



Public Sentiment towards the Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) on Facebook: A Sentiment Analysis of User Comments

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Abstract

This study examined public sentiment towards the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) on Facebook, focusing on the distribution and contextual interpretation of comments on two selected enforcement-related posts. Anchored in Social Judgement Theory, the study adopted a quantitative content analysis design. The population comprised approximately 5,201 comments on posts concerning Blessing CEO's arraignment and the alleged ₦110.4 billion fraud case involving Yahaya Bello. Using Yamane's formula and proportionate allocation, 371 comments were selected through systematic sampling. Data were analysed using frequencies and percentages to classify comments as positive, negative, neutral, or mixed/ambiguous. The findings revealed that negative sentiment predominated across the sampled comments, although reactions differed between the two cases. Positive sentiment was more prevalent in comments on the Blessing CEO post, whereas negative sentiment dominated the Yahaya Bello discussion. Neutral and mixed/ambiguous comments further demonstrated the importance of contextual interpretation in understanding online expressions. The study concludes that public responses to EFCC communication may reflect differing expectations of justice, accountability and institutional credibility. Therefore, it recommends that the Commission strengthen transparent, timely and responsive digital engagement, clarify enforcement procedures, and address public concerns while respecting due process.

Keywords: EFCC, Facebook, public sentiment, sentiment analysis, social media,

Introduction

Public institutions do not communicate in a vacuum; the significance of their messages also lies in how citizens interpret, evaluate and respond to them (Hofmann et al., 2013; DePaula et al., 2018). In the digital communication environment, these responses are increasingly visible in comments, replies and other forms of user-generated content through which people express approval, disagreement, suspicion, expectations and demands for accountability (Yaqub et al., 2021; Dong & Lian, 2021). Social media therefore provides a valuable source of data for examining public responses to institutional communication, while sentiment analysis offers a systematic means of identifying and interpreting the attitudes expressed in large volumes of textual data (Drus & Khalid, 2019; Xu et al., 2022). Nevertheless, the availability of these expressions does not mean that public sentiment can be understood simply by counting favourable and unfavourable comments. The language used, the issues being discussed and the context in which opinions are expressed are equally important to their interpretation.

This problem is particularly relevant to the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), Nigeria's principal specialised agency for investigating and prosecuting economic and financial crimes within its statutory mandate. As an institution whose activities concern corruption, financial misconduct, law enforcement and public accountability, the Commission operates in an environment in which its actions may attract both public approval and criticism. Its official



Facebook page provides a setting in which users can respond directly to institutional announcements and reports of enforcement activities. Such comments may communicate support for the fight against financial crime, but they may also raise questions about fairness, transparency, consistency and the perceived credibility of the Commission. Understanding these responses is important because the publication of institutional information does not, in itself, establish how audiences receive or evaluate the message.

Prior research on the EFCC's social media communication by Adebumiti and Oboh (2018) examined Facebook users' reactions to the Commission's anti-corruption campaign, while Akoja and Bamgbelu (2019) investigated undergraduates' perceptions of its social media engagement. Beyond the EFCC context, Drus and Khalid (2019) and Xu et al. (2022) highlighted the value of sentiment analysis for examining social media opinions, noting challenges associated with language, data quality and classification. However, further investigation is needed to systematically classify and interpret sentiments expressed under different categories of the EFCC's Facebook posts. This study addresses this gap by combining sentiment classification with thematic analysis to determine the distribution of positive, negative and neutral sentiments and identify the issues underlying users' responses.

Statement of the Problem

The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) uses its official Facebook page to disseminate information about its activities, educate the public on economic and financial crimes, promote transparency and accountability, and encourage public support for its anti-corruption efforts. Through such communication, the Commission may also seek to strengthen its institutional image, build public confidence and foster constructive engagement with citizens. However, publishing information about its activities does not necessarily guarantee favourable public responses. Facebook posts may attract a mixture of positive, negative and neutral comments, reflecting users' approval, criticism, distrust, expectations or concerns about the Commission's operations. Such responses may reveal differences between the image the EFCC seeks to project and how users interpret its activities.

Without systematically examining these reactions, the Commission may have limited insight into the sentiments expressed by its online audience, the issues informing those sentiments and their implications for digital public relations and stakeholder engagement. Although previous studies (Adebumiti & Oboh, 2018; Akoja & Bamgbelu, 2019; Oyeyemi & Umoro, 2026; Shehu et al., 2025) have examined the EFCC's social media communication and public perceptions of its engagement practices, there remains a need for further empirical investigation of the distribution and underlying themes of sentiments expressed in comments on its official Facebook page. Based on the aforementioned, this study was conducted, it sought to generate evidence-based insights into users expressed attitudes towards the Commission and the implications for its digital communication and public engagement strategies.

