Media as a Public Information Channel: Overcoming Barriers and Maximizing Governance Communication

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ABSTRACT

Effective governance depends on the capacity of local government units (LGUs) to disseminate public information that is accessible, clear, and inclusive. Despite the expanding use of digital platforms in government communication, structural inequalities and institutional coordination challenges continue to constrain their effectiveness, particularly in geographically dispersed municipalities. This study examines media as a public information channel in the Municipality of Cantilan, Surigao del Sur, Philippines, with the aim of identifying communication barriers and governance strategies that influence public information delivery across barangays with varying levels of accessibility.

An explanatory sequential mixed-methods design was employed. Quantitative data were gathered from 246 residents across four barangays, followed by in-depth interviews with 20 residents and barangay officials. Descriptive statistical analysis and reflexive thematic analysis reveal that while LGU Cantilan actively utilizes social media, official websites, and printed bulletins, communication effectiveness is hindered by inconsistent messaging, limited internet connectivity, and challenges in information comprehension. Digital platforms were perceived as frequently used but unevenly accessible, particularly in remote areas, resulting in continued reliance on traditional and interpersonal communication channels. The findings highlight the need for hybrid, equity oriented, and participatory communication systems that institutionalize feedback mechanisms and prioritize clarity and accessibility. The study contributes to public administration scholarship by emphasizing governance communication as a core institutional function essential to transparency, accountability, and citizen engagement.

Keywords: Media, Public information, Digital divide, Local governance, Citizen engagement.

INTRODUCTION

Effective governance in the digital era depends heavily on the ability of local government units (LGUs) to disseminate public information that is accessible, timely, and comprehensible to all constituents. Media platforms—ranging from digital channels such as social media and official websites to traditional print and interpersonal communication—serve as critical conduits for transparency, accountability, and citizen participation. However, the growing reliance on digital platforms has simultaneously exposed persistent inequalities in access, skills, and meaningful use, particularly in rural and geographically isolated communities.

Scholarly literature emphasizes the dual nature of media in governance. On one hand, digital platforms enhance transparency and engagement by enabling direct and interactive communication between governments and citizens (Cruz & Pangalangan, 2021). On the other hand, the digital divide remains a structural constraint that extends beyond connectivity to include affordability, device ownership, and digital literacy (Soriano & Cabañes, 2023; Van Dijk, 2020). Studies further note that fragmented and uncoordinated LGU communication strategies often lead to "strategic incoherence," where multiple platforms exist without unified messaging or clear authority, resulting in public confusion (Lee & Kwak, 2020; Orencia, 2023). Traditional media, while still vital for digitally excluded populations, is frequently undermined by irregular publication and limited reach (Alampay & Barbon, 2022).

In the Municipality of Cantilan, Surigao del Sur, these tensions between technological potential and lived realities are particularly evident. Although the LGU operates multiple platforms—including an official

Facebook page, website, and the Cantilan Bulletin—significant disparities persist in information access and comprehension across barangays. Remote areas such as Barangay Lobo experience weak or nonexistent connectivity, while even more accessible barangays contend with inconsistent signals and economic barriers such as reliance on paid Piso WiFi. These conditions contribute to missed announcements, reliance on informal information networks, and uncertainty regarding official sources.

Anchored in the constitutional right to information and freedom of expression (1987 Philippine Constitution, Art. III, Secs. 4 and 7), as well as statutory mandates under the Local Government Code of 1991 (RA 7160), this study addresses a critical governance problem: How effective is media as a public information channel in reaching diverse barangays, and what barriers limit its role in maximizing governance communication?

Specifically, the study aims to :

(1)   identify media platforms and strategies used by LGU Cantilan;

(2)   examine how residents from accessible and remote barangays receive and respond to public information;

(3)   determine communication barriers experienced by residents and LGU personnel;

(4)   surface community-generated solutions for improving two-way communication; and

(5)   develop a citizen-centered governance communication framework.

The study is guided by the hypothesis that the mere presence of multiple media platforms does not guarantee equitable access or comprehension, and that a hybrid, participatory communication system is necessary to overcome structural and institutional barriers.

METHODS

Research Design

The study employed an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design, wherein quantitative data collection and analysis preceded and informed qualitative inquiry (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Shorten & Smith, 2021). This design enabled the identification of broad patterns in media access and barriers, followed by in-depth exploration of the lived experiences underlying those patterns.

Research Locale And Participants

The research was conducted in four purposively selected barangays in Cantilan, Surigao del Sur— Magosilom, San Pedro, Buntalid, and Lobo—chosen to represent varying levels of geographic accessibility and telecommunications infrastructure. A total of 246 residents participated in the survey component through stratified random sampling, proportionally distributed across the selected barangays. In addition, 20 participants (16 residents and 4 barangay officials) were purposively selected for in-depth interviews to provide information rich perspectives.

TABLE 1. **DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS/ PARTICIPANTS**

Barangay	Purok with Highest Residents	No. of Households	No. of Respondents	Participants	
				Residents	Barangay Official
Lobo	Purok 2	33	13	4	1

San Pedro	Purok 5	195	75	4	1
Magosilom	Purok 2	342	132	4	1
Buntalid	Purok 6	68	26	4	1
Total		**638**	**246**	**16**	**4**

Research Instruments

Data were collected using a researcher-developed structured questionnaire consisting of four parts: (1) media platforms and strategies, (2) residents' access and response, (3) communication barriers, and (4) openended questions on community suggestions. Quantitative items used a five-point Likert scale, while qualitative items elicited narrative responses.

The instrument underwent face and content validation by three experts in public information and local governance and was pilot-tested among 30 respondents from a nonparticipating barangay. Reliability analysis yielded a Cronbach's alpha of 0.96, indicating excellent internal consistency.

