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Transforming Public Service Delivery from the *line* to *online* in Nigeria: Leveraging on ICT Tools

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Abstract: This paper examined e-public service delivery implementation and effectiveness in Nigeria. Aside the secondary data adopted from the United Nation e-Government Survey 2020, primary data was gathered through a descriptive research design that involved a systematic collection, presentation, and analysis of data sourced with an online survey (Google Form). The population for this study was infinite, comprising the users of government e-public services of eight (8) purposively selected Federal Agencies in Nigeria. The agencies were; the CAC, NCS, FIRS, FRSC, NAFDAC, NIS, NIMC and NYSC. Their selection is based on the ground that they constitute the foremost online public service delivery agencies in Nigeria. The survey was made available online to respondents for a period of four (4) weeks. Data collected was analysed with descriptive statistics. The study found that e-public service delivery implementation in Nigeria has recorded a significant progress in ensuring safety, privacy, convenience, timely response and cost reduction. The paper thus concluded that e-government project in Nigeria is effective but a sophisticated digital firewall to prevent data hacking or theft is needed. A reliable web security and maintenance firm can assist the government in this regard.

Keyword: public service; e-government; ICT; service transformation; service delivery

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Introduction

Public service delivery has characterized the role of every government across the globe, be it democratic, autocratic or authoritarian. This is because of the social contract that binds the government to the state. This social contract connects the people to the state through legitimacy, which requires that social services be delivered effectively and efficiently by the government in return for the loyalty and commitment of the people. In essence, the overall image of any government depends on the goodwill, legitimacy and performance trust her citizens reposed in her. Sequel to this, the extent of the quality and quantity of public service delivery has assumed the yardstick upon which government performances are being judged.

The quality of public service delivery in the third world has continued to nosedive over the years. This has been attributed to not just inefficiency but also ineffectiveness. The service delivery institutions have been succinctly described thus: “the general perfidy, poor performance, and inefficiency of public enterprises have been quite remarkable, comments across official and unofficial quarters have indicated that the enterprise has performed woefully bad that they remained a public disgrace” (Al-Hakim, 2007). The establishment is often seen as being run by “incompetent bureaucrats” grounded in “red tape”, indifferent to public needs, ineffective in service delivery, cover inefficiency with over stretched adherence to regulations. Whether or not this sense of gross incompetence is based on fact or not, as long as the perception exists, it becomes difficult for the government establishment to be up and doing in their constitutional duties of effective public service delivery. It thus becomes a widespread concern as citizens have lost faith in the competency of the institutions.

Lincoln’s dictum, “government of the people, for the people, by the people”, has assumed a prominent role in defining democracy and by extension good governance. Yet, the mode of governance across the world is far from this perspective (Parent, Vandebek & Gemino, 2005). Developing countries, in particular, have failed in their mandate of effective and efficient social service delivery and ensuring prudence in public spending. These failures have culminated into the sour relationship between the citizens and their government. In the search for a public service delivery revamping strategy to reclaim the lost legitimacy, governments around the globe now embrace digital innovations to facilitate a revolution in their service delivery performance. This innovation in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in governance has remained the cornerstone in savaging the incessant menace of

poor social service delivery. The rhetoric question daring third world nations in the face in the wake of this new technology opportunities remains: Why serve the citizens on the line when you can serve them online?

From the foregoing therefore, this paper investigated e-public service delivery implementation as an overhauling strategy for effective and efficient public service delivery in Nigeria.

Literature Review

To comprehend public service delivery properly, there is the need to understand what “service” is first, which this paper defines as the set of activities that meets the needs of a user. Services are rendered by one party to another in an agreed manner. Services are not concrete products that one can see and hold so they are termed intangible. Once rendered, a service vanishes. More evident is that fact that a service is consumed right at point of delivery, which means the supply and consumption of services take place simultaneously. Service rendering can therefore be described as a revolving process for creating and delivering user-targeted services that does not end at the delivery of the product. In this interchange of values, a user outreach must strive to make sure that the services are well delivered, received, used and that the user achieves the full intended benefit.

