarizes FGD Group's engagement-related themes. The capacity to independently use Facebook varied significantly: Persons Living with Disabilities reported explicitly that they would need assistance from caregivers, neighbors, and children, with one participant explaining, "I would need my grandson to do it for me" (FGD – PLWDs), and particularly cited physical barriers like touchscreen difficulties and small text ("I cannot read those small letters"). The usability question was not asked directly to the Muanda Women Group; however, they suggested a comparable, if not directly confirmed, exclusion from independent use, evidenced by their reported reliance on basic, non-smartphone handsets under the barriers theme (FGD – Muanda Women's Group). By

contrast, youth participants reported no technical usability barrier, and all ten activist participants reported they could use the platform themselves without assistance.

Table 3:Citizen-level Awareness, Usability and Preferred Channels (n=4 FGDs)

FGD Group	Awareness of County FB Page	Can Use Facebook Independently	Preferred/Trusted Channel
Civic Activists	High – broadly familiar	Yes (10/10 participants)	Direct contact with ward officials; WhatsApp
Youth	Low – use Facebook generally, but not the county page	Yes	WhatsApp groups; radio
Muanda Women's Group	Not directly asked; inferred low (relies on chief's *baraza*/radio for news)	Not directly asked; inferred low (no smartphone reported)	Chief's *baraza*; radio
PLWDs	Very low – mostly unaware	No – needs caregiver assistance	Word of mouth via family; radio

Actual engagement with the county's page was low even among the digitally capable groups. Persons Living with Disabilities, women's group and Activists each named an alternative primary

channel – word of mouth by a church leader or a family member (FGD – PLWDs), radio and the chief's baraza (FGD – Muanda Women's Group), and WhatsApp groups moderated by trusted leaders (FGD – Activists). On their part, the youth explained that entertainment is the primary reason they use Facebook and follow different pages entirely, relying on WhatsApp for information they consider "serious" (FGD – Youth).

There was rare description of genuine two-way engagement like messaging the county page, reacting to or commenting on the page as a routine practice by any group. This indicates low citizen engagement across the studied population, but for two reasons that are structurally distinct: disengagement by choice or habit among the digitally capable youth and activists, and exclusion for the Persons Living with Disabilities and the women's group.

Notably, the disengagement was directly linked to relevance rather than access, with one youth respondent explaining, "they think because we have smartphones, we will find them. But we follow entertainment pages" (FGD – Youth), while an activist located the same problem in content design, arguing "the problem is the page has nothing for me. I can teach people to use it, but why would they?" (FGD – Activists). This distinction between a relevance problem and an access problem is central in answering the third research question. This is because it indicates that a single uniform intervention cannot be effective in remedying the low level of citizen engagement.

This apparent contradiction is best read as a segmentation effect: the page's engagement statistics appear to be driven by a peri-urban or urban tertiary-educated youth segment–the content analysis revealed that the highest volume of engagement of any category, out of a page with roughly 124,000 followers, was generated by Youth Empowerment posts, whereas the youth captured in this study FGD sample living in the rural areas and are informally employed report they do not follow the page and remain outside that engaged core. This nuance is only possible once the

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content and qualitative analysis data are read together, strengthening the overall finding of the study that citizen engagement on Facebook is real but narrowly concentrated; not broad-based, rather than contradicting the finding.

4.2.6 Challenges Facing Bungoma County Government in Using Facebook as a Public Relations Tool for Communication

The researcher found that from the FGDs, four recurring categories of challenge emerged. To a varying degree, all four groups referred to a need for verification (externally) before trusting content on Facebook, pointing to a latent credibility gap. The starkest illustration of compounded disadvantage, combining an access barrier, "I cannot read those small letters"; a trust barrier, "I cannot trust what I cannot see or hear properly"; and an institutional-neglect barrier, "they come to us during elections – they bring wheelchairs and take photos, after elections, they forget," was provided by Persons Living with Disabilities' account, within a single stakeholder category, underscoring that Facebook-based public relations, however well executed, cannot on its own serve the full spectrum of Bungoma County's citizenry. Three groups (PLWDs, women and youth) also cited low awareness or visibility of the page itself, distinct from the technical ability to use Facebook. Activists specifically raised concerns relating to language barriers and format, reporting that "posts are too formal and in English" (FGD – Activists), and PLWDs additionally required audio content in the Bukusu language and larger text (FGD – PLWDs). Finally, three of the four groups (PLWDs, women and activists) cited lack of smartphone ownership.

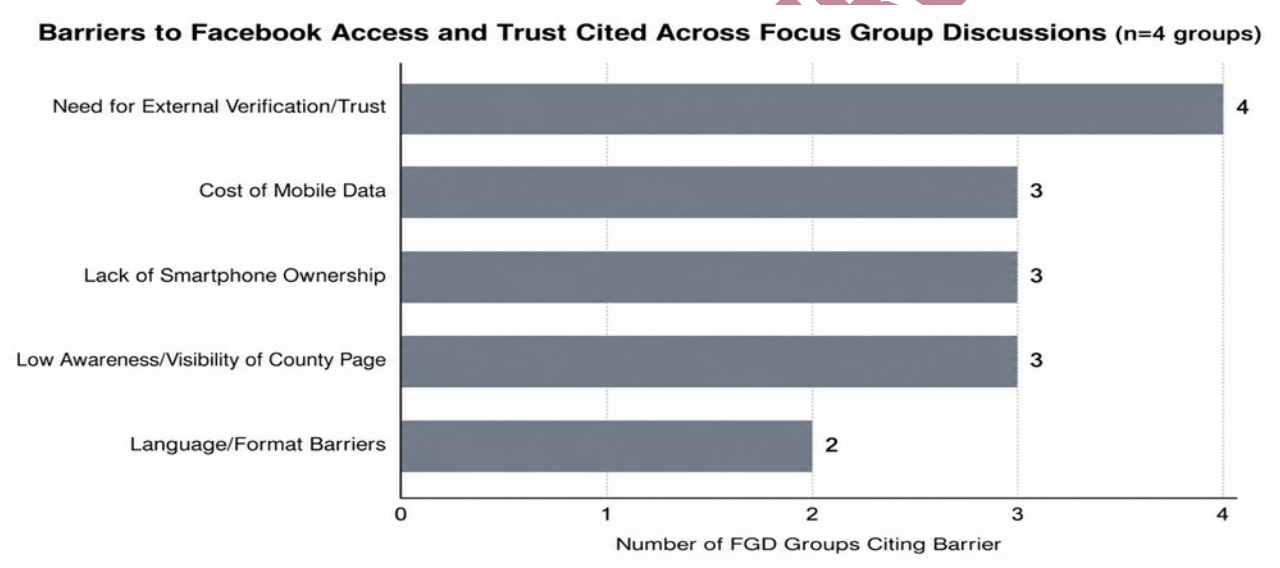
Further, the content analysis lends independently observed weight to this objective: Only eight posts (0.5%) were coded as relating to Women Empowerment, and only a single post (0.1%) was coded as relating to Persons with Disabilities across 1,513 posts published over three years. As such, there is a striking convergence between what the county actually published and what citizens

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said, as a result of this near-total absence of tailored content for two of the four population categories sampled in this study's focus group discussions, elevating diversification of content from a secondary observation to one of the study's identified principal challenges.

