

Digital Communication Skills Required of Office Technology and Management Graduates for Effective Performance in Tertiary Institutions in Ebonyi State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The study is necessitated by poor performance of Office Technology and Management (OTM) graduates, and ascertained digital communication skills required of them for effective performance in tertiary institutions in Ebonyi State. One research question guided the study and two null hypotheses were tested. The study adopted descriptive survey research design with a population of 302 administrative heads from six public tertiary institutions in Ebonyi State studied without sampling. A validated structured questionnaire was used for data collection. The reliability of the instrument was established using trial-testing and data analyzed using Cronbach Alpha which yielded a coefficient value of 0.80. Data collected were analyzed using mean and standard deviation to the answer research question and to determine the homogeneity of the responses obtained. The null hypotheses were tested using ANOVA. Findings of the study revealed among others that digital communication skills such as listening attentively on digital conversation to gain understanding and communicate virtually using body language are highly required while composing correspondences in an email, format and respond to email messages and conveying information accurately on social media are required for effective performance of OTM graduates in tertiary institutions in Ebonyi State. The findings of hypotheses showed that there was no significant difference in the mean ratings of administrative heads on digital communication skills required of OTM graduates for effective performance in tertiary institutions in Ebonyi State based on years of working experience. Equally, there was no significant difference in the mean ratings of administrative heads on digital communication skills required of OTM graduates for effective performance in tertiary institutions in Ebonyi State based on type of institution. Based on the findings, it was recommended among others that OTM graduates working in tertiary institutions in Ebonyi State should be constantly retrained through in-service training to enable them up-date their digital communication skills for effective performance in their offices.

Keywords: *Communication, Digital Communication Skills, Performance, OTM Graduates*

INTRODUCTION

Communication is central to keeping people together and has been identified as one of the fundamental determinants of job opportunities, sustenance and security. Communication according to Ademiluyi (2021) is a means of exchanging information by speaking, writing or using other media. It deals with how and when to use utterances appropriately. Abdulazeez (2017) noted that the ability to communicate information accurately, clearly and as intended is a vital life skill and something that should not be overlooked. Ezechukwu, Okanazu, Babalulu, Arowolo and Olelewe (2021) provided that communication has intellectual, socio-cultural, psychological, technological and linguistic dimension. Communication skill remains one of the employability skills needed for effective performance in workplace and a priority to meet global standard of performance in offices.

Adakole, Abiodun and Zubairu (2024) provided that the ability to execute office work and business more effectively and in a way that is much more globally competitive has improved as a result of emerging technology. The evolution of digital technology has also provided room for individuals to communicate digitally. Putro (2023) viewed digital communication as a form of interaction that utilizes technology to communicate without direct physical presence. The advantages of technology-supported communication have reduced distances, allowing individuals to communicate around the world at a high speed of point in time. Digital communication skills are essential in today's world, where technology is rapidly advancing and becoming more integrated into our daily lives.

Digital communication skills refer to the abilities and competencies required to effectively convey information and interact with others using digital platforms and tools. Otamiri and Amadi (2022) conceptualize digital communication as a sum of emailing, web conferencing skill and cloud computing skill. These skills encompass a wide range of practices and technologies that facilitate communication in today's digitally-driven environment. Proficiency in digital communication enable OTM graduates to effectively craft clear, concise and professional written messages whether in email, social media posts, reports as well as speaking clearly and effectively in visual settings. It also enables them to create and interpret visual content.

In today's rapidly evolving digital landscape, the demand for proficient digital communication skills has become paramount, especially in the field of OTM. These competencies enable OTM graduates to convey ideas, coordinate efforts and solve problem in real-time, which is fundamental for project management and innovation in the digital era (Chaka, 2020). OTM graduates in the digital age must know how to effectively convey and receive messages in person as well as through phone, email and social media which include workplace platforms such as slack and Microsoft teams. The ability to communicate effectively with superiors, colleagues and staff is essential for effective performance of OTM graduates in offices.

Performance is the work quality and quantity achieved by an employee in carrying out his function in accordance with the responsibility given to him (Utin & Sri, 2019). Employees' job performance is known to have a significant relationship in the attainment of goals of the organization which is of utmost interest to organizational manager (Obi, 2022). Adesanya, Sotayo and Bolarinwa (2020) observed that the quality of an employee has important influence on his performances in the office. Digital communication skills are, therefore, crucial for effective performance of OTM graduates in the modern workplace as it equips them with essential skills that enhances job prospects and enable them to effectively manage information and technology in various professional setting.