The emergence of ICT in governance has gave birth to the introduction of new concepts in the social sciences prominent among these concepts are; e-government/e-public service delivery, e-policing, e-procurement etc. These terms sometimes appeared as synonymous in their use though there are significant differences in their meaning and audiences (Singh & Sharma, 2009). New technology is alleviating the headaches of doing business with the government by enabling citizens to do much of the work themselves (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2009). However, e-public service delivery deals with social service delivery in a bid to facilitate a change in the perception of the citizens towards their governments (Lim, Masrom & Din, 2013).

In the 21st century, advancement in ICT has greatly influenced citizens’ behaviour as well as their conduct as it has fundamentally challenged how people work and communicate (Wirtz & Daiser, 2015) as well as how governments perform. The concept of e-Government is now a cogent subject of discussion in public service delivery literature at least for about ten years now (Heeks, 2006; West, 2005; Garson, 2003; Fountain, 2001). However, e-government is not constrained to the field of

public administration; rather it is multidisciplinary in nature as it covers fields like Information System, Political Science, Information Technology and Computer Science. E-Government is still a new phenomenon where ideas are still pouring out from scholars and its practitioners. Thus, it is devoid of a standard and universal definition (Reddick, 2010).

E-Government can simply be described as summing up “government-as-usual plus ICT”. It is a clear move away from the statuesque as it is not about business as usual, instead, it redirect focus to the use of ICT to rebrand the structures and procedures of governance (Alshehri, & Drew, 2010). Adeyeye and Aladesanmi (2011) quoted former President Obasanjo’s (Rtd) who described e-Government as “the use of information & communication technologies, to improve the efficiency, effectiveness, transparency, and accountability of governance through implementing data warehousing and integrated decision support system to manage the modern economy for the benefit of the governed”. However, an elaborate research into the definitions of e-Government shows that there are variations in the submissions of scholars as a number of them view e-government as an end in itself while many others see it as a means to an end. To the former whose idea is relevant to this paper, noted that one of the cardinal duties of government is to deliver services in an efficient and effective manner and e-government provides the platform to do just that. Thus, the successful implementation of e-public service delivery marks the realization of prominent objectives of the government and governance. As such, e-government becomes a means to an end.

In furtherance of this perspective, the European Commission, (2003) posits that e-government is the use of ICT in public administration combined with structural and skills improvement in order to enhance public services delivery, promote democratic dividends and strengthen support for public policies. Similar to the above is the view of Denhardt & Denhardt (2009) and Olowu (2004) who conceptualize e-government as a tool for service delivery. I.e. the adoption of “all the information and communication technology platforms and applications in the public sector or the use of the internet for delivering government information and services to citizens”. To buttress this perspective, Adah (2015) described e-Government as a double-lane communication process that deals with the use of ICT to deliver public services while ensuring unfettered access of such services to citizens. Practically, e-government entails the adoption of new leadership orientation, mechanism of decisions making and investment, new ways of making social services available to citizens, a genuine way of listening and responding to needs of the public in addition to new ways of

organizing and delivering public information and services. Dhamodharam & Saminathan (2011) termed e-government as the government's use of ICT tools specifically web-based internet applications to facilitate access to and delivery of public information and service to citizens, businesses and government departments. In the words of Jalali & Khorasani (2012), the idea of e-government depicts service delivery and information exchange both within the organizations (Intra-Governmental) and outside them (Inter-Governmental) that are observed using various technical tools and is seen as a mutual engagement between government and citizens, non-profit organizations, business persons, employees and the government itself is enhanced. Concisely, the common understanding in this line of thought is that e-government refers to the application of ICTs, particularly Web-based platforms, to provide cheaper, effective, easier and faster access to government services.