Figure 6: Barriers to Facebook Access and Trust Cited Across Focus Group Discussions (n = 4 groups)

A horizontal bar chart comparing how many of the four FGD groups cited each barrier: cost of data, lack of smartphones, language/format barriers, low visibility of the page, and need for external verification.



None of the seven departmental respondents mentioned systematic engagement metrics, dedicated digital-literacy outreach, or a documented social media policy beyond prompt response on the institutional side, a suggestion that challenges extend to the county's own communication planning and are not confined to citizen-side access. This aligns with the institutional gaps, limited integration between communication units and decision-making structures, and weak feedback-management systems – identified by Swart and Verwey (2022) in Kenyan county contexts.

4.3 Key Findings

1. Though predominantly used as a one-way information and publicity channel, Facebook is used extensively by Bungoma County Government; dialogic, feedback-oriented use is present but department- and secondary-dependent.

2. The engagement of the official page by the citizens is low, and this is attributed to both voluntary disengagement among digitally capable but disinterested activists and youth, and structural exclusion (disability access, format, devices and cost) among rural and marginalized groups.

3. Effectiveness is asymmetrical: Most citizens sampled either distrust the Facebook page without independent verification or are unaware of the page, whereas officials perceive Facebook as a moderately effective operational tool, an indication that the public relations outcomes of trust and dialogue intended are only achieved partially.

4. The leading challenges are institutional (absence of a documented engagement strategy), linguistic/format-related (formality, English-language dominance, disability accessibility), and economic (data costs, device access), rather than a single dominant barrier.

5. These qualitative findings are corroborated by an independent content analysis of the official Facebook page (1,513 posts, August 2022 – August 2025): content coding shows Persons with Disabilities content nearly absent (0.1%), and Youth Empowerment content dominating (22.8%), while content analysis shows an engagement rate of 12.59% and a reply rate of only 17.16%, mirroring the disparities reported by the respective focus groups, confirming the platform's predominantly one-way character.

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4.4 Summary

This chapter has provided a presentation and interpretation of the data collected from a content analysis of 1,513 posts on the county government's official Facebook page, four citizen focus groups, and seven departmental key informants. On a consistent picture, the three sources of data converge: a persistent gap between citizens' lived experience of the platform (confirmed by a reply rate of only 17.16%) and officials' assessment of the platform's effectiveness; a citizenry whose engagement is constrained by both relevance and access and relevance (confirmed by a 12.59% engagement rate concentrated among specific demographic segments); and a county government that is active but broadcast-oriented on Facebook (confirmed by an average of 42 posts per month and a content mix skewed toward youth and administrative themes). These findings form the basis for discussion, conclusions and recommendations presented in Chapter Five, having addressed all four objectives of the study through this triangulation of quantitative and qualitative evidence.

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CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSIONS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the key findings in Chapter Four in light of the empirical literature reviewed in Chapter Two, the Dialogic Theory of Public Relations, and the Excellence Theory. Then, conclusions are drawn with respect to the degree to which the research questions of the study have been answered, followed by recommendations for the County Government of Bungoma and suggestions for further research.

5.2 Discussion of Key Findings

5.2.1 Objective One: Facebook as a Public Relations Tool for Communication

The press-agentry/public-information orientation identified by the Excellence Theory as a less mature model of public relations practice has been confirmed by the finding that Facebook is predominantly used for publicity and information dissemination, with feedback-oriented use secondary (Grunig & Grunig, 2008). The framework of Grunig subjects a two-way symmetrical communication to position, in which organizational behavior is reshaped demonstrably by citizen feedback, as the excellent public relations marker. As reported by the county's own officers, the practice by Bungoma County Government sits closer to an asymmetrical model, in which there is collection of feedback, and it is used occasionally for the purposes of messaging fine-tuning but is rarely used for the purposes of redistributing institutional decision-making power. The independent content analysis of published 1,513 posts, which found broadcast-oriented categories – Health, County Administration and Youth Empowerment – dominating the page's actual output, empirically grounding what departmental officers described in interviews, reinforces this conclusion drawn qualitatively from the KIIs. This corroborates the finding by Schwartz et al.

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(2024) that, despite large followings, Israeli municipal Facebook pages similarly under-use the dialogic potential of the platform, and Babu and Otteng (2024), who reported Kisumu County's comparable one-way tendencies.

5.2.2 Objective Two: Effectiveness

The identified perception gap between citizens and departmental officers addresses the research question on effectiveness directly. Grunig and Grunig (2000) reiterate that the Excellence Theory holds that effective public relations is not measured by the volume of messages sent but is measured by the quality of the relationship between an organization and its publics. Bungoma County Government's Facebook communication is only partially effective based on that standard: A significant percentage of the citizens engaged in this study – particularly Persons Living with Disabilities and Muanda Women's Group – remain outside the relationship altogether, either reliant on other trusted intermediaries to validate its content or unaware of the page, even though officers can point to minor operational adjustments and prompt comment responses. The engagement rate of 12.59% and, more telling, the reply rate of 17.16% documented in the content analysis supply this asymmetry with behavioral non-self-reported evidence: a channel whereby fewer than one in five citizens' comments receive any reply cannot be considered to be a fully effective public relations practice, however much officers believe their own responses to be (Grunig & Grunig, 2000). Since functioning dialogue loops exist mainly with the subset of citizens who are already digitally engaged, the requirement of sustained mutual dialogue by the Dialogic Theory is therefore only weakly met (Kent & Taylor, 2014).

5.2.3 Objective Three: Citizen Engagement

A theoretically significant finding is that engagement is low for structurally different reasons across groups. The access and format barriers are linked to PLWDs and Muanda Women Group,

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consistent with Bhanye et al. (2023)'s digital inequality documented across African local governments. By contrast, the barrier for activists and youth is habit and relevance rather than capability: these groups direct their attention elsewhere despite being comfortable Facebook users, echoing the observation that government content that is publicity-oriented struggles to compete for attention against entertainment and WhatsApp-oriented feeds (Aldirdiri, 2024). The finding from the content analysis that the highest engagement of any category was driven by Youth Empowerment, even though the page is not followed by the rural youth sampled in the FGD of this study, is a suggestion that the actual engaged audience of the page is a demographic that is both narrower and more urban than the general population served by the county – a nuance segmentation that would not have been revealed by qualitative data alone. Because this distinction implies that a single blanket intervention like simply posting more often will not resolve engagement gaps stemming from two different root causes, it matters practically.

