The Role of E-Government Policy in Promoting Administrative Efficiency and Citizens' Engagement in Edo State.

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Abstract

This study investigates the multifaceted role of e-government policy in promoting administrative efficiency and fostering citizen engagement in Edo State. It acknowledges the state's significant investment in digital transformation, including its acclaimed "paperless" system, and seeks to move beyond anecdotal evidence to provide a comprehensive, empirical assessment of its impact. The research aims to determine the extent to which these e-government platforms have genuinely streamlined government processes, reduced bureaucracy, and enhanced transparency within the civil service. Concurrently, it analyses how these digital initiatives have affected citizens' ability to access services, participate in governance, and hold government accountable. The paper adopted secondary source of data collection. The study recognizes that a digital divide and a lack of digital literacy may serve as significant barriers, limiting the benefits of e-government to only a segment of the population.

This will allow for a nuanced understanding of the successes, challenges, and disparities in the implementation and adoption of e-government in Edo State. The findings provide evidence-based recommendations for policymakers to improve existing platforms, bridge the digital divide, and ensure a more inclusive and effective e-governance ecosystem for all citizens.

Keyword: E-Governance, Efficiency, Engagement, Administration, Citizens

Introduction

Governments around the globe are actively seeking methods to provide public services in a more efficient and effective manner. E-governance is regarded as a mechanism to enhance productivity and efficiency within internal administration while also improving responsiveness to the public. E-governance can be perceived as an extension of reforms aimed at boosting public sector efficiency. The efforts made by government agencies and departments to utilize ICT tools and applications, as well as the Internet and mobile devices, to promote good governance, reinforce existing relationships, and establish new partnerships within civil society, are referred to as e-governance initiatives. Similar to e-commerce, e-governance signifies the onset of a significant wave of technological innovation and the reinvention of government. It serves as a powerful catalyst for advancing into the 21st century with higher quality, cost-effective government services and fostering a better relationship between citizens and the government (Fang, 2002). Numerous government agencies in developed nations have made progressive strides towards utilizing the web and ICT, thereby enhancing coherence in all local online activities, expanding local access and skills, facilitating interactive services for local discussions, and boosting citizen participation in the promotion and management of their territories (Graham and Aurigi, 1997).

The application of information technology has the potential to significantly enhance citizen engagement in governance processes at all levels by facilitating online discussion forums and improving the swift development and efficacy of advocacy groups. The government stands to benefit by offering improved services in terms of time efficiency, thereby making governance more streamlined and effective. Furthermore, transaction costs can be reduced, leading to greater

accessibility of government services (UNESCO 2005). As noted by Danfulani (2013), E-governance emerged as a consequence of advancements in Information and Communication Technology (ICT), which is manifested through digital innovations such as personal computers, the internet, mobile telephony, and various electronic applications. The convergence of these technologies has simplified the flow of information, enhancing its accessibility and delivery. This development has brought about numerous benefits, as it has connected citizens with the government, increased governmental efficiency and resilience, reduced the costs associated with governance and transactions, and improved transparency. Akbar (2004) supports the notion that e-Governance is enhancing the lives of billions globally and is integrating government services in an unprecedented manner. Consequently, the use of information communication technology will promote efficiency and effectiveness in meeting the outlined goals. Therefore, e-Governance serves as a political tool implemented to guarantee good governance, facilitating the relationship between the government and citizens to ensure improved performance. It fosters openness and transparency in governmental operations. In other words, administrative efficiency and democratic principles can be advanced simultaneously through innovation by encouraging public engagement and oversight via web-based interactive services in external administration (Kim, 2016).

