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Taking Public Service Delivery in Nigeria Online for Effectiveness and Efficiency: The users' Perspective

By Hassan, Afees Olumide & Ishola, Abdulrasaq Ajadi
Obafemi Awolowo University

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Taking Public Service Delivery in Nigeria Online for Effectiveness and Efficiency: The users' Perspective

Hassan, Afees Olumide α & Ishola, Abdulrasaq Ajadi σ

Abstract- The ability of a government to ensure an effective and efficient social service delivery is central to good governance. Online platform has become a veritable path to effective and efficient public service delivery globally. The paper investigated the effectiveness and efficiency of online public service delivery in Nigeria from the end-users' perspective. Using an online survey conducted with online users of services of selected federal agencies in Nigeria, the paper found that online public service delivery in the country was considered effective and efficient, especially when compared with the old physical delivery mode. However, findings further revealed that there was much room for improvement, especially as a sizeable number of users rated the online service delivery low in certain aspects. The paper, therefore, recommends that the Nigerian government should address such areas as a way of improving the services and earning greater users' confidence.

I. Introduction

In Nigeria, some of the limitations in the traditional public administration practices are attributable to bureaucratic rigidity and complexity among government Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) as well as excessive and time-consuming duplication of paperwork which leads to long waiting time both for citizens and public administration officers (Al-Hakim, 2007). Increasing yearnings for effective and efficient services came with a soaring skepticism on the ability of the public institutions to organize its affairs productively. The public sector is often viewed as being run by "incompetent bureaucrats" steeped in "red tape," indifferent to the needs of the public, and ineffective in service delivery. 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 public sector to be effective in the conduct of its affairs. It becomes a widespread concern as citizens have lost faith in the competency of the institutions.

While striving to address the ugly service trend and inculcate prudence in governance, ICT was incorporated into social service delivery in what is known as electronic government (e-government) (Adah, 2015). Applying ICT to public service delivery (e-government) is not peculiar to a particular country or continent; rather, it is a worldwide phenomenon that concerns developed and developing nations (Reddick, 2010). The reasons for e-government adoption vary across nations. To some, it is the global trend that must be imitated while to others, it as an opportunity to enshrine transparency, accountability, efficiency, and effectiveness into the business of governance. However, the development of a quality e-services delivery system that is efficient and effective is an important aspect of good governance. This is because e-services create the avenue for engaging citizenry both in governance and in the use of e-government services.

Nigeria, like every other nation in the global community, is striving to achieve a standard where e-governance becomes the order of the day. It has set for itself the goal of developing its ICT structure to a level where ICT becomes an avenue for sending and receiving information from one sector of the society to the other.

Nigeria formally commenced her e-government project in 2001 with the establishment of National IT policy. Various other steps have been taken afterward. They include the establishment of National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA) in 2003; establishment of National e-Government Strategies (NeGSt) in March 2004; establishment of Public Service network (PS net) with the integration of all the ministries and the National Assembly (Agunloye, 2009); online project of Corporate Affairs Commission established in June 2005; the introduction of electronic passport; and the introduction of e-payment system in January 2009. Today, many services of the government have been taken online. In the education sector, registration for examinations like WAEC, NECO, and JAMB UTME and release of results are done online. Businesses are registered online. These, among others, have altered the ways interactions take place between citizens and the Nigerian government. In over a decade of introduction of online services, the need arises to examine the effectiveness and efficiency of e-services by the government, especially considering deficiencies associated with the old method of public service delivery in Nigeria, hence this study.

Author α: (PhD) Department of Public Administration Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife. e-mail: aohassan@oauife.edu.ng
Author σ: Department of Public Administration University of Ilorin. e-mail: ishola.aa@unilorin.edu.ng