5.2.4 Objective Four: Challenges

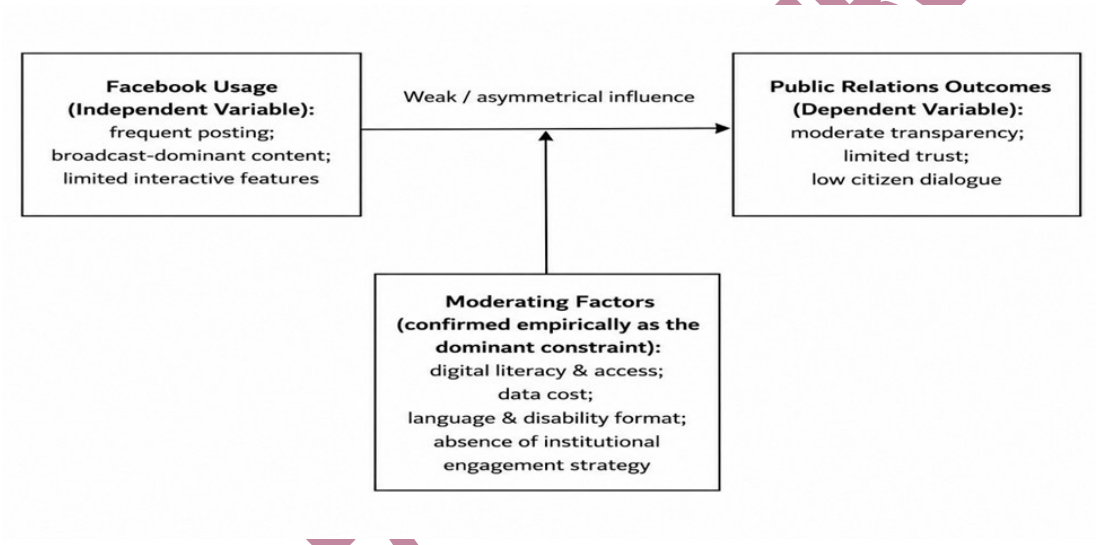
The absence of a documented county social media strategy, and the identified challenges – low page visibility, language and disability formatting, device access and cost of data –collectively support the finding that often, the Kenyan county communication units lack the structured feedback-management systems necessary for converting social media presence into genuine public relations value by Swart and Verwey (2022). These challenges reflect those highlighted by other studies elsewhere (Adoyo, 2021; Baltz, 2023; Guillaumie et al., 2024; Schwartz et al., 2024). Arguably, the study's single most concrete piece of evidence of institutional neglect is the minimal women empowerment content (0.5%), the near-total absence of Persons with Disabilities content (0.1% of 1,513 posts), moving the Persons Living with Disabilities FGD's complaint of being remembered only "during elections" from just a perception to a documented fact. The emphasis placed by Dialogic Theory on trust as a precondition for, rather than merely an outcome of online

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dialogue (Kent & Taylor, 2014), is further validated by the credibility gap evident across all four FGDs, where citizens want to verify Facebook content against a physical stamp, radio broadcast, or a chief.

Figure 7: Empirically Revised Conceptual Framework

A box-and-arrow diagram showing that the relationship between Facebook usage and public relations outcomes, as originally hypothesized in Figure 1 (Chapter Two), is weak and asymmetrical, with digital literacy, access, language/format, and institutional strategy confirmed as the dominant moderating constraint.



5.2.5 Methodological Reflection and Limitations of the Study

Before the conclusion of the study is drawn, two methodological points merit explicit reflection. One, the analysis plan in Chapter Three anticipated an inferential quantitative strand – a correlation analysis linking public relations outcomes such as transparency, responsiveness and stakeholder participation to Facebook use, computed in SPSS from structured questionnaire data. Practically, the quantitative evidence available for this chapter is a content analysis of the county's Facebook page itself (engagement metrics, content category, and posting frequency), and not a Likert-scale

survey instrument. This substitute is methodologically sound – it arguably yields a more objective picture of effectiveness than a survey would have, and measures actual platform behavior rather than self-reported perception – but it is descriptive rather than inferential in nature. Consequently, reply rates and engagements are reported in this study as descriptive percentages and interpreted alongside, rather than through formal correlation coefficients. Therefore, the relationships proposed in the conceptual framework (Chapter Two, Figure 1), are supported through triangulated convergence of descriptive-quantitative and qualitative evidence rather than through statistically tested association, and this distinction should be borne in mind when generalizing the findings.

Two, the strength of the conclusions that can be drawn is affected by several limitations. The key informant component achieved a 70% response rate (7 of 10 targeted departments), and the three departments that did not respond – Roads, Transport and Infrastructure; Gender, Youth, Culture and Sports; and Water, Environment and Natural Resources– may hold varied views not captured here. Departmental feedback influence and self-reports of responsiveness are not verified by independent records and are likely to be subject to social-desirability bias, a risk that was only addressed partially by this study through triangulating them against the reply rate figure of the content analysis. Only the activists group reported an explicit participant count (n = 10), within the focus group discussions; in the data available to this study, there is no independent verification of the exact sample sizes of the remaining three groups, and in addition, the Muanda Women's Group was not asked the usability and awareness question posed to the other three groups, requiring the inferences flagged in Section 4.2.4 and Table 3. Lastly, the cross-sectional design of the study captures platform behavior and perceptions at a single point in time (informed by a three-year recall window) and cannot establish whether the trend visible in Figure 3 is stable, worsening, or improving in terms of engagement patterns.

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5.3 Conclusion

This study set out to investigate how the County Government of Bungoma uses Facebook as a public relations tool for communication. The evidence gathered supports the conclusion that Facebook is embedded in the county's communication routine. However, it predominantly functions as an information channel and one-way publicity tool, rather than a fully dialogic relationship-building platform. For the digitally connected minority already following the page, the platform is moderately effective. It does not yet serve or reach the disability-affected, the rural, and the elderly populations. Most of these groups need timely information on social protection payments, health services, and bursaries. Citizen engagement is consequently low. This is driven by a combination of factors: simple disengagement among digitally capable citizens, low visibility of the page, format inaccessibility, and economic exclusion.

Convergent quantitative evidence strengthens this conclusion. An independent analysis of 1,513 Facebook posts recorded a 17.16% reply rate and a 12.59% engagement rate. The same analysis confirmed that content on women's empowerment and persons with disabilities jointly made up less than one percent of all material published. This corroborates both the exclusion reported qualitatively and the perception gap identified between officials and citizens.

