State-owned Enterprises as Strategic Instruments of Political Communication: Exploring Government-Citizen Engagement in Emerging Democracies

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Abstract

This study evaluated the impact of state-owned businesses as strategic political communication actors on citizen involvement, government legitimacy, and public confidence in developing democracies. The purpose of the study was to ascertain how public perceptions of government efficacy and legitimacy were influenced by service delivery performance, communication of government development priorities, and citizen-oriented communication techniques. Quantitative and qualitative methods were combined in a convergent mixed-methods study design. In addition to interviews with particular stakeholders and experts, 400 respondents completed questionnaires that were used to gather data. Thematic analysis was used to investigate qualitative data, and descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze quantitative data. The results showed that citizens' opinions of government legitimacy were greatly improved by state-owned businesses' efficient service delivery. Additionally, the study discovered that inclusive and open communication tactics promoted increased civic engagement, increased public trust, and raised awareness of government efforts. The study's narrow emphasis on particular stakeholders and respondents may have limited how broadly the results could be applied. The report suggested enhancing institutional performance, bolstering citizen-centered communication strategies, and incorporating state-owned businesses into national governance communication frameworks. By creating an interdisciplinary understanding of the communicative function of state-owned firms in connecting political communication, public administration, and governance outcomes, the study advanced knowledge.

Keywords: *State-owned enterprises, political communication, government legitimacy, public trust, citizen engagement*

Introduction

In modern governance, voters are increasingly assessing governments based on their daily contacts with public institutions as well as campaign promises, political rhetoric, and policy statements. Key indices of governmental competence and legitimacy now include the caliber of public services, institutional responsiveness, transparency, and the capacity of government institutions to convert policy into significant results. As a result, public institutions play a crucial role in communication since their actions subtly communicate the state's ability, responsibility, and dedication. According to Bouckaert and Van de Walle (2003) and Grimmelikhuijsen and Knies (2017), effective governance is therefore assessed not just by what governments say but also by what public institutions accomplish and how these accomplishments are presented to citizens.

State-owned businesses (SOEs) hold a particularly critical place among public institutions since they are among the most obvious manifestations of governmental power in the day-to-day lives of citizens. SOEs have a big impact on how the public perceives government since they operate in industries like power, banking, telecommunications, transportation, water supply, healthcare, and infrastructure. They continue to be crucial tools for advancing economic growth, providing basic services, and carrying out national development initiatives in many developing nations, especially Nigeria and other African democracies. As a result, their efficacy influences not only economic success but also public opinions on democratic legitimacy, institutional competency, and government credibility (World Bank, 2014; OECD, 2015; OECD, 2024).

In the past, SOEs were created to solve market imperfections, supply public goods, protect critical national interests, and advance socioeconomic growth. But over time, their job has grown to encompass a major communicative component in addition to economic tasks. SOEs convey government priorities and policy accomplishments while exhibiting state responsiveness through effective infrastructure projects, enhanced service delivery, community development efforts, and citizen-oriented programs. As a result, public perceptions of government efficacy and dedication to development are shaped by their institutional performance and interactions with residents.

With the development of digital governance and changing citizen-state relations, this communicative role has grown in importance. SOEs now communicate directly with citizens by sharing information, soliciting input, and encouraging transparency through official websites, social media platforms, mobile applications, digital service portals, and stakeholder engagement methods. These communication efforts assist agenda-setting, accountability, reputation management, and citizen participation in ways that go beyond conventional public relations (Criado et al., 2013; Mergel, 2013). The ability of SOEs to communicate has become a crucial tool for restoring public trust and bolstering institutional legitimacy at a time when corruption, inefficiency, poor accountability, and subpar service delivery frequently erode public confidence in government institutions (Edelman, 2024; OECD, 2024).

Examining this link in the Nigerian and broader African governance contexts is especially pertinent. Declining public trust has been associated with institutional flaws, poor service delivery, and a lack of government responsiveness in many African democracies. Rather than through political institutions themselves, citizens frequently interact with the state mainly through public organizations that provide necessary services. Perceptions of government performance are so influenced by experiences with public services such as energy, transportation, and telecommunications. Therefore, the efficacy and communication strategies of SOEs have the potential to either increase public discontent with governance or strengthen public trust in governmental institutions.