Literature Review

EFCC: An Overview

The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) was established in 2003 under the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (Establishment) Act, 2004, which provides its statutory framework and mandate. The Commission was created to address economic and financial crimes in Nigeria, including advance-fee fraud, money laundering, financial malpractices and other offences within its jurisdiction. Its responsibilities include investigating and prosecuting



economic and financial crimes, preventing such offences, enforcing relevant laws and coordinating efforts with other institutions involved in combating financial crime. The Commission's stated vision is a Nigeria free of economic and financial crimes, while its mission emphasises prevention, enforcement and coordination (EFCC, n.d.).

In pursuing this mandate, the EFCC employs multiple communication strategies, including media relations, press releases, public enlightenment campaigns, community outreach, radio and television programming, and digital communication. Social media, particularly Facebook, provides a platform for disseminating information about arrests, investigations, prosecutions, asset recovery, fraud prevention and anti-corruption initiatives, while enabling users to respond through comments and other forms of engagement. The Commission has also acknowledged the importance of digital platforms in encouraging citizen participation in the fight against corruption (EFCC, 2022).

Review of Empirical Studies

Existing studies on the EFCC's social media communication, public perception of anti-corruption campaigns and sentiment analysis provide a useful foundation for examining public sentiment towards the Commission on Facebook. However, they differ in their research focus, analytical approaches and the extent to which they explain the sentiments expressed in online discussions. Adebumiti and Oboh (2018) examined social media users' reactions to the EFCC's anti-corruption campaign, classifying Facebook responses as positive, objective or negative. Their study establishes a direct precedent for analysing audience reactions to the Commission's online communication. Nevertheless, classifying comments by their general tone does not necessarily explain the issues underlying those responses or distinguish criticism of a particular enforcement action from broader distrust of the institution. Similarly, Akoja and Bamgbelu (2019) investigated undergraduates' perceptions of the EFCC's use of social media for citizen engagement. Although their study contributes to understanding audience perceptions of institutional communication, its focus on questionnaire responses differs from an analysis of naturally occurring Facebook comments.

Research employing sentiment-analysis techniques offers additional methodological insights. Aremu and Muhammad (2024) applied sentiment analysis to social media reactions to increased university fees, demonstrating the relevance of classifying online opinions in the Nigerian context. Olabanjo et al. (2023), in their analysis of social media discourse surrounding Nigeria's 2023 presidential election, explored computational approaches to identifying sentiment in politically consequential discussions. While these studies demonstrate the applicability of sentiment analysis to public issues, their contexts differ from institutional communication by an anti-corruption agency. Therefore, their findings cannot be directly generalised to public responses to the EFCC. Asefon et al. (2024) further contribute to the methodological discussion through their comparative examination of machine-learning algorithms for multilingual Nigerian social media comments. Their work highlights the importance of selecting appropriate classification techniques when analysing online discourse in a linguistically diverse environment. However, computational classification alone cannot fully explain the contextual meanings of users' comments, particularly where sarcasm, local expressions or criticism directed at specific institutional actions are involved. These studies therefore support combining systematic sentiment classification with contextual interpretation rather than relying exclusively on automated polarity scores.



The importance of interpreting online expressions within their social and institutional contexts is further illustrated by Olaleye and Dahunsi (2026), who examined comments on Facebook and Nairaland concerning Nigeria's controversial 2025 Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME) through Appraisal Theory. Their focus on evaluative language offers a useful perspective for understanding how online users communicate judgement, dissatisfaction and other attitudes towards public institutions and events. In the EFCC context, Oyeyemi and Umoro (2026) examined Benin City residents' perceptions of the Commission's anti-corruption media campaign, while Shehu et al. (2025) investigated public perceptions of the EFCC's arrest of Yahaya Bello in the context of social media. These studies are relevant because they situate public responses within broader concerns about anti-corruption communication and institutional legitimacy. Nevertheless, research on residents' perceptions and reactions to a specific enforcement case is analytically distinct from examining the sentiments expressed in comments posted directly under the EFCC's official Facebook content. The distinction matters because general perceptions elicited through surveys or interviews may differ from the immediate, issue-specific responses users choose to express online. The present study therefore draws on these works for contextual understanding without treating their findings as direct evidence of sentiment patterns on the Commission's Facebook page.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Social Judgement Theory (SJT) as developed by Muzafer Sherif and Carl I. Hovland in 1961, and further developed through the work of Carolyn W. Sherif and Roger Nebergall. The theory was formally presented in their book *Social Judgment: Assimilation and Contrast Effects in Communication and Attitude Change* (Sherif & Hovland, 1961). Its basic assumption is that individuals evaluate messages and information by comparing them with their existing attitudes, beliefs, values and experiences. The theory identifies three categories, or latitudes, through which people evaluate messages: the latitude of acceptance, comprising positions they consider agreeable; the latitude of rejection, comprising positions they oppose; and the latitude of non-commitment, comprising positions about which they are uncertain or have no firm opinion. The theory also explains assimilation and contrast effects: individuals may perceive a message as closer to their existing position than it actually is or regard it as more distant when it conflicts with their views. The degree of personal involvement in an issue can influence how individuals evaluate messages and respond to attempts at persuasion (Sherif & Hovland, 1961). One strength of Social Judgement Theory is that it explains why people exposed to the same message may interpret it differently and express contrasting opinions. It is therefore useful for understanding public reactions to institutional communication, political messages and controversial social issues.