Despite the significant popularity and effectiveness of electronic government, its proper implementation remains unexplored in numerous countries. Nevertheless, technology holds the potential to enhance governmental operations and improve interactions with citizens. According to Sier (2005), the utilization of information and communication technology to enhance governance by strengthening the government's role in service delivery, public administration, and the promotion of participatory democracy has been gaining traction in various regions worldwide. Maswood (2009) suggests that E-governance can be defined as the execution of governance through electronic means to enable an efficient, rapid, and transparent process of disseminating information to the public and other agencies, as well as conducting governmental administrative activities. It involves the application of modern Information and Communication Technologies, such as the Internet, Local Area Networks, and mobile devices, by governments to enhance effectiveness, efficiency, and service delivery, thereby facilitating easier access to government

services for the public. E-Governance represents a network of organizations that includes government, nonprofit, and private-sector entities; in the realm of e-governance, there are no clear boundaries.

Statement of the problem

Edo State stands as a frontrunner in the implementation of e-government in Nigeria; however, it is uncertain whether these technological advancements have effectively resulted in the anticipated benefits of administrative efficiency and citizen participation. In spite of considerable investments and a widely praised "paperless" system, it is still unclear if the newly introduced digital platforms are being fully utilized by all civil servants and whether the general populace possesses the requisite skills and access to engage with them. There exists a disparity between the policy's objectives and its actual impact in practice. Edo State has achieved remarkable progress in establishing e-government infrastructure, which includes an Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system and a digital policy framework.

Nevertheless, studies indicate that not all civil servants are enthusiastic about the adoption of e-governance, and many may not possess the necessary skills to effectively utilize the new digital tools. The shift from a manual, paper-based system to a completely digital framework can be difficult, and bureaucratic resistance or insufficient ongoing training may lead to a gap between the technology available and its practical application. This presents a challenge, as the full advantages of efficiency cannot be achieved if the system is not wholeheartedly accepted and used by all government employees. A significant issue is the absence of a thorough and current evaluation of its actual impact in Edo State. Although there is anecdotal evidence and government assertions of success, there is a pressing need for a systematic and empirical study to ascertain whether the implementation of e-government is effective.

The effectiveness of e-government extends beyond merely internal governmental operations; it also encompasses fostering a more inclusive and responsive connection with citizens. Although digital platforms are intended to deliver services and information, a considerable segment of the population, especially in rural or economically disadvantaged regions, may encounter obstacles to access.

These obstacles consist of a digital divide stemming from inadequate internet connectivity, the high expense of data, and insufficient digital literacy. Consequently, those individuals who stand to gain the most from enhanced government services and greater transparency may find themselves excluded from the emerging digital landscape. This situation poses a threat of unequal access to public services and has the potential to exacerbate existing social disparities rather than alleviate them. The objective of this paper is to explore the function of e-government in fostering administrative efficiency and citizen engagement in Edo State.

Objective of the study

The main objective of this study is to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the role of e-government policy in promoting administrative efficiency and citizen engagement in Edo State. While the specific are:

1. To examine the extent to which the state's e-government platforms have improved internal government processes in Edo State.
2. To determine how e-government initiatives have facilitated citizen participation in governance.
3. To identify the key challenges hindering the full realization of e-government's benefits.
4. To provide evidence-based policy recommendations to the Edo State government on how to improve its e-government strategy, bridge the digital divide, and foster more inclusive and effective citizen engagement.

Methodology

In a study examining the impact of e-government in Edo State, secondary data were utilized to offer historical context and a comprehensive viewpoint. The methodology for secondary data involved a systematic review of diverse sources, which included official policy documents, white papers, and strategic plans from the Edo State government. This encompassed the Edo State Digital Policy, reports from the Ministry of Digital Economy, Science and Technology, as well as documents from the Edo State Geographic Information Service (EdoGIS) and the Public Procurement Agency (EDPPA). A meticulous review of academic journals, conference papers, theses, and dissertations related to e-government in Nigeria, particularly focusing on Edo State, was conducted. Additionally, newspaper

articles, press releases, reports from civil society organizations, and blog posts from that period were analyzed to gain insights into the public discourse and perceptions surrounding e-government. Reports from organizations such as the World Bank, the United Nations, and other international development agencies that have collaborated with Edo State were also scrutinized.