Despite their strategic significance, the majority of previous research has been on the economic functions of SOEs, such as ownership arrangements, corporate governance, financial sustainability, and administrative changes (World Bank, 2014; OECD, 2015; OECD, 2024). The importance of political communication in SOEs has received comparatively less attention, despite the fact that these studies offer insightful information about institutional management. Few studies have specifically looked at how citizens' opinions of government legitimacy, trust, and accountability are impacted by their service delivery, public engagement tactics, and organizational reputation. In developing democracies, where public institutions serve as the primary conduit between the people and the government, this disparity is particularly noticeable.

In a similar vein, political communication research has historically focused on political figures, election campaigns, the media, and official government message, paying very little attention to how non-electoral public institutions convey governance through their actions. However, governments usually rely on institutional accomplishments to prove the effectiveness of their policies and bolster their credibility. Because citizens are increasingly evaluating governance not only through political debate but also through their direct interactions with state institutions, it is crucial to understand SOEs as strategic communication actors.

With a focus on Nigeria and the larger African public administration setting, this paper investigates state-owned firms as strategic political communication players within nascent democracies. It explores how SOEs impact individuals' perceptions of government legitimacy, public trust, and civic participation through their service delivery performance, communication methods, and representation of government development initiatives.

Three objectives are pursued by the study. First, it studies the influence of SOEs' service delivery performance on citizens' opinions of government legitimacy. Second, it examines the effectiveness of SOEs' communication techniques in encouraging citizen involvement and public trust. Third, it studies the role of SOEs in conveying government development initiatives and impacting public perceptions of governance performance.

This study improves knowledge of institutional performance as a type of political communication by combining ideas from public administration, political communication, and governance studies. It makes the case that SOEs should be seen as strategic governance institutions that governments use to convey their competence, responsiveness, transparency, and commitment to development in addition to being economic organizations. It is anticipated that the results will provide a theoretical and practical contribution by guiding approaches to build institutional legitimacy, improve citizen-centered communication, and improve governance outcomes in developing democracies.

The rest of the paper is structured as follows. The theoretical framework and a review of pertinent literature are presented in the next section. The methodology, which describes the research strategy, data collection methods, and analytical methodologies, comes next. The results are then examined and presented in light of previous research. The study's implications, suggestions, limits, and future directions are all included in the paper's conclusion.

Literature Review

Theoretical Frameworks

These theories describe how state-owned companies (SOEs) operate as strategic political communication tools that impact public trust, government legitimacy, and government-citizen engagement, legitimacy theory and institutional theory serve as the foundation for this study.

Legitimacy Theory

Weber (1978) is credited with developing legitimacy theory. Suchman (1995) defined legitimacy as the widespread belief that an organization's actions are acceptable and in line with societal norms, beliefs, and expectations. According to the argument, for institutions to continue to be successful and long-lasting, the people must accept them. In the public sector, legitimacy encompasses citizens' trust in governmental power as well as organisational longevity. As a result, governments gain legitimacy not only through elections but also through their capacity to successfully provide basic services and public goods (Tyler, 2021).

According to recent research, citizens are evaluating governments more and more on the basis of institutional competence, accountability, transparency, responsiveness, and service performance. Higher levels of public trust and legitimacy are more likely to be enjoyed by governments that excel in these areas (Van der Meer, 2023; Hameduddin & Vivona, 2023; Castelo & Gomes, 2023; Oliveira et al., 2024). As significant suppliers of vital services in industries including infrastructure, transportation, telecommunications, and energy, SOEs act as outward symbols of the government. As a result, their actions convey crucial messages about the efficacy of the government and its dedication to the general good. The conceptual foundation for comprehending how SOEs affect citizens' opinions of the legitimacy and trustworthiness of the government is provided by this theory.

Institutional Theory

Organisations function within institutional settings that are shaped by laws, conventions, values, and societal expectations, according to institutional theory, which was established by Meyer and Rowan (1977), DiMaggio and Powell (1983), and Scott (2014). Therefore, organizations are social structures that acquire legitimacy by adhering to recognized criteria rather than just being technical entities. Stakeholder perceptions are influenced by the symbolic meanings associated with institutional acts, structures, and communication methods (Scott, 2014).

By converting policy goals into observable actions and results, public institutions serve as middlemen between governments and citizens, according to recent applications of the idea to public administration (Moynihan & Kavanagh, 2023). In this regard, SOEs use infrastructure development, social investment initiatives, service delivery, and public engagement programs to convey government priorities. Their performance signals policy accomplishments and development pledges while reflecting governmental ideals including accountability, openness, efficiency, and responsiveness.