Taken together, this evidence answers all four research questions. The leading challenges are economic, linguistic, and institutional, rather than technological alone. Engagement is low, multi-causal, and concentrated among a narrower, more urban audience than the county's population as a whole. Effectiveness is asymmetrical between officials and citizens. The extent of use is great, but narrowly informational.

From the perspective of the conceptual framework advanced in Chapter Two, the study finds evidence of the hypothesized link between public relations outcomes and Facebook usage.

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However, this link is weaker than assumed. It is dominated by access and digital literacy as moderating variables, rather than functioning as a positive relationship that is uniform and straightforward across the county's population.

5.5 Recommendations

i. The Department of Communication in Bungoma County Government should adopt a documented public relations and social media policy that explicitly sets targets for two-way engagement (polls, scheduled Q&A sessions, and response rates), not only posting frequently, so that there is a deliberate move by the county government from the model of public information to the two-way symmetrical model that is identified as the best practice by the Excellence Theory.

ii. Low-data channels already trusted by rural and marginalized citizens – radio slots and ward-level WhatsApp groups administered by chiefs and ward administrators – should be paired with Facebook content to directly address the cost of data and low visibility barriers identified in Objective Four – by extending reach beyond the digitally connected minority.

iii. The county should produce bilingual content (Kiswahili/English) that is simplified and, where feasible, audio or vernacular language content, and adopt accessibility features (audio narration, larger text) to serve PLWDs, consistent with provisions of the Constitution of Kenya (2010) on responsive public service and access to information.

5.6 Suggestions for Further Studies

This study triangulated a content analysis of the Facebook page of the County Government of Bungoma with perceptual data from citizens and key informants, yet there are still opportunities for further inquiries. To directly test the segmentation hypothesis of this study that an urban, tertiary-educated audience drives engagement while the rural populations sampled here remain

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largely outside it, future research could survey the demographic composition of the approximately 124,000 followers of the page; evaluate, through a follow-up study, whether adopting this study's recommended content-diversity quotas and reply-rate targets measurably improves citizen engagement over time; and extend the comparative lens to other Kenyan counties to test whether the publicity-dominant, low-reply-rate pattern found here is a devolution-wide phenomenon.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Introduction/Authorization Letter



ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

Private Bag 00217 LIMURU, KENYA
Email:office@spu.ac.ke
Website: www.spu.ac.ke

Tel Office: +254 (0) 20-2020505/10
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(0) 736 - 424440

BOARD OF POSTGRADUATE STUDIES

29th April, 2026

National Commission for Science and Technology,
P.O. BOX 30623-00100,
Nairobi.

Dear Sir/Madam,

RE: RECOMMENDATION FOR EZEKIEL WAMALWA KULOBA – MACSDIST776621 TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

This letter confirms the above-named person is a student in the Master of Arts in Communication Studies (MACS) Program at St. Paul's University.

After completion of the course work, the student is engaged in major research work leading to a Thesis/Dissertation writing. The student's selected topic is:

"Facebook as a public relations tool in county governments of Kenya: A case study of Bungoma County, Kenya."

The SPU-Institutional Scientific Ethics Review Committee has reviewed the above-named research proposal and granted the ERB approval number 760. for the period between 27th April, 2026 – 27th April, 2027 (1 year).

Kindly grant this student the required permit. For further information, please contact the undersigned through postgraduatestudies@spu.ac.ke