Despite the above limitations, the theory remains useful and applicable to the current study. Specifically, the theory provides a framework for interpreting sentiments expressed in comments on the EFCC's official Facebook page. The Commission's posts about arrests, investigations, prosecutions, asset recovery and anti-corruption campaigns provide messages to which users may respond according to their existing beliefs and experiences concerning corruption, law enforcement, justice and institutional credibility. Comments expressing approval of an EFCC operation may indicate that the action is consistent with the user's expectations of accountability, whereas comments questioning the fairness, selectivity or credibility of an operation may reflect disagreement between the Commission's communicated position and the user's existing



judgement. Neutral or uncertain comments may indicate non-commitment, requests for clarification or responses that do not clearly convey approval or disapproval.

Methodology

Research Design

The study adopted a quantitative content analysis design. Content analysis was appropriate because it enabled the systematic classification of user-generated comments according to their sentiment and the issues they addressed. The study focused on two EFCC Facebook stories published in 2026: “Again, EFCC Arraigns Blessing CEO Over Fresh Alleged N13m Fraud in Lagos,” published on 10 June 2026, and “Alleged N110.4bn Fraud: Witness Narrates How \$760,910 Was Used to Pay School Fees of Yahaya Bello’s Children,” published on 12 March 2026. These stories concerned high-profile alleged financial crimes and provided an opportunity to examine how Facebook users expressed attitudes towards EFCC-related enforcement activities.

Population of the Study

The population comprised all user comments posted in response to the two selected stories on the EFCC’s official Facebook page. The post concerning Blessing CEO attracted approximately 2,100 comments, while the post concerning Yahaya Bello attracted approximately 3,101 comments. Based on these reported figures, the accessible population was approximately 5,201 comments.

Sample Size and Sampling Technique

The study adopted proportionate stratified and systematic sampling techniques to select comments from the two purposively selected EFCC Facebook posts. Using Yamane’s (1967) formula, at a 5% margin of error, a sample size of 371 comments was obtained from the population of 5,201 comments. Proportionate allocation yielded 150 comments from the Blessing CEO story (2,100 comments) and 221 from the Yahaya Bello story (3,101 comments). Systematic sampling was then applied separately to each post, using an interval of approximately 14 and a randomly selected starting point between 1 and 14, to ensure consistent selection across both sets of comments.

Unit of Analysis and Categories of Analysis

The unit of analysis was the individual user comment posted under either of the two selected EFCC Facebook stories. Each comment constituted one unit for coding, while a comment containing several ideas was assigned a dominant sentiment based on its overall evaluative direction. Where a comment expressed more than one sentiment, the coding rules specified how mixed or ambiguous expressions were handled. The analysis employed the following categories:

Category	Operational definition
Positive sentiment	Comments expressing approval, support, praise or confidence in the EFCC, its actions or the reported enforcement activity.
Negative sentiment	Comments expressing criticism, disapproval, distrust, allegations of bias or concerns about the EFCC’s conduct, credibility or enforcement decisions.
Neutral sentiment	Comments that were primarily factual, descriptive, informational or insufficiently evaluative to be classified as positive or negative.
Mixed or ambiguous sentiment	Comments expressing both positive and negative evaluations, sarcasm, irony or unclear attitudes that could not confidently be assigned to a single polarity.