Theoretical Framework

This paper is based on the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), which was initially proposed by Fred Davis in 1989. This theoretical framework is extensively utilized to comprehend the adoption and utilization of technology. The model asserts that two key factors, Perceived Usefulness (PU) and Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU), influence an individual's intention to adopt and utilize new technology. Perceived Usefulness pertains to the degree to which an individual believes that employing a technology will enhance their job performance, whereas Perceived Ease of Use refers to the extent to which the individual perceives the technology as requiring minimal effort (Davis, 1989). According to TAM, a user's intention to embrace a technology is shaped by these factors, which ultimately impact technology usage behavior. TAM has been broadly implemented across various fields, including the public sector, to evaluate the acceptance of egovernance systems.

In the realm of e-governance within Edo State, specifically regarding the Ministry of Information, the Technology Acceptance Model serves as an effective framework for comprehending how both public servants and citizens adopt and utilize digital platforms aimed at enhancing administrative efficiency. The Ministry of Information is pivotal in disseminating government policies, engaging with the public, and overseeing various public information systems. As e-governance systems are implemented to optimize administrative processes and improve service delivery, it is essential for the Ministry to ensure that these systems align with the criteria set forth by the TAM, thereby guaranteeing that they are regarded as both useful and user-friendly. The concept of Perceived Usefulness, as defined by TAM, is vital in assessing the adoption of e-governance systems in Edo State. Public servants within the Ministry of Information are more inclined to accept these systems if they are convinced that the technology will enhance their job performance. For instance, if an online platform provides quicker

access to government data or accelerates the processing of public requests, the system will be perceived as useful, thus increasing the probability of its adoption. Furthermore, the perceived usefulness of these systems can also extend to citizens engaging with government services. If the e-governance platform enables citizens to access services more conveniently, such as applying for permits or lodging complaints, they are likely to view the system as advantageous.

The Perceived Ease of Use is a crucial factor in the realm of e-governance adoption. It denotes the extent to which individuals believe that utilizing a specific system is straightforward. In Edo State, there may be differing levels of technological proficiency among public servants and citizens. Consequently, if the e-governance system is designed to be user-friendly, featuring an intuitive interface and minimal technical challenges, it is more likely to gain acceptance. The simpler the system is to navigate, the higher the probability that both government employees and the general populace will interact with it. Implementing user-centered design principles in the creation of e-governance systems is essential for ensuring usability and, as a result, fostering greater acceptance (Venkatesh et al., 2003). The application of the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) to the adoption of e-governance systems within the Ministry of Information in Rivers State offers valuable insights into how these systems can be effectively designed and executed to improve administrative efficiency. TAM emphasizes perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use, which aids in pinpointing the critical factors that will affect user adoption and ongoing utilization of digital platforms. The Ministry of Information can leverage these insights to create systems that cater to the requirements of public servants, enhancing their operational efficiency, while also addressing the needs of citizens to improve service delivery.

Furthermore, the straightforward nature of the theory and its emphasis on user perceptions render it an excellent framework for assessing the adoption of e-governance systems within public administration. By comprehending user attitudes towards technology through the perspectives of perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use, public administrators can more efficiently design and implement systems that meet the expectations of both government employees and citizens. This congruence enhances the probability of successful technology adoption and, consequently, improves administrative efficiency. A multitude of

studies has validated the relevance of the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) in evaluating the adoption of information systems in the public sector. For instance, Venkatesh et al. (2003) demonstrated that perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness are vital factors influencing user acceptance in both private and public sectors. Likewise, in the realm of e-governance, TAM has been utilized to investigate user adoption across various nations, including Nigeria, where it has facilitated the identification of factors affecting the adoption of online government services (Ayo et al., 2011).