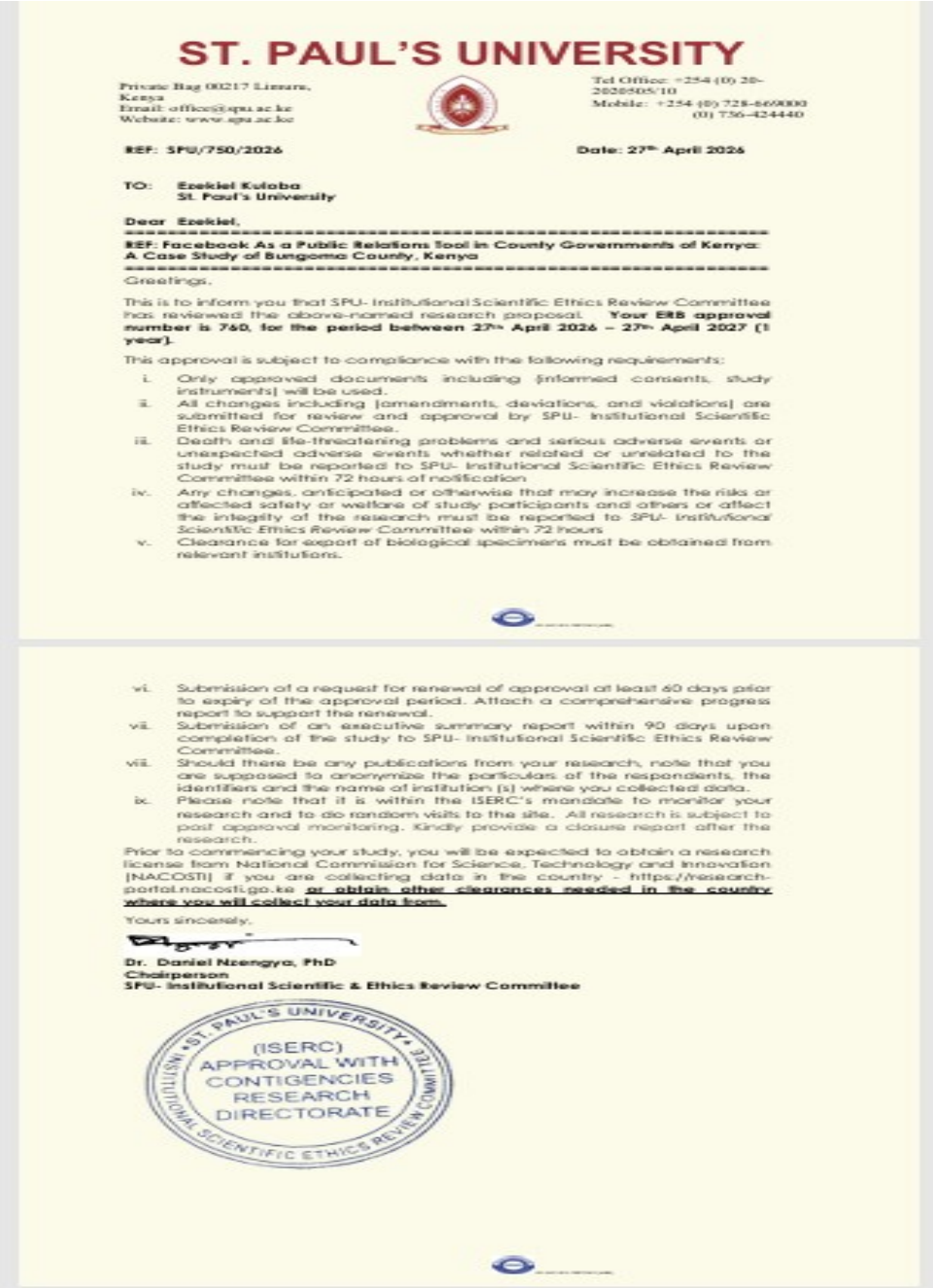
Yours Faithfully,

2 3 APR 2026

Dr. John Muhoho Kimani
Director Board of Postgraduate Studies

SPUKenya

Appendix B: ISERC Approval



ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

Private Bag 00217 Limuru, Kenya
Email: offices@spu.ac.ke
Website: www.spu.ac.ke

Tel Office: +254 (0) 20-2020505/10
Mobile: +254 (0) 728-669000 (0) 736-424440

REF: SPU/750/2026 **Date: 27th April 2026**

TO: Ezekiel Kuloba
St. Paul's University

Dear Ezekiel,

RE: Facebook As a Public Relations Tool in County Governments of Kenya: A Case Study of Bungoma County, Kenya

Greetings,

This is to inform you that SPU- Institutional Scientific Ethics Review Committee has reviewed the above-named research proposal. **Your ERB approval number is 760, for the period between 27th April 2026 – 27th April 2027 (1 year).**

This approval is subject to compliance with the following requirements:

i. Only approved documents including [informed consents, study instruments] will be used.
ii. All changes including [amendments, deviations, and violations] are submitted for review and approval by SPU- Institutional Scientific Ethics Review Committee.
iii. Death and life-threatening problems and serious adverse events or unexpected adverse events whether related or unrelated to the study must be reported to SPU- Institutional Scientific Ethics Review Committee within 72 hours of notification
iv. Any changes, anticipated or otherwise that may increase the risks or affected safety or welfare of study participants and others or affect the integrity of the research must be reported to SPU- Institutional Scientific Ethics Review Committee within 72 hours
v. Clearance for export of biological specimens must be obtained from relevant institutions.

vi. Submission of a request for renewal of approval at least 60 days prior to expiry of the approval period. Attach a comprehensive progress report to support the renewal.
vii. Submission of an executive summary report within 90 days upon completion of the study to SPU- Institutional Scientific Ethics Review Committee.
viii. Should there be any publications from your research, note that you are supposed to anonymize the particulars of the respondents, the identifiers and the name of institution [s] where you collected data.
ix. Please note that it is within the ISERC's mandate to monitor your research and to do random visits to the site. All research is subject to post approval monitoring. Kindly provide a closure report after the research.

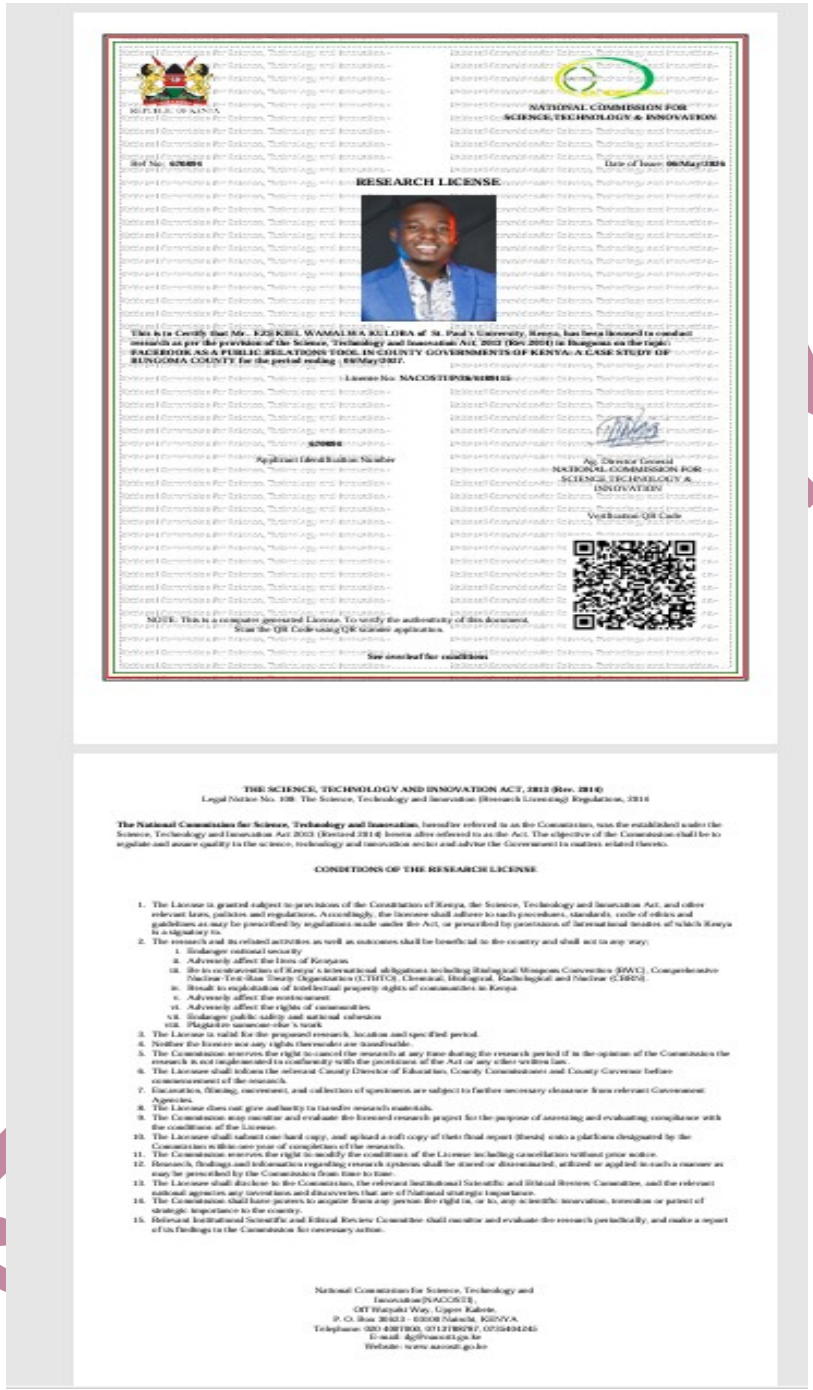
Prior to commencing your study, you will be expected to obtain a research license from National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation [NACOSTI] if you are collecting data in the country - https://research-portal.nacosti.go.ke **or obtain other clearances needed in the country where you will collect your data from.**

Yours sincerely,

Dr. Daniel Nzengya, PhD
Chairperson
SPU- Institutional Scientific & Ethics Review Committee

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL SCIENTIFIC ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE
(ISERC)
APPROVAL WITH CONTIGENCIES
RESEARCH DIRECTORATE

Appendix C: NACOSTI Research Permit



NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION

RESEARCH LICENSE

This is to Certify that Mr. EZEKIEL WAMALWA KULOBA of St. Paul's University, Kenya, has been licensed to conduct research as per the provision of the Science, Technology and Innovation Act, 2013 (Rev. 2014) in Bungoma on the topic: FACEBOOK AS A PUBLIC RELATIONS TOOL IN COUNTY GOVERNMENTS OF KENYA: A CASE STUDY OF BUNGOMA COUNTY for the period ending : 08/May/2027.