The theory describes how SOEs operate as strategic political communication actors whose institutional performance affects public perceptions of government credibility, legitimacy, and governance; institutional theory is especially pertinent to this subject. It bolsters the claim that political communication includes visible behaviors and the provision of services by public entities in addition to formal speeches and media campaigns.

Nonetheless, institutional theory and legitimacy theory work well together to offer a solid theoretical framework for comprehending state-owned businesses as tactical tools of political communication. In terms of public trust, government credibility, and citizen acceptance of governmental power, legitimacy theory describes the results of institutional performance; however, institutional theory explains the mechanisms by which these results are produced. According to institutional theory, state-owned businesses are public institutions that use their actions, service provision, and interactions with stakeholders to convey governmental values, goals, and development agendas. It describes how SOEs serve as a bridge between the public and the government by turning public policy into observable and assessable results. Contrarily, legitimacy theory clarifies how citizens understand these results and how these interpretations affect opinions about the efficacy, reliability, and legitimacy of the government.

Therefore, the central claim of this study—that state-owned enterprises are strategic communication institutions that governments use to engage citizens, communicate governance outcomes, and foster legitimacy—is supported by the integrated theoretical perspective. In emerging democracies, this synthesis offers a thorough framework for analysing the connections between SOEs, political communication, government legitimacy, and public trust.

Empirical Review

Corporate governance, financial performance, operational effectiveness, public accountability, and privatization have historically been the main topics of empirical research on state-owned enterprises (SOEs). However, more recent research acknowledges that SOEs carry out more comprehensive governance tasks by acting as visible public institutions that governments use to convey governance performance and policy outcomes. However, there is still a dearth of empirical data explicitly looking at SOEs as strategic political communication actors.

According to the OECD (2024), public views of state capability and government legitimacy are greatly influenced by the efficacy, accountability, and transparency of SOEs. The effectiveness of SOEs in industries like energy, transportation, and telecommunications is frequently linked by the public to the skill of political leadership. The study emphasizes the significance of SOE governance, but it doesn't specifically look at how they influence public opinion through communication.

In a similar vein, citizens are increasingly evaluating governments based on institutional performance rather than political promises, according to the Edelman Trust Barometer (2024). Through the provision of services, public organizations—including SOEs—indirectly convey the efficacy of the government, thereby impacting public confidence. However, rather than concentrating on the communication roles of SOEs, the study broadly addresses institutional trust.

Cuervo-Cazurra et al.'s comparative study from 2024 demonstrated that when SOEs successfully provide public services and advance national development objectives, they bolster government legitimacy. Similarly, Sanders and Canel (2023) contended that institutional behavior is a type of communication that can influence public trust and the image of the government. Although these studies contribute to our knowledge of institutional legitimacy, SOEs as strategic communication actors receive little attention.

The increasing significance of institutional communication is further demonstrated by research on digital governance. According to Mergel (2023), government agencies are using social media and digital platforms more frequently to improve accountability, transparency, and citizen involvement. Although the study does not particularly cover SOEs, effective communication through these channels improves views of government responsiveness.

Empirical research in Africa has mostly focused on issues related to accountability and governance. While Mutize and Tefera (2020) and Thomas (2012) connected political meddling and bad governance to subpar institutional performance in a number of African nations, Simpson (2014) found flaws in board accountability and governance among Ghanaian SOEs. Even though these studies offer insightful information about SOE administration, their role as strategic political communication players is understudied since they primarily examine SOEs as administrative and economic organizations. The current study's empirical basis comes from this gap.

Thus, a study of the current literature identifies three significant gaps. First, the majority of empirical research ignores the political communication roles of SOEs in favour of examining them from an economic, managerial, and governance standpoint. Second, despite evidence that individuals understand institutional performance as a kind of governmental communication, current research frequently regards service delivery and communication as distinct phenomena. Third, especially in developing democracies, there is a dearth of empirical research combining state-owned businesses, political communication, government legitimacy, and citizen trust into a coherent analytical framework.