Method of Data Analysis

The data were analysed using descriptive statistics. Specifically, frequencies and percentages of positive, negative, neutral and, where applicable, mixed or ambiguous comments were calculated to establish the distribution of expressed sentiments. The results were presented in frequency tables to facilitate comparison between the Blessing CEO and Yahaya Bello stories.

Data Presentation

Table 1. Population, Sample Size, and Proportionate Allocation

Story Post	Date Published	Accessible Population (N)	Proportion (%)	Sampled Comments (n)
A. Blessing CEO Arraignment (Private/Celebrity Fraud)	June 10, 2026	2,100	40.38%	150
B. Yahaya Bello Case (Political/Public Official Fraud)	March 12, 2026	3,101	59.62%	221
Total		5,201	100.00%	371

Table 1 presents the population and proportionate allocation of the 371 sampled comments across the two selected EFCC Facebook stories. The Blessing CEO story, published on 10 June 2026, accounted for 2,100 comments, representing 40.38% of the accessible population, from which 150 comments were sampled. The Yahaya Bello story, published on 12 March 2026, attracted 3,101 comments, representing 59.62% of the population, from which 221 comments were selected. The combined population was 5,201 comments, with the sample proportionately distributed between the two stories. This distribution ensured that the Yahaya Bello story, which attracted more comments, received a correspondingly larger share of the sample, thereby supporting comparison of sentiment across the two cases.

Table 2. Sentiment Distribution for Story A (Blessing CEO)

Sentiment Category	Operational Definition Summary	(f)	(%)
Positive	Commending EFCC action, expressing confidence in enforcement	68	45.33%
Negative	Criticizing the priority given to the case, allegations of sensationalism	41	27.33%
Neutral	Descriptive mentions, asking for factual updates, non-evaluative tagging	26	17.33%
Mixed / Ambiguous	Sarcasm, jokes, ironical expressions, or dual sentiment	15	10.01%
Total		150	100.00%

Table 2 shows that positive sentiment was the most prevalent category among comments on the Blessing CEO story, accounting for 68 comments (45.33%). These comments expressed support for the EFCC's action or confidence in its enforcement activities. Negative sentiment accounted for 41 comments (27.33%), reflecting criticism of the attention given to the case or concerns about sensationalism. Neutral comments constituted 26 (17.33%) and largely involved requests for information, factual mentions or non-evaluative tagging. The remaining 15 comments (10.00%, subject to rounding) were classified as mixed or ambiguous because they contained sarcasm, irony, humour or conflicting evaluations. The distribution indicates that positive sentiment was more common than negative sentiment in the sampled comments on this story. However, the proportion of negative comments shows that support for the EFCC's action was not universal, and the findings describe reactions to this particular post rather than general attitudes towards the Commission.

Table 3. Sentiment Distribution for Story B (Yahaya Bello)

Sentiment Category	Operational Definition Summary	(f)	(%)
Positive	Demanding full prosecution, supporting asset recovery and accountability	54	24.43%

Negative	Expressing skepticism, perceived political selectivity, distrust of legal speed	118	53.39%
Neutral	Quoting figures (\$760k / N110b), asking court details, neutral tags	31	14.03%
Mixed / Ambiguous	Political sarcasm, Pidgin proverbs, ambiguous expressions	18	8.15%
Total		221	100.00%

Table 3 indicates that negative sentiment dominated the comments on the Yahaya Bello story, accounting for 118 comments (53.39%). These comments reflected scepticism, perceived political selectivity and concerns about the pace or fairness of legal proceedings. Positive sentiment represented 54 comments (24.43%), mainly expressing support for prosecution, asset recovery and accountability. Neutral comments accounted for 31 (14.03%), including factual references to the reported financial figures and requests for information about court proceedings. A further 18 comments (8.15%) were classified as mixed or ambiguous because of political sarcasm, Pidgin expressions or unclear evaluations. The predominance of negative sentiment suggests that the sampled users expressed more criticism and scepticism than approval in response to this story. This pattern may indicate that the political and institutional implications of the case elicited stronger critical reactions than straightforward support for anti-corruption enforcement. Nevertheless, the comments alone cannot establish users' underlying motives or prove that the wider public distrusts the EFCC.