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II. Literature Review

a) Service Delivery

To comprehend "service delivery," there is the need to understand what is termed "service" 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. In literature, there has been a persistent use of "goods and services" in a conjoined manner. However, what differentiates services from goods are intangibility, inseparability, simultaneity, and variability (Akpoiroro & Okon, 2015). Services are not concrete products that one can see and hold, so they are termed intangible. Once rendered, a service vanishes. More evident is the fact that a service is consumed right at the point of delivery, which means the supply and consumption of services take place simultaneously. About governments, policies and programs are designed to facilitate the creation and delivery of essential social services through the activities of the bureaucrats (Ikechukwu, O. U., Udu, O., Onyema, U. E., Raphael, A. E., Obi, Y. V. & Obasi, V. U., 2019). Public administrators create and implement public policies that hope to deliver social services that have an overriding aim of improving the well-being of the people by providing their basic needs of life. At the very foundation of this objective is the pursuit of a strong, virile, and broad-based economy with adequate capacity to absorb externally generated shocks (Okojie, 2009). Service delivery, then, is a cyclic process for developing and delivering user-focused services. Service delivery does not stop once the product has been delivered as user outreach and engagement must continue to ensure that services are well-received, used, and the user achieves the full intended benefit.

However, public service delivery has a peculiar stance in terms of the user's perception of its quality. Unlike in the free market where utility value must correspond to the cost of purchase, public service depends on the capacity of the provider (government) (Wolff, Kühl & Satzger, 2018). Available public resources and the capacity of the bureaucrats are essential. This is because the nexus between service efficiency and bureaucratic process enjoys a linear relationship (Ikechukwu *et al*, 2019). It is in view of the need to overhaul the capacity of public service delivery platforms that service delivery is now structured to minimize delivery cost (Wolff *et al*), enlarges coverage areas while enhancing citizens' access through the available technologies in what is commonly known as e-government.

b) E-Government

Considering the governance challenges confronting the third world in recent times, as evidenced in the erratic and ineffective service delivery process (Yahaya, 2019), the quest to find a lasting solution has occupied the front seat on the agenda of the academia. In this effort, bureaucracy has been singled out as a prominent impediment to the attainment of good governance and efficiency in public service delivery. In response to its menace, therefore, e-government was suggested.

E-Government is a means through which political values and mandates are being fulfilled. In this perspective, through e-public service delivery, popular participation can be engendered, transparency can be achieved, and accountability enshrined. To back up the idea, Al-Hakim (2007) submitted that e-Government denotes the use of ICTs by the government to improve the way public administration interacts with citizens and businesses and to improve the efficiency of the administrative process. Similarly, Means and Schneider (2000) examine the concept from the perspective of the relationships between governments, their customers (businesses, other governments, and citizens) and suppliers by the use of the internet. More discretely, Lawson (1998) describes e-government as "transferring power to people, by operating in a one-stop, non-stop way, and doing more for less." In the view of Heichlinger (2004), citizens are central to the idea of e-government, so he defined "e-Government as a set of activities supported by information systems to improve the relationships between government institutions and citizens." The constant mention of "government-citizen relationship" in the above definitions portrays an element of politics. According to Davies (2015) and Adah (2018), e-Government refers to concerted efforts of public authorities to use information and communication technologies to better public services delivery and increase democratic participation. Conclusively, e-Government possesses the potentials to transform the government to be more prudent, accountable, and responsive to the citizens (Reddick, 2010).

c) E-Government: The African Experience

African is home to a multiplicity of tribes and populations. Diverse in language, culture, history, religions, and economic endowment. In a detailed perspective, Aina, Mutula and Tiamiyu (cited in Eyitayo, 2008:33) while describing Sub-Sahara Africa (SSA) opine that:

The region of SSA (excluding South Africa) faces massive political and socio-economic challenges, in addition to the existing underdeveloped human resources, deficient infrastructure, cultural, and funding constraints. The public sector also has its problems. It is based on manual filing systems, burdened by enormous movements of correspondence, duplication of files, wastage of paper, difficulty in accessing information in files, loss of data, and general inefficiency of operations. From the picture painted above, a revolutionary approach is required to resuscitate good governance in