OTM graduates are individuals who have successfully completed a programme of study in Office technology and management education programme in tertiary institutions. In the context of this study, OTM graduates are employees of tertiary institutions who work as administrative assistants, office managers or professional secretaries. Developing and demonstrating strong digital communication skills can significantly enhance OTM graduates' job prospects and career advancement opportunities. Kehinde and Olatunde (2022) in their study upheld that digital communication skills are basic necessity to reduce unemployment among OTM graduates. Unfortunately, Okeke and Ifesi (2018) provided that the difficulty of OTM graduates to utilize various computer-based technologies, and the outcry of supervisors about the inability of graduates of the OTM programme to use various ICT applications in carrying out office functions is worrisome. In order to bridge the gap of inefficiency and underperformance of OTM graduates, Ojiaku, Nkanmebe and Nwaizugbo (2018) emphasized that on-the-job training should be considered a golden opportunity for graduates with little experience since it allows them to learn as they work.

OTM graduate needs to be able to open an email account, use a web browser, access internet application software, and communicate online with clients and coworkers (Mshelia and Orheruata, 2022). Doyle (2025) stressed that employers across industries are looking for digital communication professionals with a variety of specific skill sets. These individuals are highly demanded by organizations for numerous tasks that ranges from creating online brand assets to building an engaged social media audience with the hope of promoting sales and increase profits.

Acquisition of digital communication skills provide OTM graduates the ability to utilize digital devices as well as communicating effectively. This is in line with Ademiluyi (2021) who provided that proficiency with digital technology enables OTM graduates to effectively interact, cooperate, share digital content, and resolve issues remotely. This study focused on digital communication skills required of OTM graduates and the findings of this study will provide comprehensive empirical evidence of the digital communication skills as required by OTM graduates for effective performance in tertiary institutions in Ebonyi State.

To ascertain the digital skills, opinion of the administrative heads in the tertiary institutions is crucial since they are ones responsible for overseeing the operations and management of the specific offices where employed OTM graduates perform their duties. They are also in a better position to give account of the job performance of OTM graduates as well as digital communication skills required of them to be relevant in their offices. Administrative heads in the context of this study are heads of various divisions, departments and units within the tertiary institutions.

The influencing factors on digital communication skills required of OTM graduates for effective performance in tertiary institutions in Ebonyi State could be years of working experience and type of tertiary institution. Years of working experience refers to the number of years one spends as administrative heads. Ile and Okafor (2023) averred that differences in training experiences may lead to the acquisition of different competencies. Adebayo in Osahon (2018) noted that experience of an assessor is a significant factor that can influence the credibility of an individual assessment. Similarly, type of institutions may influence employability skills required by OTM graduates for effective job performance. It could be that employability skills required in universities may differ from those required in the polytechnics while those required in the polytechnics may differ from those required in colleges of education. Oussama and Abdelkader (2019) stated from their observation that employability skills may differ from one employer to another.

Tertiary institutions in Nigeria are institutions that provide education to students after secondary school education. The types include universities, polytechnics and colleges of education. The major aim of tertiary institutions includes the acquisition, development and inculcation of the proper value orientation, acquisition of both physical and intellectual skills for the survival of the individual and society. In tertiary institution, OTM graduates are expected to engage with diverse stakeholders in faculties, departments, administrators, students and colleagues among others. Their ability to communicate clearly and professionally through digital means is paramount.

Unfortunately, Otamiri, Odu and Nwabali (2020) and Odu (2019) revealed that the level of digital literacy is still very low among administrative staff, OTM graduates inclusive. The authors added that in some cases, administrative documents are even typed in commercial computer centres in spite of the presence of functional computer systems in some of the administrative offices. In the same vein Otamiri and Baribuna (2022) observed that suggested that only a few administrative managers in tertiary institutions can comfortably use online communication tools such as email, web conferencing in executing administrative tasks. This coincides with David and Glambona (2018) who averred that digital skill gap in areas of internet communication, word processing makes it difficult for the administrative system of tertiary institutions to maximize the numerous investments made in the procurement of ICT facilities. It was against this background

that this study was carried out to determine digital communication skills required of OTM graduates for effective performance in tertiary institutions in Ebonyi State, Nigeria.

Statement of Problem

The effective performance of OTM graduates in digital age hinges on their ability to communicate proficiently through various digital platform. As organizations increasingly rely on digital platforms for communication, collaboration and information sharing, the expectation for OTM graduates to possess strong digital communication competencies increases. The researcher's interaction with some OTM graduates suggested that some OTM graduates in tertiary institutions lack digital communication skills required of them for effective performance in their offices.

The researcher's observation also revealed that many OTM graduates cannot use online communication tools like e-mail, web conferencing and other information sharing tools in carrying out administrative tasks. As a result, work meant for OTM graduates are been handled by graduates of other discipline thereby rendering such OTM graduates professional job specifics irrelevant.