The application of the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) to the examination of e-governance, particularly the function of e-government in enhancing administrative efficiency and citizen engagement in Edo State, is crucial for comprehending the dynamics of technology adoption within the public sector. By concentrating on the perceived usefulness and ease of use of digital platforms, TAM offers a structured framework for assessing user acceptance, which is vital for improving administrative efficiency. The theory's emphasis on understanding user perceptions guarantees that e-governance systems are developed to fulfill user requirements, resulting in better public administration.The Technology Acceptance Model provides a thorough framework for scrutinizing the factors that affect the adoption of e-governance systems in Rivers State. By emphasizing perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use, TAM aids in identifying the primary determinants of technology acceptance, which can inform the design and execution of e-governance systems within the Ministry of Information. This model assists policymakers and administrators in grasping user attitudes towards technology and ensures that digital platforms are seamlessly integrated into public administration to enhance service delivery and administrative efficiency (West, 2004).

Conceptual Clarification/Literature Review

The Concept of E-governance

E-governance is defined as the digital transformation of organizational processes by governmental bodies. More specifically, it pertains to the incorporation of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), both as tools and methodologies, within the administrative functions of government agencies and departments. The primary aims are to diminish corruption (by reducing human

involvement), enhance productivity, and ensure the efficient, equitable, transparent, and accountable provision of services and goods to the populace. These objectives are in harmony with governance principles, including accountability, corruption control, adherence to the rule of law, and overall governmental efficacy. Indeed, while ICTs as a whole are relatively modern innovations, the application of technology in governance is likely as ancient as humanity itself. As McGinnis (2012) observes, "successful democracies throughout history … have utilized the technology of their era to collect information for improved governance." Each era is marked by distinct technologies, often in response to the prevailing societal, economic, and political demands, and at times in anticipation of future requirements. Therefore, while certain technologies arise as a response, others are developed intentionally or inadvertently without a specific aim until human necessities define their roles (Massey, 2015). In this current era, considerable attention has been directed towards the role of ICTs in contemporary governance practices and their potential to foster good governance, particularly in developing economies. Siar (2005) recognized six primary functions of e-governance that contribute to enhancing citizens' awareness and comprehension of their community's attributes, promoting effectiveness and efficiency in service delivery, as well as ensuring transparency and accountability in government operations and services.

In the 2018 United Nations (UN) E-government Surveys Report, the advantages of e-governance functions were expressed through the framework of the UN Sustainable Development Goals, particularly as a mechanism that fosters sustainability and resilience.A component of the strategy includes the use of ICTs to ensure universal access to public services via more conventional means, such as post offices, radio and television, as well as ICT-enabled channels like telephone call centers.In addition to providing access to services and information, ICTs can fulfill more practical roles, exemplified by the ICT-enabled device developed to monitor the availability and quality of water in regions of Senegal, Mali, Benin, and Niger. Indeed, the notion of e-governance as a facilitator of resilience and sustainability is paramount.

The Concept of Administrative Efficiency

Efficiency refers to the capability of performing tasks effectively, successfully, and without unnecessary waste.Administrative efficiency emphasizes systematic advancement and well-structured management (Payne & Pheysey 1971).The aspects of specialization (the division of labor within the organization) and standardization/formalization (the standardization of roles and interdepartmental communication) positively influence administrative efficiency; conversely, the aspect of centralization negatively impacts administrative efficiency. Administrative efficiency can also be understood as the effectiveness in the collection, processing, and dissemination of information (Spenkelink 2012).

E-Governance and Administrative Efficiency

E-Governance plays a significant role in enhancing the effectiveness, efficiency, and equity of public services, thereby improving the quality of service delivery (Pathak et al., 2008). The policy framework, improved public services, high-quality and cost-effective government operations, citizen participation in democratic processes, and administrative and institutional reforms are key objectives of e-Governance (Dawes, 2008). It is essential for facilitating service provision, employee support and recognition initiatives, acknowledging customers in local service delivery, implementing the concept of a 'one-stop' customer service counter, and utilizing performance measurement to foster a cycle of continuous improvement (Robertson & Ball, 2002). As a result, e-Governance represents a distinctive collaboration among the government, private entrepreneurs, community volunteers, and citizens aimed at enhancing the e-literacy skills within the community (Prasad, 2012). One of the primary goals pursued by e-Governance is to achieve administrative efficiency (Vanderose, Degraveand & Habra, 2015). Furthermore, good governance and e-Governance are crucial for empowering administrative efficiency; e-Governance serves as a means to attain good governance. E-Government is an integral component of e-Governance.