E-Public Service Delivery Transformation in Nigeria: The Journey so far

The innovation in ICT and the emergence of the Internet were strong pushers in the movement from an industrial to an information age (Wirtz & Daiser, 2015). The world has assumed a global village where all nations strive to attain a significant level of electronic governance that involves the use of ICTs to deliver government services (Adah, 2015). Nigeria is regarded as the giant of Africa in the international community; this attachment emanated from her enormous population, considerably large landmass and not necessarily because of its advancement in information and communication technology. However, the need to combat rising levels of corruption, inefficiency, and ineffectiveness in the public sector led to the decision to take governance to the next level by ensuring the presence of government online. This is established in a speech of former president Obasanjo when he stressed that his administration has been centred on reorientation and reorganization of the civil service and public officials by changing the business as usual (corrupt, bureaucratic, and inefficient) default system to a transparent, efficient and productive, and participatory one. Moreover, he continued that his administration has taken a bold step to re-engineer the backroom engine to institutionalize an “effective system through computer-assisted modern processes known as e-government” (Obasanjo, 2004). In a collaborating view, a top government official in the Ministry of Science and Technology buttressed the need for e-government as a change element in the Nigerian public service. He described e-government as:

... a hurricane that nobody, not even a President can stop. Can you see a President stopping a hurricane? He cannot. No dictator, for instance, can tell you that you cannot send an e-mail... One way to diminish [419] fraudsters are to have proper data and proper documentation which IT [introduces].

Aside the presented political vocal attention paid to the e-government project, history reveals that the application of computer in the conduct of public governance in Nigeria dated back to the year 1948 when the British colonialists installed it at the Nigerian Port Authority. Later in the 70s, the Nigerian government promulgated an indigenization decree that set apart business categories for Nigerians only and the computer business was one such area. This move allows indigenous citizens to set up businesses in the importation and sale of computers and in the long run, the number of computers in the country experienced a serious boost (UNU, 2004). In furtherance to this, by the late 1970s, the Nigerian government established the Central Computer Committee (CCC), that is charged with the responsibility of creating standards for users and vendors of computers in Nigeria and develop inputs for the national policy on computing. However, the Nigerian Communication Commission (NCC) that was formed in 1992 was reactivated in 2000 and since then the e-government implementation framework has rolled-out several “citizen-centric projects” (Agunloye, 2007).

The National Telecommunications Act was established to serve as the regulatory framework for all ICT related issues. To realize the objectives of the National Policy, the government established the National Technology Development Agency (NITDA), which is under the auspices of the Ministry of Science, and Technology to implement the policy frameworks (NITDA, 2001). The rapid emergence and growth of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in everyday life of citizens has thereby pushed the Nigerian government to transform itself into an electronic government (e-government) to better serve the citizens. In furtherance to the e-government journey, Prof. Akunyili (2010) while delivering a speech at the World Congress on Information Technology in Amsterdam opined that the common characteristic of e-government is the automation of the initial paper-centred processes to enhance access to public services. More importantly, it seeks strengthen government’s drive towards efficiency in governance and increased transparency in the management of resources, for national growth and development.

Sequel to the concerted effort of the government in the adoption of e-government between 2011 and 2013, mobile applications and channels that can directly enhance poverty alleviation, gender mainstreaming, social inclusion and disaster management were designed and operationalized. More interestingly, the creation of National Service Portal in 2013 marked a significant epoch in the Nigeria e-public service delivery project. The portal offers a number of interconnection between government Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs). Comments from unofficial quarters show that the portal has been very helpful in citizens' access to Government services in the short run while it has the potential of facilitating transparency in governance and in the long run, trust in the government.

Nigeria is currently experiencing a slow but steady growth in the ICT sector. In a recent ranking by the United Nations in 2020 on e-Government implementation around the world, Nigeria was positioned 141th of the 193 United Nation Member States with the following breakdown: 0.4406 on Global Development Index, 0.4507 on Human Capital Index, 0.5176 on Online Service Index and 0.3534 on Telecommunication Infrastructure Index (UNDESA, 2020). In comparison with other developing countries of Africa, Nigeria is not making commendable progress in its e-government project. This could be due to low level of acceptance of e-public service delivery projects by the citizens or the implementation standard as adopted by the government does not conform to international standard.