Theoretical Underpinning

This study is anchored on Skills theory of leadership also known as Skills theory which was propounded by Robert Katz in 1955. The theory emphasizes on the skills and competencies that make effective leaders. The theory posited that leadership can be developed and improved through the acquisition and shaping of specific skills and abilities. The theory focused on examining the skills and abilities individual possess and how these skills can be developed and utilized in the workplace. It stressed that individual's skills are the primary determinant of job performance and career progression. The theory offered a valuable insight into what makes a leader effective and provides a practical framework for leadership development. The theory categorized skills into three main types namely technical skills, human capital skills and conceptual skills. The model is also relevant to the present study because it highlights the importance of continuous learning and skills development, as skills are not static but evolve over time in response to changing technology, job requirements and organizational needs.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of the study was to ascertain digital communication skills required of OTM graduates for effective performance in tertiary institutions in Ebonyi State.

Research Question

What are the digital communication skills required of OTM graduates for effective performance in tertiary institutions in Ebonyi State?

Hypotheses

1. There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of administrative heads on digital communication skills required of OTM graduates for effective performance in tertiary institutions in Ebonyi State based on their years of working experience (below 5 years, 5 - 10 years and above 10 years).

2. There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of administrative heads on digital communication skills required of OTM graduates for effective performance in tertiary institutions in Ebonyi State based on type of institution (Universities, Polytechnic and Colleges of Education)

Research Method

The study was conducted in Ebonyi State using descriptive survey research design. The state has 13 Local Government Areas mainly Igbos, dominantly farmers and civil servants. The population of the study comprised 302 administrative heads in six public tertiary institutions. The entire population was studied without sampling. A validated structured instrument titled “Digital Communication Skills Required of Office Technology and Management Graduates (DCSROTMG)” developed by the researcher was used for data collection. The instrument contains items structured on four-point rating scale of Highly Required (HR), Required (R), Lowly Required (LR) and Not Required (NR), which were weighted as 4, 3, 2, and 1 respectively. The internal consistency of the instrument was established with a pilot test and data obtained analyzed using Cronbach alpha, with 0.80 value obtained. 302 copies of the questionnaire were administered to the administrative heads in the public tertiary institutions in Ebonyi State with the help of three research assistants who are OTM graduates in tertiary institutions in Ebonyi State to collect data for the study. Direct approach was employed in the data collection in order to ensure that copies of the questionnaire administered were properly filled and successfully retrieved. A total of 300 copies were successfully retrieved indicated 90 percent return. It took the researcher two weeks to distribute and collect data. The data collected were analyzed using mean and standard deviation to answer research questions and determine the homogeneity of the respondents’ opinion.

Result

What are the digital communication skills required of OTM graduates for effective performance in tertiary institutions in Ebonyi State?

Table 1: Respondents’ mean ratings and standard deviation of digital communication skills required of OTM graduates for effective performance

S/NO	Items on digital communication skills required	X	SD	Remarks
Ability to:				
1.	compose correspondences in an email	3.33	.55	Required
2.	format and respond to email messages	3.20	.51	Required
3.	make effective virtual presentation	3.45	.50	Required
4.	convey information accurately on social media	3.34	.58	Required
5.	organize and participate in virtual meeting using zoom or Microsoft team	3.39	.69	Required
6.	share screen effectively while on video conversation	3.49	.60	Required
7.	download information from internet	3.43	.57	Required
8.	upload information into the internet	3.36	.59	Required
9.	listen attentively on digital conversation to gain understanding	3.50	.65	Highly Required
10.	communicate virtually using body language	3.53	.68	Highly Required
11.	contribute positively during digital conversation	3.43	.70	Required
Cluster Mean		3.40		Required

Data in Table 1 shows that out of 11 digital communication skills rated as required of OTM graduates for effective performance, respondents rated items 9 and 10 as highly required with mean scores of 3.50 and 3.53. The remaining nine items were rated required with mean scores that ranged between 3.20 to 3.49. The cluster mean score of 3.40 shows that digital communication skills are required of OTM graduates for effective performance in tertiary institutions in Ebonyi State. The standard deviation ranging from .51 to .70 indicates that the respondents are not wide apart in their ratings.

Hypothesis 1

There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of administrative heads on digital communication skills required of OTM graduates for effective performance in tertiary institutions in Ebonyi State based on their years of working experience.