Table 4. *Comparative Summary of Overall Sentiment Distribution (N = 371)*

Sentiment Category	Story A: Blessing CEO (n=150)	Story B: Yahaya Bello (n=221)	Combined (N=371)	Total	Overall Percentage (%)
Positive	68 (45.33%)	54 (24.43%)	122		32.88%
Negative	41 (27.33%)	118 (53.39%)	159		42.86%
Neutral	26 (17.33%)	31 (14.03%)	57		15.36%
Mixed/ Ambiguous	15 (10.01%)	18 (8.15%)	33		8.90%
Total	150 (100.0%)	221 (100.0%)	371		100.00%

Table 4 provides a combined picture of sentiment across the 371 comments sampled from both stories. Negative sentiment was the largest category, with 159 comments (42.86%), followed by positive sentiment with 122 (32.88%), neutral sentiment with 57 (15.36%) and mixed or ambiguous sentiment with 33 (8.90%). Comparison between the stories reveals a clear difference in the direction of expressed sentiment: positive comments were more prevalent in the Blessing CEO story (45.33%), whereas negative comments dominated the Yahaya Bello story (53.39%). This contrast suggests that sentiment varied according to the specific case being discussed rather than following a uniform pattern across the two EFCC posts.

Discussion of Findings

The study found that negative sentiment was more prevalent than positive sentiment across the two EFCC Facebook posts, suggesting that critical evaluations of the Commission's enforcement activities featured prominently in the sampled discussions. This finding relates to Adebumiti and Oboh's (2018) examination of social media users' reactions to the EFCC's anti-corruption campaign and complements Akoja and Bamgbelu's (2019) study of public perceptions of the Commission's social media engagement. However, the present study extends these works by examining naturally occurring comments on specific enforcement cases. From the perspective of Social Judgement Theory (Sherif & Hovland, 1961), users may assess the Commission's messages against existing expectations of justice, accountability and institutional credibility. The finding implies that the EFCC should not assume that publicising enforcement activities



automatically generates approval but should address criticism through transparent and consistent communication.

The findings also revealed contrasting sentiment patterns across the two cases. Positive sentiment predominated in the Blessing CEO discussion, suggesting greater expressed support for the enforcement action, whereas negative sentiment dominated the Yahaya Bello discussion, indicating stronger expressions of criticism and scepticism. The latter finding is relevant to Shehu et al.'s (2025) examination of public perceptions of the EFCC's arrest of Yahaya Bello and Oyeyemi and Umoro's (2026) study of perceptions of the Commission's anti-corruption media campaign. The contrast also reinforces the importance of interpreting online sentiment within the context of the specific issue, as reflected in Aremu and Muhammad's (2024) and Olabanjo et al.'s (2023) sentiment-analysis studies. Social Judgement Theory offers a possible explanation: users may accept or reject enforcement messages depending on how these align with their existing attitudes and expectations. However, differences in the cases and their contexts mean that the precise causes of the contrasting reactions cannot be established from sentiment classification alone. The implication is that the EFCC should assess public responses to individual cases and communicate clearly about enforcement procedures, evidential standards and accountability, particularly where cases involve politically prominent individuals.

Furthermore, the presence of neutral and mixed or ambiguous comments demonstrates that online responses cannot always be reduced to straightforward approval or disapproval. This finding aligns with Asefon et al.'s (2024) examination of classification challenges in multilingual Nigerian social media comments and Olaleye and Dahunsi's (2026) analysis of evaluative language in online discussions. Although Social Judgement Theory provides a useful basis for understanding acceptance, rejection and non-commitment, neutral comments do not necessarily indicate uncertainty, as some may simply convey factual information. Similarly, sarcasm, irony and local expressions may obscure the intended sentiment. The finding therefore highlights the importance of contextual interpretation and clearly defined coding procedures in sentiment analysis. For the EFCC, careful interpretation of online comments may provide a more reliable understanding of public reactions and help identify concerns requiring further clarification.

Conclusion, Implications and Recommendation

Based on the findings, public sentiment towards the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission on Facebook should be understood not merely as a reaction to individual arrests or allegations but as an expression of how citizens evaluate the Commission's legitimacy, fairness and commitment to accountability. The central argument of this study is that the public reception of anti-corruption communication depends not only on the information the EFCC publishes but also on how its actions correspond with citizens' expectations of impartial justice. The findings have important implications for the EFCC's communication practices. The Commission should adopt a more responsive and transparent approach to public engagement, providing timely, verifiable updates on significant cases and explaining its procedures without compromising investigations or judicial processes. Communication should distinguish allegations from established facts, respect the presumption of innocence and demonstrate consistency in explaining enforcement decisions. Rather than focusing exclusively on publicity and the visibility of arrests, the EFCC should strengthen two-way engagement by addressing recurring public concerns, correcting demonstrably inaccurate information and using feedback from online discussions to identify communication gaps. These measures may help strengthen public understanding of its



mandate, although improved communication must be supported by credible and impartial enforcement.

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AI Use Declaration:

None.