Methodology

In a bid to validate the UN submissions with home-grown data, the paper adopted a descriptive research design that involved a systematic collection, presentation, and analysis of data sourced with an online survey (Google Form). The population for this study was infinite, comprising the users of government e-public services of eight (8) purposively selected Federal Agencies in Nigeria. The agencies were; the Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC), the Nigerian Customs Service (NCS), Federal Inland Revenue Service (FIRS) and the Federal Road Safety Commission (FRSC). In the list also is the National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC), the Nigerian Immigration Service (NIS), the National Identity Management Commission (NIMC) and the National Youth Service Corp (NYSC). Their selection is based on the ground that they constitute the foremost online public service delivery agencies in Nigeria.

In the administration of online survey, the respondents were reached on the Facebook Audience-Access Service, sorted on the bases of Nationality (Nigerians), Educational Status (Higher Education) and Profession (Graduates, Self-employed, Elite and Artisans). This was premised on the assumption that a significant number of Facebook subscribers have interacted with government agencies electronically before, since all efforts to get details of visitors to the selected agency's website yielded only a few results as only the Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC) and the Federal Inland Revenue Service (FIRS) had visitors' counter on their websites. The survey was made available online to respondents for a period of four (4) weeks. Data collected was analysed with descriptive statistics.

Data Presentation and Discussion

Socio-Demographic Features of the Respondents

As presented in the Table 1, over the four weeks timeframe allotted to the online survey, 13743 responses were received. Out of these, 5624 (40.9%) of the respondents were between 20 - 40 years, while 8117 (59.1%) of the respondents fall within the age range of 41-60 years. This indicates that the respondents were considerably matured and at their service age of 20-60 years and this feat of respondents engendered very detailed and reliable responses for this study. The table equally showed that 3179 (23.1%) of the respondents were female, while 10564 (76.9%) were male. This indicated that there was a difference in the representation of the male and female in the universe of this study. However, this was incapable of skewing the findings because the research is not gender-oriented. More remarkably, the total respondents have attained the tertiary level of education in their respective disciplines. This implies that the respondents have the relatively required academic acumen and exposure for providing basic and accurate answers for the survey questions.

In addition, 54.7% of the respondents were civil/public servant from diverse government ministries, departments and agencies of federal, state and local governments; 24.6% of the respondents were from private organisations with notable interface with government services; and just 7.5% of the respondents were self-employed; while 12.9% of the respondents constituted students in numerous higher institutions of learning across the country. Just a few of the respondents were unemployed. To this end, these selective respondents were considered capable of

providing comprehensive information on the e-Government Implementation in Nigeria.

Table 1. Socio-Demographic Details

Age	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
21-40 years	5624	40.9	40.9
41-60 years	8117	59.1	100.0
Below 20 years	2	.0	100.0
Total	13743	100.0	
Sex			
Female	3179	23.1	23.1
Male	10564	76.9	100.0
Total	13743	100.0	
Academic Qualification			
Tertiary	13743	100.0	100.0
Profession			
Civil/Public Servant	7524	54.7	54.7
Private Worker	3394	24.6	79.3
Self-Employed	1032	7.8	87.1
Students	1784	12.9	100.0
Unemployed	9	.0	100.0
Total	13743	100.0	

Source: Field Survey, 2020

Effectiveness of e-Public Service Delivery in Nigeria

In an attempt to evaluate the effect of digital switch in the mode of public service delivery, the survey sourced data on the effectiveness of e-public service delivery in Nigeria using privacy, safety, availability of the required information, response time, cost reduction, convenience, and user friendliness as the moderating variables. Table 2 below reveals the frequency and percentage distribution of respondents on each of the assertions and its values/responses were organized using Likert scale of measurements, such as: High (4), Low (3), moderate (2) and No Response (1).

As indicated in the table, 12433 (90.5%) of the respondents reacted that safety of their identity has been made possible by the digital platform. This assertion was further confirmed by 7462 (54.3%) of the respondents that submitted that e-public service delivery had moderately create some level of privacy in the transaction of services with the Nigerian public institutions. Online safety is a big luxury even for the developed nations as hackers and spies have defied the most protected servers of

the world (Davies, 2015; Alshehri & Drew, 2010; Colesca, 2009). Similarly, Nigeria as a developing world is only capable of providing reasonable online safety possible in terms of her level of economy, technological advancement as well as her national orientation. Also, 8285 (60.3%) of the total respondents established that availability of their desired and other essential information through online transaction is moderate in the delivery of e-public services in Nigeria.