License No: NACOSTI/P/26/61811

Applicant Identification Number

Ag. Director General
NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION

Verification QR Code

NOTE: This is a computer generated License. To verify the authenticity of this document, Scan the QR Code using QR scanner application.

See overleaf for conditions

THE SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION ACT, 2013 (Rev. 2014)
Legal Notice No. 108: The Science, Technology and Innovation (Research Licensing) Regulations, 2014

The National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation, hereafter referred to as the Commission, was the established under the Science, Technology and Innovation Act 2013 (Revised 2014) herein after referred to as the Act. The objective of the Commission shall be to regulate and assure quality in the science, technology and innovation sector and advise the Government in matters related thereto.

CONDITIONS OF THE RESEARCH LICENSE

1. The License is granted subject to provisions of the Constitution of Kenya, the Science, Technology and Innovation Act, and other relevant laws, policies and regulations. Accordingly, the licensee shall adhere to such procedures, standards, code of ethics and guidelines as may be prescribed by regulations made under the Act, or prescribed by provisions of international treaties of which Kenya is a signatory to.
2. The research and its related activities as well as outcomes shall be beneficial to the country and shall not in any way;
   i. Endanger national security
   ii. Adversely affect the lives of Kenyans
   iii. Be in contravention of Kenya's international obligations including Biological Weapons Convention (BWC), Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO), Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear (CBRN).
   iv. Result in exploitation of intellectual property rights of communities in Kenya
   v. Adversely affect the environment
   vi. Adversely affect the rights of communities
   vii. Endanger public safety and national cohesion
   viii. Plagiarize someone else's work
3. The License is valid for the proposed research, location and specified period.
4. Neither the license nor any rights thereunder are transferable.
5. The Commission reserves the right to cancel the research at any time during the research period if in the opinion of the Commission the research is not implemented in conformity with the provisions of the Act or any other written law.
6. The Licensee shall inform the relevant County Director of Education, County Commissioners and County Governor before commencement of the research.
7. Excavation, filming, sound recording and collection of specimens are subject to further necessary clearance from relevant Government Agencies.
8. The License does not give authority to transfer research materials.
9. The Commission may monitor and evaluate the licensed research project for the purpose of assessing and evaluating compliance with the conditions of the License.
10. The Licensee shall submit one hard copy, and upload a soft copy of their final report (thesis) onto a platform designated by the Commission within one year of completion of the research.
11. The Commission reserves the right to modify the conditions of the License including cancellation without prior notice.
12. Research, findings and information regarding research systems shall be stored or disseminated, utilized or applied in such a manner as may be prescribed by the Commission from time to time.
13. The Licensee shall disclose to the Commission, the relevant Institutional Scientific and Ethical Review Committee, and the relevant national agencies any inventions and discoveries that are of National strategic importance.
14. The Commission shall have powers to acquire from any person the right to, or to, any scientific innovation, invention or patent of strategic importance to the country.
15. Relevant Institutional Scientific and Ethical Review Committee shall monitor and evaluate the research periodically, and make a report of its findings to the Commission for necessary action.

National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI)
Off Waiyaki Way, Upper Kabete,
P. O. Box 30623 - 00100 Nairobi, KENYA
Telephone: 020-4007000, 0713788787, 0735404245
E-mail: dg@nacosti.go.ke
Website: www.nacosti.go.ke

Appendix D: Informed Consent Form

Research Study Participation Consent Form

Title Of Study: "**THE INFLUENCE AND USE OF FACEBOOK IN THE PRACTICE OF PUBLIC RELATIONS IN COUNTY GOVERNMENTS OF KENYA: A CASE STUDY OF BUNGOMA COUNTY**"

Researcher

Ezekiel Kuloba

Email: macsdist776621@spu.ac.ke

Phone: 0722579452

Study purpose

You are hereby invited to take part in this study, which seeks to undertake exploration of the use of Facebook as a tool for public relations in Kenya's County Governments, with Bungoma County as the case study. The collected information will contribute significantly towards comprehension of how efforts of public relations in settings of government are impacted by the use of Facebook.

Procedures

You will be requested to take part in an interview if you consent to participate in this study. The interview will be conducted via video conference, via phone, and in person and will take approximately 45 minutes. The interview will be audio-recorded for accuracy purposes, with your permission.

Confidentiality

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A high level of confidentiality will be exercised on all the information obtained during the study. There will be no revelation of your personal identity in any presentations, publications, and reports that may arise from this study. Only the researcher and research supervisor will have access to the data collected, which will also be stored securely. The data will be retained for a maximum of one year after completion of the study, after which it will be destroyed securely.

Voluntary Participation

It is entirely voluntary for you to participate in this study, and at any time, you are at liberty to withdraw or not to participate without any penalty. However, any data already collected will be destroyed should you decide to opt out of the study.

Potential Risks and Benefits

Participating in this study has no significant risks. However, some discomfort may emanate from discussing professional experiences. If you do not wish to answer any questions, you are free to skip such questions. Your participation will contribute to a greater understanding of the use of Facebook in public relations practices in county governments, even though there may be no direct benefits to you.

Questions and Clarifications

Please feel free to contact me at macsdist776621@spu.ac.ke or +254722579452 should you have any questions or need clarification about this study or your participation. You can also contact Dr. Susan Mwangi at smwangi@spu.ac.ke or Dr. Ukaiko Ojiambo at uojiambo@spu.ac.ke (Both are my research supervisors).