Data Gathering Procedure

Data collection was conducted in August 2025 following approval from the Municipal Mayor's Office and coordination with barangay officials. Surveys and interviews were administered in person to ensure inclusivity and a 100% retrieval rate. Informed consent was obtained from all participants in compliance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012 (RA 10173).

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using **descriptive statistics**, including frequencies, percentages, and weighted means, to assess perceptions of media use, access, and barriers. Qualitative data were analyzed using **Braun and Clarke's reflexive thematic analysis** (2006, 2022), following systematic phases of familiarization, coding, theme development, and interpretation. Integration of quantitative and qualitative findings occurred during interpretation.

RESULTS

Media Platforms And Communication Strategies

Residents generally perceived LGU Cantilan's media use as active, with an overall weighted mean of **3.89 ("Frequently Used")**. The official website received the highest rating ($\bar{x}$ = 4.02), while consistency across platforms received the lowest ($\bar{x}$ = 3.74).

TABLE 2. Media Platforms And Strategies Of Lgu Cantilan

Indicators	Mean	Interpretation
1. The LGU effectively uses Facebook to disseminate public information.	3.85	Frequently Used
2. The LGU maintains an updated official website to share programs and services.	4.02	Frequently Used
3. The LGU publishes the Cantilan Bulletin to provide printed updates.	3.88	Frequently Used

4. The communication strategies of the LGU are clear, timely, and consistent across all platforms	3.74	Frequently Used
5. The LGU uses visual content (e.g., infographics,	3.96	Frequently Used
posters, livestreams) to understanding of improve public information.		
Over-all Mean	**3.89**	Frequently Used

Residents' Access And Response To Announcements

Residents reported regular receipt of announcements through both social media and barangay officials ($\bar{x}$ = 3.87). However, clarity of announcements received the lowest rating ($\bar{x}$ = 3.72), indicating a gap between access and comprehension.

Table 3. Residents' Access and Response to Announcements

Indicator	Mean	Interpretation
1. I regularly receive announcements through official social media platforms.	3.87	Agree
2. I received announcements from barangay officials or community meetings.	3.87	Agree
3. I understand the announcements clearly when they are released.	3.72	Agree
4. I have access to at least one regular source of LGU information (e.g., Facebook, radio, bulletin)	3.79	Agree
5. I follow the instructions provided in LGU announcements.	3.85	Agree
Over-all Mean	**3.82**	**Agree**

Communication Barriers

Communication barriers were rated as significant (overall $\bar{x}$ = 3.67, "Agree"). The most prominent issue was inconsistent receipt of announcements ($\bar{x}$ = 3.72), followed by poor internet connectivity ($\bar{x}$ = 3.69) and difficulty verifying official sources ($\bar{x}$ = 3.62).

TABLE 4. COMMUNICATION BARRIERS EXPERIENCED BY RESIDENTS

Indicator	Mean	Interpretation
1. I often experience poor or no internet signal when accessing LGU announcements.	3.69	Agree
2. I do not always receive announcements comes from LGU.	3.72	Agree
3. It is hard to tell whether an announcement comes from the LGU or unofficial source.	3.62	Agree

4. LGU announcements are not posted or shared frequently.	3.65	Agree
5. I usually learn about LGU updates from neighbors	3.66	Agree
or friends, not official platforms.		
Over-all Mean — **3.67**		**Agree**

Community-Suggested Improvements

Thematic analysis generated five major themes: (1) use of traditional communication channels, (2) improved frequency and clarity of information, (3) structured feedback mechanisms, (4) optimization of the Cantilan Bulletin, and (5) connectivity and barangay-based information centers.

Table 5. Thematic Analysis of Community and Barangay Official Suggestions

Category	Theme	Sub-theme
Communication Channels	Use of Traditional Communication Channels	Megaphones, Mobile Announcements, Barangay Assemblies
Information Management	Improve Frequency and Accessibility of Information	Regular Posting, Clear Language, Accessibility for Older Adults
Citizen Engagement	Feedback Mechanisms for Citizens	Suggestion Boxes, SMS Hotline, Facebook Messenger
Print Media Optimization	Cantilan Bulletin	Local Language Version, Regular Distribution
Infrastructure & Human Resources	Connectivity Solutions and Barangay-Based Info Centers	WiFi Hotspots, Signal Boosters, Barangay Focal Persons

DISCUSSION

The findings demonstrate that while LGU Cantilan maintains multiple media platforms, platform presence alone does not ensure equitable or effective communication. Consistent with Lee and Kwak's (2020) concept of strategic incoherence, fragmented messaging and uneven platform management undermine the reliability of official information. The persistent influence of the digital divide—validated by Soriano and Cabañes (2023) and Van Dijk (2020)—explains why residents in remote barangays continue to rely on megaphones, assemblies, and interpersonal networks.

The results further reveal a critical distinction between information access and information comprehension, reinforcing arguments for plain language communication and audience-sensitive message design (Gunnarsson & Pettersson, 2023; Tesoro, 2022). Community suggestions highlight strong demand for participatory, two-way communication systems, aligning with co-creation and hybrid governance models (Bovaird & Loeffler, 2020; Torres, 2022).

Despite its contributions, the study is limited to selected barangays and focuses on communication processes rather than program outcomes. Nonetheless, the integration of quantitative patterns and qualitative insights enabled the development of a context-sensitive framework—the Cantilan Responsive, Accessible, and Participatory (CRAP) Communication System—which operationalizes redundant dissemination, localization, feedback loops, and institutional capacity-building.

Overall, the study affirms that effective governance communication must evolve from one-way broadcasting to citizen-centered, hybrid, and participatory systems, particularly in municipalities marked by geographic and digital inequalities.

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