In order to close these gaps, the current study makes the case that state-owned businesses should be seen as both strategic political communication tools and economic institutions. This study looks at how SOEs' public engagements, communication strategies, and service delivery effectiveness affect government legitimacy, citizen trust, and government-citizen engagement, in contrast to earlier research that mostly concentrated on efficiency or governance results. The study presents a fresh interdisciplinary viewpoint that combines public administration and governance research with political communication theory. By doing this, it adds to the growing conversation on how governments convey information through institutional performance and how the public views such success as proof of the government's ability, responsibility, and dedication to progress.

Methodology

The complexity of the research problem, which required both quantitative evidence of citizens' perceptions and qualitative insights into how SOEs communicate government priorities, policies, and development outcomes, led to the adoption of a mixed-methods research approach in this study to investigate the role of state-owned enterprises (SOEs) as strategic political communication instruments influencing public trust, government legitimacy, and citizen engagement in emerging democracies. Specifically, a convergent parallel mixed-methods design was used, involving the simultaneous collection, independent analysis, and integration of data, which improved the validity and reliability of the results.

The study was carried out in Nigeria, a developing democracy where SOEs are still crucial to the provision of infrastructure, economic growth, public services, and state-citizen interactions. Nigeria was chosen because state-owned enterprises (SOEs) in industries like energy, transportation, telecommunications, and public utilities are significant hubs for citizen-government interaction, and their performance and communication strategies are crucial factors in determining public trust, confidence, and political legitimacy.

Three groups of respondents made up the study population: citizens who frequently use SOE services; management and communication staff in certain SOEs; and specialists in political communication, public administration, governance, and development studies. Although managers, communication officers, and governance specialists offered institutional and professional viewpoints on the communication function of SOEs, citizens were included because they are the main recipients of SOE services.

A multistage sampling strategy was used for the quantitative component. Participants were chosen using simple random sampling after respondents were sorted by gender, age, occupation, and level of education. States and large cities with significant SOE operations were purposively chosen. Yamane's (1967) sample size formula was used to get the sample size of 400 respondents at a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error. 406 (96.7%) of the 420 surveys that were distributed through direct human contact were recovered. 400 surveys were deemed valid and appropriate for statistical analysis following data screening.

Twenty key respondents, including senior SOE managers, corporate communication officers, governance practitioners, public policy experts, and political communication scholars, were chosen using purposive sampling for the qualitative component. Their expertise gave them in-depth knowledge of governance procedures, institutional communication tactics, and the larger political communication roles of SOEs.

Data from both primary and secondary sources were used. Semi-structured interviews and structured questionnaires were used to gather primary data. A five-point Likert scale, ranging from Strongly Agree (5) to Strongly Disagree (1), was used in the questionnaire to gauge respondents' opinions of service delivery, communication efficacy, public trust, government legitimacy, and citizen engagement. In-depth qualitative data on the communication function of SOEs and their impact on governance outcomes were produced through semi-structured interviews.

Peer-reviewed journal articles, books, official government publications, policy documents, SOE annual reports, corporate communication materials, and reports from international organisations such as the World Bank, United Nations, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and African Development Bank were the sources of secondary data. By offering theoretical and contextual support, these documentary sources enhanced the original data.

Experts in political communication, public administration, governance, economics, business administration, and research technique evaluated the questionnaire and interview guide to guarantee the caliber of the research tools. Their suggestions enhanced the instruments' comprehensiveness, relevancy, and clarity. While face validity was attained by making sure the instruments were clear, intelligible, and suitable for the intended respondents, content validity was established by matching all items with the study objectives, research questions, and theoretical framework.

Results and Discussion

Based on the research objectives, the study's results are presented in this part. Descriptive statistics, such as frequency distributions, mean scores, and standard deviations, are used to present the quantitative results from the survey given to 400 respondents. Mean scores of 3.00 and higher denoted acceptance, whereas mean scores of less than 3.00 denoted rejection, according to a decision procedure that was implemented. The results are examined in light of the study's goals and the body of research on political communication, public trust, state-owned enterprises (SOEs), and the legitimacy of governance.