As regard the timely response to users' online request, 6624 (48.2%) of the respondents established that e-public service delivery is moderate in term of timeliness. This moderate scaling was equally understandable as the waiting time is dependent on the extent of server capacity and capability rather than the unstable waiting time usually encounter at the period of manual service delivery. As argued by Ajayi (2007), the absence of an Internet Exchange Point in Nigeria that required that Local Internet traffic be transmitted through points in Europe and America at great cost also add to the delay in transaction responses.

It was also asserted that cost benefit when compared with old method of service delivery was favourable, with an average of 8063 (58.7%) of the respondents reacting to this assertion, thus indicating that e-public service delivery reduces cost than the traditional method of transaction with the public institutions in Nigeria. This is due to the fact that cost of transportation to the centre of service and other logistics cost has been eliminated. This submission matches that of Albeshir (2015) and Davies (2015) who added time and cost saving as part of the benefits of online service delivery.

It was equally observed that Successful completion of transactions through e-public service delivery is moderate with 6454 (47.0%) of the respondents affirmed this assertion as displayed in Table 2, this could be as a result of the level of efficiency of the internet facilities in the country. However, 7500 (54.6%) of the respondents accentuated to the fact that e-public service delivery is highly convenient when compare to the old method of service delivery. The application of the internet in public service delivery is confirmed to be convenient world over (Singh & Sharma, 2009). Derivable from this is the fact that transactions can be initiated, monitored and successfully pursued at any location and time so choose by the citizens (Ayanso, Chatterjee & Cho, 2011). Moreover, 8621 (62.7%) of the respondents declared that they enjoyed moderate satisfaction from the service rendered by the public institutions through the application of digital tools in service delivery. This confirms that e-public service delivery is a notable method used by the majority of public institutions in the delivery of their services and as well serve as a means of keeping

pace with the global standard. In essence, the data in the table implies that e-public service delivery implementation is efficient in Nigeria.

Table 2. Effectiveness of e-Public Service Delivery in Nigeria

		High	Low	Moderate	No Response
S/N	Effectiveness and Efficiency	f (%)	f (%)	f (%)	f (%)
i.	Safety of your identity	669 (4.9)	573 (4.2)	12433 (90.5)	2 (.0)
ii.	Privacy of your transaction	4529 (33.0)	1206 (8.8)	7462 (54.3)	480 (3.5)
iii.	Availability of your desired and other essential information online	4122 (30.0)	1270 (9.2)	8285 (60.3)	- (-)
iv.	Timely response to your request(s)	1689 (12.3)	5002 (36.4)	6624 (48.2)	362 (2.6)
v.	Cost benefit when compared with old method of service delivery	8063 (58.7)	851 (6.2)	4763 (34.7)	- (-)
vi.	Successful completion of transactions	4334 (31.5)	2889 (21.0)	6454 (47.0)	- (-)
vii.	Convenience	7500 (54.6)	83 (.6)	6094 (44.3)	- (-)
viii.	Satisfaction from service rendered	2821 (20.5)	2235 (16.3)	8621 (62.7)	- (-)

Source: Field Survey, 2020

Conclusion and Recommendations

Resulting from the purposely-selected respondents that amounts to 13743 whose responses were collected through a self-selected online survey. The adopted variables confirms that e-government is an effective means of overhauling public service delivery. This confirms the UN Survey report that positioned the country on 141th, which is a positive development from its 143rd position in 2016. This finding is not peculiar to Nigeria as previous researches in both the developed and developing nations of the world subscribed to the effectiveness of the medium¹.

Although the country is experiencing a steady boost in her e-public service delivery project, yet much is still desired to attain a reliable level of effectiveness in the quest.

¹ See (Albeshar, 2015; Davies, 2015; Singh & Sharma, 2009; Ayanso, Chatterjee & Cho, 2011; Dhamodharam & Saminathan, 2011).

A considerate improvement in the level of privacy, safety, timeliness and completeness of transactions. This can be achieved by building a sophisticated firewall in the system to prevent data hacking or theft. A reliable web security and maintenance firm can assist the government in this regard.

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