By implementing effective governance and e-Government, it is possible to identify the fundamental principles necessary for achieving administrative efficiency (Haldenwang, 2004); the primary goal of eGovernance is to foster good governance (Kabir 2007). Thus, administrative efficiency, transparency, and accountability are essential attributes of good governance; the successful execution of e-Governance can enhance good governance. As a result, e-Governance serves

as a means to empower good governance, enabling grassroots citizens to engage with the government at all levels. In the 21st century, ICT aims to promote increased efficiency and provide responsive, cost-effective services to citizens within the framework of good governance principles. It is a crucial mechanism for enhancing the administrative efficiency, transparency, and effective service delivery of the government (Jahankhani, et al. 2006). The objective is to make public service delivery more effective, efficient, swift, accountable, accessible, responsive, and traceable (Garg, 2008). In this context, the primary focus of eGovernance is the eradication of corruption and the strengthening of civil society, encouraging people's participation, transparency, administrative efficiency, and accountability. Furthermore, eGovernance enhances administrative efficiency by minimizing delays, ensuring transparency, facilitating easy access, promoting responsiveness, reducing bureaucratic obstacles, and improving the quality of service and citizen-centric service delivery. Successful e-Governance will result in cost savings and can contribute to the development of an ICT-based generation and stimulate economic growth (Alam, 2012). The aforementioned features can be realized through the proper implementation of e-Governance utilizing modern information and communication technologies.

Benefits of e-Governance

The World Bank (2002) highlighted several advantages of e-governance, including the following: it significantly streamlines the process of information gathering for both citizens and businesses. It enables individuals to access information about any government department and participate in the decision-making process. Furthermore, it fortifies the foundation of democracy by promoting increased citizen engagement at all levels of governance. Additionally, it facilitates the automation of services, ensuring that information related to public welfare initiatives is readily accessible to all citizens, thus reducing corruption. This transformation alters the operational dynamics of government, fostering greater transparency and further diminishing corruption. With information about every governmental activity being easily accessible, it compels each government department to be accountable, as they are aware that their actions are under close scrutiny. Effective implementation of e-Governance practices allows individuals to complete their tasks online, thereby avoiding the unnecessary inconvenience of traveling to various offices.

The successful execution of e-Governance practices enhances the delivery of services to citizens, fosters improved interactions with businesses and industries, empowers citizens through access to information, facilitates better management, provides greater convenience, promotes revenue growth, and leads to cost reductions, among other benefits. Additionally, the advent of e-Governance brings governments closer to their citizens. In fact, it has become exceedingly convenient to communicate with government agencies today. Indeed, citizen service centers are now situated nearer to the populace. These centers may include an unattended kiosk within the government agency, a service kiosk positioned near the client, or the utilization of a personal computer at home or in the office. E-Governance practices enable businesses to access crucial information with just a click.

The Way Forward

To fully harness the potential of e-government in Edo State, a comprehensive strategy is essential. This strategy includes enhancing the current infrastructure, prioritizing human capacity development, and formulating policies that are more inclusive and centered around citizens. Addressing the foundational issue of the Digital Divide and Improving Access is crucial; although the government has initiated programs such as Edo Digital Connect to broaden broadband infrastructure, these initiatives need to be intensified to reach more rural and underserved regions. Merely having a platform is insufficient; citizens must have the means to afford and access it. This includes establishing more Public Access Points that provide free or low-cost internet in community centers, libraries, and schools. Furthermore, ensuring the affordability of devices is vital, which can be achieved by collaborating with telecommunication companies and private sector partners to subsidize the costs of digital devices for low-income citizens. Additionally, enhancing Digital Literacy Programs through campaigns and training initiatives, particularly aimed at women, the elderly, and individuals in rural areas, is necessary to equip them with the skills required to utilize e-government services.