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Consent

I have read and understood the above-provided information. I voluntarily agree to participate in this research study. I understand that I may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

Participants Initials: _____

Participant's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Researcher's Signature: _____

Date: _____

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Appendix E: Interview Guides

First Interview Guide: For Department Heads (Bungoma County)

Good morning… I am Kuloba Ezekiel, a St. Paul's University student, currently pursuing a master's degree. I am undertaking a study titled "The Influence and Use of Facebook in the Practice of Public Relations in County Governments of Kenya: a case study of Bungoma County." In this study, Bungoma County is my focal point. This study is a requirement by the institution for the award of the degree of Master of Arts in Communication. Therefore, to enable me to complete my studies at the university, I would like you to take part in this process. The information you provide will be treated with the highest level of confidentiality and will be used solely for the stated purpose. In addition, your participation in this process is voluntary. For accuracy, I will be recording your responses, and as confirmation that you have voluntarily agreed to participate in this research, I request that you sign the consent form for me.

Thank you.

1. Can you please introduce yourself?
2. What is your role within the Bungoma County government?
3. What is your academic background?
4. What is your highest level of education?
5. What are your primary responsibilities?

Overview of Facebook Usage

6. Does Bungoma County Government have an official Facebook page for public interaction and communication with citizens?
7. How frequently does the Government of Bungoma County post communication content on the official Facebook page?

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8. What are the main public relations reasons for which Bungoma County Government utilizes Facebook?
9. To what extent is Facebook used by Bungoma County Government to facilitate citizen participation and dialogue on issues of the county?

Press agentry/publicity application

10. To what extent does Bungoma County Government's communication emphasize promotion and publicity of activities of the county compared to citizen interaction?
11. Which types of content does Bungoma County Government use on its official Facebook page to enhance visibility and public awareness of county initiatives?

Two-way asymmetrical application

12. How frequently does the County Government of Bungoma respond to inquiries and comments by citizens on Facebook in a manner that fosters continued interaction?
13. To what extent does the County Government of Bungoma adjust its communication strategies and messages using feedback from citizens on Facebook?
14. To what extent does Bungoma County Government use feedback from citizens on Facebook to influence changes in service delivery and communication practices?

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15. To what extent does Bungoma County Government use feedback from citizens on Facebook to influence changes in service delivery and communication practices?

16.

17.

Two-way Asymmetrical Application

18. To what degree does the County Government of Bungoma share communication messages aimed at influencing citizens' behaviour or awareness using Facebook?

19.

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Second Interview Guide: For Bungoma County Activists

Good morning… I am Kuloba Ezekiel, a St. Paul's University student, currently pursuing a Master's degree. I am undertaking a study titled "The Influence and Use of Facebook in the Practice of Public Relations in County Governments of Kenya: a case study of Bungoma County". In this study, Bungoma County is my focal point. This study is a requirement by the institution for the award of the degree of Master of Arts in Communication. Therefore, to enable me to complete my studies at the university, I would like you to take part in this process. The information you provide will be treated with the highest level of confidentiality and will be used solely for the stated purpose. In addition, your participation in this process is voluntary. For accuracy, I will be recording your responses, and as confirmation that you have voluntarily agreed to participate in this research, I request that you sign the consent form for me.

Thank you.

1. Can you introduce yourself, please?
2. What role do you play in the County Government of Bungoma?
3. What academic background do you have?
4. What is the highest education level that you have?
5. Which major responsibilities do you have?

Social media usage overview

6. How is the official Facebook page of the County Government of Bungoma managed in terms of response mechanisms, content moderation, and updates to enhance effective communication with citizens?
7. What citizen engagement and dialogue forms are facilitated through the official Facebook page of Bungoma County Government?

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8. How often do such interactions occur?
9. In what ways does Bungoma County Government use Facebook to support public relations and communication functions with citizens?
10. What strategic objectives of communication guide the use of Facebook as a public relations platform by the County Government of Bungoma?

Press agentry/publicity application

11. How is promotional content managed by the County Government of Bungoma on its official Facebook page?
12. How are reactions by the audience such as likes, shares, and comments monitored to assess public reach and attention?

Public information application

13. How does Bungoma County Government use Facebook for accurate and timely dissemination of public information?
14. What verification processes or internal approvals ensure credibility before publication?

Two-way asymmetrical application

15. How does Bungoma County Government analyse Facebook feedback to adjust campaigns or communication messages aimed at influencing behaviour, attitudes, and public awareness while advancing county objectives?

Two-way symmetrical application

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St. Paul's University Repository

16. How does the County Government of Bungoma use Facebook to promote mutual understanding and dialogue between citizens and county administration? Please provide examples of interactive engagements.
17. What mechanisms are available to promote continuous two-way communication and feedback exchange between the county government and citizens through Facebook?
18. Can you describe a case where Facebook feedback by the citizens influenced decision-making, service delivery and county communication approaches, and how the response was communicated back to the public?

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Third Interview Guide: For Youth groups/Women empowerment groups representatives

Good morning… I am Kuloba Ezekiel, a St. Paul's University student, currently pursuing a master's degree. I am undertaking a study titled "The Influence and Use of Facebook in the Practice of Public Relations in County Governments of Kenya: a case study of Bungoma County." In this study, Bungoma County Government is my focal point. This study is a requirement by the institution for the award of the degree of Master of Arts in Communication. Therefore, to enable me to complete my studies at the university, I would like you to take part in this process. The information you provide will be treated with the highest level of confidentiality and will be used solely for the stated purpose. In addition, your participation in this process is voluntary. For accuracy, I will be recording your responses, and as confirmation that you have voluntarily agreed to participate in this research, I request that you sign the consent form for me.

Thank you.

1. Can you introduce yourself, please?
2. What role do you play in the County Government of Bungoma?
3. What academic background do you have?
4. What is the highest education level that you have?
5. Which major responsibilities do you have?

Social media usage overview

1. How does Bungoma County Government integrate Facebook into its overall communication framework and public relations?
2. Which offices are tasked with managing its use?

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3. From your point of view, to what extent does Bungoma County Government use Facebook as an official public relations tool for communicating with citizens?
4. What strategic objectives guide the use of Facebook by the County Government of Bungoma?
5. What ways does the county government use to assess whether there is an effective achievement of these objectives?

Citizen Engagement and Interaction

6. How does the County Government of Bungoma evaluate and monitor the engagement of citizens with shared content on the official Facebook page of the county?
7. What mechanisms are in place to respond to feedback, inquiries, and concerns received through Facebook communication?

Public Information and Communication Effectiveness

8. How does the Government of Bungoma County use Facebook to disseminate public information like service updates, programmes, and policies to residents?
9. In your perspective, how effective has Facebook been in terms of improving public awareness, accessibility of information, and communication transparency within Bungoma County Government?

Use of Feedback and Communication Improvement

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10. How does the Government of Bungoma County use analytics and feedback obtained from interactions on Facebook to improve service delivery or communication strategies?

Dialogue and Two-Way Communication

11. In what ways does the Government of Bungoma County facilitate constructive dialogue and two-way communication between the county administration and citizens through Facebook?