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

The demographic characteristics of respondents are presented in Table 1. The variables considered include gender, age, educational qualification, and occupational status.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 400)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	218	54.5
	Female	182	45.5
	Total	400	100.0
Age	18–30 years	82	20.5
	31–40 years	118	29.5
	41–50 years	110	27.5
	Above 50 years	90	22.5
	Total	400	100.0
Educational Qualification	Secondary	54	13.5
	Diploma/NCE	78	19.5
	Bachelor’s Degree	176	44.0

	Postgraduate Degree	92	23.0
	Total	400	100.0
Occupation	Public Sector	126	31.5
	Private Sector	102	25.5
	Self-employed	88	22.0
	Student	48	12.0
	Others	36	9.0

Source: *Field Survey (2026)*

Male respondents made up 54.5% of the sample, while female respondents made up 45.5%, according to Table 1. Gender-based bias in perceptions of SOE performance and communication procedures is less likely because of the study's highly equal gender distribution, which indicates that opinions from both male and female citizens were included.

In terms of age distribution, the biggest percentage of respondents (29.5%) were between the ages of 31 and 40, closely followed by those between the ages of 41 and 50 (27.5%). This suggests that a sizable fraction of participants belonged to economically active age groups that are probably going to regularly use government services offered by SOEs.

According to the educational profile, the majority of respondents (44.0%) had bachelor's degrees, followed by those with postgraduate degrees (23.0%). This implies that the majority of participants had sufficient educational exposure to assess issues related to public accountability, institutional communication, and government performance. Employees from a variety of professional backgrounds participated, with public sector workers making up the largest group (31.5%) and private sector workers coming in second (25.5%).

Research Objective One

Objective One: To examine the influence of state-owned enterprises' service delivery performance on citizens' perceptions of government effectiveness and legitimacy.

Table 2: Influence of State-Owned Enterprises' Service Delivery Performance on Citizens' Perceptions of Government Effectiveness and Legitimacy (N = 400)

S/N	Statement	Mean	Std. Dev.	Decision
1	The quality of services provided by SOEs influences my perception of government performance.	4.32	0.71	Accepted
2	Efficient service delivery by SOEs increases my confidence in government institutions.	4.25	0.78	Accepted

3	Poor performance of SOEs negatively affects my perception of government legitimacy.	4.41	0.69	Accepted
4	Government effectiveness can be assessed through the performance of SOEs.	4.18	0.83	Accepted
5	Reliable services from SOEs strengthen citizens' trust in government.	4.27	0.76	Accepted
	Grand Mean	4.29	0.75	Accepted

Source: *Field Survey (2026)*

The findings in Table 2 reveal that respondents strongly agreed that the performance of state-owned enterprises significantly shapes citizens' perceptions of government effectiveness and legitimacy. The overall mean score of 4.29 indicates a high level of agreement among respondents.

The statement that *"poor performance of SOEs negatively affects my perception of government legitimacy"* recorded the highest mean score (4.41), suggesting that citizens often associate institutional failures within public enterprises with broader government performance. Similarly, the influence of service quality on perceptions of government performance recorded a mean score of 4.32.

This finding supports the argument of Bouckaert and Van de Walle (2003) that citizens frequently evaluate government legitimacy through the quality and reliability of public services. In democratic societies, public institutions serve as practical representations of government intentions and capacity. Therefore, failures in service delivery may weaken citizens' confidence in state authority.

The result also aligns with Grimmelikhuijsen and Knies (2017), who argue that institutional performance contributes significantly to public trust because citizens judge government credibility through observable outcomes. However, the finding contrasts with perspectives that regard political legitimacy as primarily determined by ideological commitment, electoral processes, or political identity rather than administrative performance. The evidence from this study suggests that everyday institutional experiences, particularly through SOEs, remain critical sources of legitimacy formation.

Research Objective Two

Objective Two: To assess the role of communication strategies adopted by state-owned enterprises in enhancing government-citizen engagement and public trust.

Table 3: Role of Communication Strategies Adopted by State-Owned Enterprises in Enhancing Government-Citizen Engagement and Public Trust (N = 400)

S/N	Statement	Mean	Std. dev.	Decision
1	Regular communication by SOEs improves citizens' understanding of government programmes.	4.21	0.81	Accepted
2	Social media engagement by SOEs promotes transparency and accountability.	4.16	0.85	Accepted

3	Effective communication by SOEs enhances public trust in government institutions.	4.34	0.73	Accepted
4	Citizens are more likely to engage with government when SOEs provide timely information.	4.29	0.77	Accepted
5	Stakeholder engagement initiatives undertaken by SOEs improve government-citizen relations.	4.24	0.79	Accepted
	Grand Mean	4.25	0.79	Accepted

Source: Field Survey (2026)

Table 3 demonstrates that communication strategies employed by SOEs play an important role in shaping public trust and strengthening government-citizen relationships. The overall mean score of 4.25 indicates that respondents generally agreed that effective communication enhances public understanding and engagement.