In the realm of Enhancing Administrative Efficiency and Civil Servant Competence, it is essential to recognize that the effectiveness of administrative operations is directly linked to the individuals managing the system. The shift towards a "paperless" government represents a crucial advancement; however, it

necessitates ongoing training and a cultural transformation that includes Continuous Training for all civil servants, ranging from entry-level positions to senior management, to guarantee their adeptness in utilizing e-government platforms. Additionally, it is important to establish incentives for government employees who successfully leverage the new digital tools, while also making digital literacy a fundamental criterion for performance assessments and promotions. Furthermore, the implementation of User-Centric Design is vital, as it involves civil servants in the design and enhancement of e-government platforms to ensure that these tools are user-friendly and cater to their specific requirements.

Finally, regarding the topic of enhancing Citizen Engagement, it is well understood that genuine citizen engagement transcends the mere provision of information; it necessitates the establishment of a two-way communication channel that enables active citizen participation. This encompasses Feedback Mechanisms, which are essentially dedicated and responsive platforms for feedback available on all government websites and applications, social media channels, and specific hotlines designed to address citizen complaints and suggestions. Furthermore, the Development of E-Participation involves creating specific platforms for e-participation, including online town halls, public forums, and digital surveys, aimed at gathering public input on policy-making and governance. Additionally, Transparency and Accountability are crucial for reinforcing transparency by making more public data available regarding government projects, budgets, and service delivery metrics. Ultimately, this approach will foster trust and motivate citizens to engage with the government.

Conclusion

In summary, although Edo State has achieved significant progress in the implementation of e-government, especially with its "paperless" initiative, the effectiveness of this program in enhancing administrative efficiency and engaging citizens is inconsistent. The state has made substantial investments in both infrastructure and training, resulting in noticeable advancements in government operations and service delivery. Nevertheless, various challenges remain, hindering the complete realization of e-government's capabilities. The transition to digital systems has clearly improved internal government functions. This

improvement is reflected in the more efficient processes within ministries, departments, and agencies, which have minimized bureaucratic delays and reduced reliance on paper. The adoption of digital tools and training has enhanced the effectiveness and productivity of civil servants. A notable example of this increased efficiency and transparency is the successful digitization of land administration through the Edo Geographic Information System (EdoGIS).

The effect on citizen engagement is multifaceted. Although e-government platforms are intended to deliver services and information, the degree of citizen involvement and satisfaction varies significantly. The main obstacles include the digital divide, insufficient internet access, cost issues, and a lack of digital literacy, particularly in rural regions—along with a general unawareness of the services that are available. This indicates that, despite the government's establishment of engagement channels, many citizens are unable to take full advantage of them. Edo State's e-government initiative signifies a notable and praiseworthy attempt to modernize governance in Nigeria. It has established a robust foundation for an administration that is efficient, transparent, and accountable. Nevertheless, the state's advancement can be characterized as a journey comprising two distinct phases: a notably successful internal transformation of the civil service and an external engagement with the citizenry that is still evolving. The journey remains unfinished. To maximize its investment, the state must now transition its focus from simple implementation to ensuring inclusivity and accessibility for all citizens.

Recommendations

To enhance e-government in Edo State and effectively foster administrative efficiency and citizen involvement, the government must implement a comprehensive strategy that focuses on critical areas such as infrastructure, human capacity, and policy. This will involve strengthening digital infrastructure, expanding broadband access, ensuring a reliable power supply, and promoting affordability. Furthermore, it is essential to enhance human capacity and digital literacy, as the success of e-government relies on the capability of both civil servants and citizens to utilize technology. Without sufficient skills, even the most advanced systems are likely to fail. This necessitates mandatory civil servant training that encompasses not only basic computer skills but also the specific use

of e-government platforms and data management. Additionally, citizen-centric digital literacy programs should be developed to target digital literacy initiatives and training across the state. These programs must be customized to meet the needs of various demographics, including women, the elderly, and rural farmers, and should be delivered in local languages to boost participation. Finally, it is crucial to improve policy and citizen-centric services by adopting user-friendly designs, developing a feedback loop, and encouraging e-participation.

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