Challenges in Facebook Use

12. What primary challenges does the Government of Bungoma County face in using Facebook as a public relations tool for communication?
13. What measures has the county government proposed or implemented to deal with these challenges and enhance the effectiveness of Facebook communication?

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Fourth Interview Guide: For Persons Living with Disabilities (PLWDs)

Good morning… I am Kuloba Ezekiel, a St. Paul's University student, currently pursuing a master's degree. I am undertaking a study titled "The Influence and Use of Facebook in the Practice of Public Relations in County Governments of Kenya: a case study of Bungoma County." In this study, Bungoma County Government is my focal point. This study is a requirement by the institution for the award of the degree of Master of Arts in Communication. Therefore, to enable me to complete my studies at the university, I would like you to take part in this process. The information you provide will be treated with the highest level of confidentiality and will be used solely for the stated purpose. In addition, your participation in this process is voluntary. For accuracy, I will be recording your responses, and as confirmation that you have voluntarily agreed to participate in this research, I request that you sign the consent form for me.

Thank you.

6. Can you introduce yourself, please?
7. What role do you play in the County Government of Bungoma?
8. What academic background do you have?
9. What is the highest education level that you have?
10. Which major responsibilities do you have?

Social media usage overview

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14. How does Bungoma County Government integrate Facebook into its overall communication framework and public relations?
15. Which offices are tasked with managing its use?
16. From your point of view, to what extent does Bungoma County Government use Facebook as an official public relations tool for communicating with citizens?
17. What strategic objectives guide the use of Facebook by the County Government of Bungoma?
18. What ways does the county government use to assess whether there is an effective achievement of these objectives?

Citizen Engagement and Interaction

19. How does the County Government of Bungoma evaluate and monitor the engagement of citizens with shared content on the official Facebook page of the county?
20. What mechanisms are in place to respond to feedbacks, inquiries and concerns received through Facebook communication?

Public Information and Communication Effectiveness

21. How does the Government of Bungoma County use Facebook to disseminate public information like service updates, programmes and policies to residents?
22. In your perspective, how effective has Facebook been in terms of improving public awareness, accessibility of information and communication transparency within Bungoma County Government?

Use of Feedback and Communication Improvement

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23. How does the Government of Bungoma County use analytics and feedback obtained from interactions on Facebook to improve service delivery or communication strategies?

Dialogue and Two-Way Communication

24. In what ways does the Government of Bungoma County facilitate constructive dialogue and two-way communication between the county administration and citizens through Facebook?

Challenges in Facebook Use

25. What primary challenges does the Government of Bungoma County face in using Facebook as a public relations tool for communication?
26. What measures has the county government proposed or implemented to deal with these challenges and enhance the effectiveness of Facebook communication?

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Appendix F: Content Analysis Coding Framework

Part 1: Thematic Content Categories (applied for the frequency coding reported in Table 4.3 and Figure 4.3, n = 1,513 posts; 303 posts systematically sampled)

Each of the 303 systematically sampled posts (every fifth post) was assigned to exactly one of the following seventeen mutually exclusive thematic categories: Youth Empowerment; County Administration; Health, Agriculture; Others; Education; Infrastructure; Economic Development; Sports & Recreation; Public Participatio Water & Sanitation; Environment; Finance & Budget; Events & Ceremonies; Tourism & Culture; Women Empowerment; Disaster Management, and Persons with Disabilities.

Part 2: Engagement Metrics (applied for the engagement rate and reply rate reported in Figure 4.5)

Metric	Description
Reactions	Count of likes/reactions recorded on each sampled post.
Comments	Count of citizen comments recorded on each sampled post.
Replies	Count of comments that received a reply from page administrators or other users.
Engagement rate	Calculated as (comments + reactions) ÷ total page followers, expressed as a percentage.
Reply rate	Calculated as replies ÷ total comments, expressed as a percentage.

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Appendix G: Content Analysis Schedule

CONTENT ANALYSIS SCHEDULE			
Variable	**Indicator**	**Operational Description**	**Scale of Measurement**
Content Type	Informational	Updates, public notices, policies and announcement-providing posts.	Nominal
	Promotional	Posts highlighting campaigns, events, projects, and achievements.	Nominal
	Interactive	Posts inviting public participation	Nominal
Posting Frequency	Number of posts	All posts published between August 2022 and August 2025	Ratio
Interactivity	Use of interactive features	Presence of live videos, links, tags, mentions, and hashtags.	Nominal
Audience engagements	Likes/Reactions	Number of reactions or likes per post	Ratio
	Comments	Number of comments per post	Ratio
	Shares	Number of shares per post	Ratio
Responsiveness	Response Presence	Whether comments by the citizens get responses from the county government (Yes/No)	Nominal
	Response Time	Duration of time taken to respond to an inquiry or comment	Interval
Tone of communication	Positive	Posts framed in an encouraging or supportive manner	Nominal
	Neutral	Posts presented in a factual and objective manner	Nominal
	Negative	Posts addressing complaints, conflict and criticism	Nominal

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Appendix H: Sample of raw interview/FGD data

Question	Response / Notes
Can you please introduce yourself?	I am the Chief Officer, Department of Education and Vocational Training
What is your academic background?	Education
What is your highest level of education?	Master's degree
What are your primary responsibilities?	I promote foundational learning by building classrooms, sanitation facilities, and distributing learning materials to ensure equitable access to early childhood education; equipping youth with practical and technical skills by establishing modern workshops, dispersing conditional grants to cover tuition, and deploying instructors; and enhancing access to education by providing bursaries and scholarships to needy students in the county.
Does Bungoma County Government have an official Facebook page for public interaction?	Yes
How frequently does the Government of Bungoma County post communication content on the official Facebook page?	Very frequently
What are the main public relations reasons for which Bungoma County Government utilizes Facebook?	Information dissemination and public awareness, creating publicity, getting feedback from the citizens
To what extent is Facebook used to facilitate citizen participation and dialogue?	To a large extent; Share crucial policies with citizens
To what extent does communication emphasize promotion/publicity vs citizen interaction?	To a large extent; Promotion of achievements and bursaries prioritized;
Which types of content does Bungoma County Government use on Facebook to enhance visibility?	Development updates, governor's public engagements, bursary deadlines, ECDE teacher recruitments, photos, videos, livestreaming.
How frequently does the County respond to Facebook inquiries/comments to foster interaction?	Very frequently. Communication officers respond promptly during working hours.
To what extent does the County adjust strategies using Facebook feedback?	To some extent; adjustments are made based on trending parent queries.

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To what extent does the County use Facebook feedback to influence service delivery changes?	Moderately – influences feeding programs and textbook distribution.
To what degree does the County share messages to influence citizen behavior/awareness?	Large degree

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