The highest-rated item was that *"effective communication by SOEs enhances public trust in government institutions"* (mean = 4.34). This implies that citizens perceive communication not merely as information dissemination but as a mechanism for accountability, transparency, and relationship-building.

The finding supports the argument of Canel and Luoma-aho (2019) that strategic public communication contributes to institutional legitimacy by creating dialogue between governments and citizens. Similarly, digital communication platforms, particularly social media, have become increasingly important tools through which public institutions explain policies and respond to citizens' concerns.

However, the relatively lower mean score for social media engagement (4.16) suggests that technological communication alone may not guarantee trust. This supports existing arguments that communication effectiveness depends on credibility, responsiveness, and consistency rather than simply the availability of communication platforms.

Research Objective Three

Objective Three: To determine the contribution of state-owned enterprises to the communication of government development agendas and governance outcomes.

Table 4: Contribution of State-Owned Enterprises to the Communication of Government Development Agendas and Governance Outcomes (N = 400)

S/N	Statement	Mean	Std. Dev.	Decision
1	Development projects implemented by SOEs communicate government commitment to national development.	4.37	0.72	Accepted
2	SOEs help citizens understand government development priorities.	4.20	0.84	Accepted

3	Public infrastructure projects undertaken by SOEs improve perceptions of government performance.	4.42	0.68	Accepted
4	Community development programmes of SOEs positively influence public opinion about government.	4.18	0.82	Accepted
5	SOEs serve as visible channels through which government achievements are communicated to citizens.	4.35	0.74	Accepted
	Grand Mean	4.30	0.76	Accepted

Source: Field Survey (2026)

The findings presented in Table 4 indicate that respondents strongly perceived SOEs as important channels through which governments communicate development achievements and policy commitments. The overall mean score of 4.30 demonstrates strong agreement regarding the political communication role of SOEs.

The highest-rated statement was that *"public infrastructure projects undertaken by SOEs improve perceptions of government performance"* (mean = 4.42). This suggests that visible development outcomes provide citizens with tangible evidence of government effectiveness. Similarly, respondents agreed that SOEs serve as channels through which government achievements are communicated (mean = 4.35).

The findings correspond with the institutional perspective of public administration, which argues that citizens often evaluate governments through visible outputs rather than policy declarations alone. SOEs therefore function as practical communication instruments because their activities translate government policies into observable services and projects.

Nevertheless, the findings also highlight a potential challenge. While SOEs can enhance government reputation, poor performance, corruption, or ineffective management may produce the opposite effect by communicating state failure rather than achievement. This reinforces the argument that institutional performance and communication effectiveness must operate together to strengthen democratic legitimacy.

Summary of Findings

In summary, the findings show that state-owned businesses serve as both political communication channels and institutions for providing services. While their communication tactics promote openness, trust, and citizen participation, their efficacy affects how residents view the ability of the government. The results support previous research that relates legitimacy with public sector performance, but they go further by showing that SOEs serve as crucial channels of communication for governments to build and preserve public trust in emerging democracies.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Using Nigeria as the empirical setting, this study investigated the function of state-owned companies (SOEs) as strategic political communication tools and their impact on public trust, government legitimacy, and citizen participation in developing democracies. The study was predicated on the knowledge that the calibre of services provided by public institutions is just as important to government communication as political speeches, media campaigns, and official statements. The study produced both quantitative and qualitative data on how citizens' perceptions of governance are influenced by the performance and communication strategies of SOEs by using a convergent parallel mixed-methods approach.

The results showed that citizens' perceptions of the efficacy and legitimacy of the government are strongly influenced by the quality of services provided by SOEs. The majority of respondents concurred that while ineffective institutional performance erodes public trust and government legitimacy, effective service delivery increases public confidence in government institutions. Because voters assess governments primarily through their daily contacts with public institutions, these results support the idea that institutional performance is a crucial component of political communication.

The study also found that SOEs' strategic communication practices—such as timely information distribution, stakeholder involvement, openness, and digital communication—are crucial for improving ties between the public and the government. Effective communication has been shown to promote citizens' willingness to interact with public authorities, increase institutional transparency, and improve public knowledge of government programs. This illustrates how communication in public organizations is a crucial governance technique that supports democratic accountability rather than just an administrative task.