Table 2: Summary of one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) on the ratings of administrative heads on digital communication skills required of OTM graduates for effective performance based on years of working experience

Source of Variance	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p-value	Decision
Between Groups	69.61	2	34.81	3.94	1.00	Not Significant
Within Groups	857.14	297	8.84			
Total	926.75	300				

Table 2 shows f-ratio of 3.94 at 2 and 297 degrees of freedom with a p-value of 1.00 which is greater than the p-value of .05 ($1.00 > .05$). This means that there is no significant difference in the mean ratings of administrative heads on digital communication skills required of OTM graduates for effective performance in tertiary institutions in Ebonyi State based on years of working experience. Therefore, the null hypothesis was not rejected.

Hypothesis 2

There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of administrative heads on digital communication skills required of OTM graduates for effective performance in tertiary institutions in Ebonyi State based on type of institution.

Table 3: Summary of one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) on the ratings of administrative heads on digital communication skills required of OTM graduates for effective performance based on type of institution

Source of Variance	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p-value	Decision
Between Groups	66.59	2	33.29	3.75	.31	Not Significant
Within Groups	860.17	297	8.87			
Total	926.75	300				

Table 3 shows f-ratio of 3.75 at 2 and 297 degrees of freedom with a p-value of .31 which is greater than the p-value of .05 ($.31 > .05$). This means that there is no significant difference in the mean ratings of administrative heads on digital communication skills required of OTM

graduates for effective performance in tertiary institutions in Ebonyi State based on type of institution. Therefore, the null hypothesis was not rejected

Discussion of Findings

Findings of the study revealed that digital communication skills such as listen attentively on digital conversation to gain understanding and communicate virtually using body language are highly required while composing correspondences in an email, format and respond to email messages and convey information accurately on social media are required of OTM graduates for effective performance in tertiary institutions in Ebonyi State. The findings could be attributed to the importance of digital communication skills in enhancing the effectiveness of both employees and organizational performance. The finding agrees with Chaka (2020) who stated that digital communication skills were needed by OTM graduates of tertiary institutions to be able to convey ideas, coordinate efforts and solve problem in real-time, which is fundamental for project management and innovation in modern organizations. Putro (2023) noted that digital communication allows managers to interact quickly and efficiently with their team members, without being constrained by time constraints of physical location. The finding also agrees with Otamiri and Baribuma (2022) who provided that the ability to utilize emails and share information on WhatsApp makes it easy for administrative information to be circulated on time, and as well get feedback on time. Mshelia and Orheruata (2022) also concur with the finding that OTM graduate needs to be able to open an email account, use a web browser, access internet application software, and communicate online with clients and coworkers. Kehinde and Olatunde (2022) noted that digital communication skills are crucial skills needed by OTM graduates for effective job performance in digital offices.

Findings of the study also indicated that there was no significant difference in the mean ratings of administrative heads on digital communication skills required of OTM graduates for effective performance in tertiary institutions in Ebonyi State based on years of working experience and type of institution. This means that administrative heads irrespective of their years of working experience and type of institutions where they are working, all indicated that OTM graduates require digital communication skills for effective performance in offices. In agreement, finding concur with Otamiri and Baribuma (2022) who stated that there is no significant relationship between digital communication skills and timely task completion by administrative managers in public tertiary institutions. Adakole, Abiodun and Zubairu (2024) found that administrative supervisors' perceptions regarding the digital communication skills required of OTM graduates are not significantly influenced by their years of working experience or the type of institution they work for.

Finally, the findings have serious implication on the training of OTM students in OTM department. The findings imply that delivery of OTM programme in tertiary institutions in equipping students with digital communication skills is crucial for effective performance in offices upon graduation. Failure to equip students with these necessary skills may lead to a significant skill mismatch where graduates possess qualification but lack competencies required by employers. Equipping students with necessary digital communication skills not only enhance their performance but also improve institutional reputation and as well lead to increased enrollment. The findings also imply regular review and inclusion of evolving communication skills in OTM curriculum. When properly integrated, students would become holistically prepared for modern office environment upon graduation. If ignored, ill-prepared graduates would be produced.

Conclusion

The study highlights the critical role digital communication skills play in the contemporary educational and professional landscape. As digital communication skills continue to evolve, it is imperative for OTM graduates to possess a robust set of competencies that enable them to navigate various communication platforms effectively. It is concluded from the findings of this study that digital communication skills are required of OTM graduates for effective performance in tertiary institutions.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Office Technology and Management (OTM) graduates working in tertiary institutions in Ebonyi State should be constantly retrained by Management of tertiary institutions through in-service training, workshops, seminars and conferences to enable them up-date their digital communication skills for effective performance.
2. The curriculum planners of OTM programme in the various tertiary institutions in Nigeria should review its contents to incorporate digital communication skills as identified in this study. This will help them to perform their office tasks effectively.
3. OTM lecturers in Nigerian tertiary institutions should lay more emphasis on hands-on-practice exercises to enable their students acquire needed digital communication skills for effective performance in modern offices after graduation.

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