The study also discovered that government development agendas are communicated through SOEs, which serve as visible channels. Public utility services, infrastructure projects, and community development programs carried out by SOEs were seen as concrete examples of the government's dedication to the advancement of the country. As a result, public views of governance results are influenced by both institutional performance and communication efficacy.

From a theoretical standpoint, the study adds to the body of knowledge on political communication by showing that communication should be viewed as both institutional performance and message transmission. By combining political communication theory with public administration and institutional performance viewpoints, it advances governance studies and offers a more comprehensive framework for comprehending how governments establish legitimacy in emerging democracies.

Practically speaking, the results indicate that governments looking to boost public trust should give top priority to enhancing state-owned firms' operational effectiveness, transparency, and communication capabilities. In addition to the creation of policies, effective governance also depends on the caliber of institutional execution and citizen communication.

This work adds significantly to our understanding of political communication, governance, and public administration. By showing that state-owned businesses serve as strategic communication actors whose service delivery performance conveys government competence, responsiveness, and legitimacy, it first expands the conceptual understanding of political communication. Second, the study adds to the comparatively small body of literature on the political communication roles of public companies in Africa by offering empirical data from a developing democratic setting. This study emphasises institutional performance as a key communication strategy, while the majority of prior research has focused on government media relations, election communication, or digital campaigns. Third, a thorough analytical framework for investigating the connection between institutional efficacy, public trust, and democratic governance is provided by the integration of quantitative and qualitative data. By highlighting the importance of fusing statistical information with contextual interpretations, this methodological approach advances future governance research.

Lastly, the study offers evidence that is pertinent to policy and can help governments, SOE management, and governance practitioners improve public sector accountability, promote citizen participation, and improve institutional communication methods. The following suggestions are put forth in light of the study's conclusions. First, governments should give top priority to increasing the operational effectiveness of state-owned businesses by providing sufficient financing, appointing executives on the basis of merit, conducting frequent performance reviews, and implementing institutional reforms. Better service delivery will boost democratic legitimacy and increase public trust in the administration.

Second, strategic communication frameworks that prioritize openness, responsiveness, stakeholder involvement, and proactive information sharing about government initiatives, programs, and organisational performance should be institutionalized in state-owned businesses. Third, in order to promote two-way communication and enhance public access to information, public institutions should bolster digital communication platforms by increasing the use of social media, interactive websites, mobile applications, and other digital technologies.

This study has a number of shortcomings despite its merits. First, the study's focus on Nigeria as a model emerging democracy may have limited the findings' applicability to nations with differing institutional, political, or economic contexts. Studies that compare several emerging democracies may yield more comprehensive conclusions.

Second, the quantitative results depended on respondents' opinions, which could be impacted by social desirability bias, political inclination, or individual experiences. Subjective perceptions cannot be totally excluded, even though the conclusions were triangulated with the aid of qualitative interviews and documentary data. Third, the study did not perform sector-specific assessments; instead, it looked at state-owned businesses as a whole. There may be differences in the efficiency of communication and the provision of services in several industries, including public utilities, energy, transportation, health, and telecommunications. Lastly, because the cross-sectional methodology only recorded respondents' opinions at one particular moment in time, it was unable to evaluate shifts in institutional performance or public trust over longer time periods.

Longitudinal study approaches should be used in future studies to investigate how changes in state-owned enterprise performance over time affect public trust and government legitimacy. More comprehensive information about the political communication function of public companies in various institutional and governance contexts would be provided by comparative cross-national research involving multiple developing democracies.

In order to ascertain whether communication tactics and governance outcomes vary among other types of state-owned firms, such as energy, transportation, healthcare, water resources, and telecommunications, future researchers should also conduct sector-specific studies. The moderating effects of digital transformation, artificial intelligence, e-governance, and social media analytics on state-owned firms' communication efficacy and their effect on public involvement may be investigated in future studies.

Lastly, to investigate the intricate causal relationships between institutional performance, strategic communication, public trust, government legitimacy, and democratic governance, future research should use sophisticated analytical techniques like structural equation modeling (SEM), multilevel modeling, or longitudinal panel analysis. These methods would improve the empirical knowledge of the function of state-owned businesses in modern public administration and governance and offer deeper theoretical insights.

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