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the region in particular and Africa in general. Coincidentally, e-government provides an efficient panacea to a number of the region's challenges. Hence, it was hurriedly adopted. In other similar submissions, Yahaya (2019), Adah (2015) and Al-Hakim (2007) explained that one of the main limits in traditional public administration practices is due to the bureaucratic complexity among the departments, excessive and time-consuming duplication/multiplication of paperwork which lead to long waiting time both for citizens and for public administration officers. The application of ICTs to the public sector environment promised to improve public administration and to satisfy citizen demands for good governance through prompt social service delivery (Wirtz & Daiser, 2015). However, African countries particularly Western African nations like Nigeria are lagging far behind (Dhamodharam & Saminathan, 2011) in the e-government movement notwithstanding the fact that Nigeria has one of the fastest-growing ICT markets on the African continent, yet she persistently records low global ranking in the delivery of e-public services to her citizens (Adah, 2015). More specifically, Kenya was placed on an "enhanced level" alongside Nigeria for its rapid e-government adoption as it extends infrastructure and services to citizens in the rural areas (Reddick, 2010).

Nigeria is currently basking in the euphoria of digital breakthroughs given her experience of slow but steady growth in the ICT sector. However, significant growth is not yet recorded in the use of ICT for e-Government. This is attributable to several prominent among which is the inadequacy of electronic infrastructure needed to spearhead the digital revolution (Yahaya, 2019). In the 2016 e-government implementation ranking by the United Nations, Nigeria was the 143rd nation of the 193 United Nation Member States with the following breakdown: 0.33 on Global Development Index, 0.36 on the e-participation index, 0.38 on Human Capital Index, 0.41 on Online Service Index and 0.20 on Telecommunication Infrastructure Index. Ghana, another West African country with similar political and economic pattern with Nigeria was ranked 120th with the breakdown of 0.42 on Global Development Index, 0.46 on the e-participation index, 0.55 on Human Capital Index, 0.45 on Online Service Index and 0.26 on Telecommunication Infrastructure Index (Knoema, 2016).

Surprisingly in 2018, Nigeria was still on the 143rd position despite the enormous amount of funds committed by the government after scoring so low in the 2016 survey. In the breakdown this time around, she experienced minor improvements in EGDI with 0.38, HCI with 0.42, 0.52 in Online Service Index but with a serious decline in TII with 0.18. So fortunate for her this time around, Ghana, her next-door neighbour, moved from the 120th position in 2016 to 101th in 2018 (UNDESA, 2018).

From the UN e-government ratings, Nigeria is placed at the Middle Online Service Index (OSI) and e-Government Development Index (EGDI) (Between 0.25 and 0.50) and on "enhanced stage" (UNDESA, 2016 and Reddick, 2010). On a contrary perspective, Hassan (2014) contradicts the above rating as his study reveals that as of the year 2013, Nigeria is already at the connected stage of e-government. Nevertheless, the government has been gearing policies and initiatives to accelerate growth. The need for transparency and accountability in service delivery to ensure efficiency and effectiveness is one of the intended benefits of ICTs in governance. More interestingly, ICTs in governance can engender and sustain the trust of the citizens in their government (Alshehri & Drew, 2010).

On the surface, these ratings show that Nigeria is not making commendable progress in its e-government project. This significantly showed that either there is a low level of acceptance of e-Government by the citizens or the e-government implementation standard in Nigeria does not conform to international standards.

III. Methodology

The study relied on data collected through an online survey using an unrestricted self-selected sampling technique. The technique is an open type that allows any interested respondent on targeted online platforms to participate in the survey. The survey targeted online users of eight (8) purposively selected Federal Agencies in Nigeria. They are Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC), Nigerian Customs Service (NCS), Federal Inland Revenue Service (FIRS) and Federal Road Safety Commission (FRSC). Others are the National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC), Nigerian Immigration Service (NIS), National Identity Management Commission (NIMC), and National Youth Service Corp (NYSC). Their selection was based on the ground that they constituted the leading online public service delivery agencies in Nigeria at the time of the survey. In the administration of the survey, the respondents were reached on three (3) Facebook platforms through a hyperlink. The platforms are Facebook Audience-Access Service, sorted on the bases of Nationality (Nigerians), Educational Status (Higher Education), and Profession (Graduates, Self-employed, Elite, and Artisans); followers of all Federal Universities on Facebook and followers of the selected agencies on Facebook. A significant number of these social media users were believed to have interacted with the government electronically. The survey was available online to respondents for four (4) weeks. Data collected were analyzed using simple descriptive statistics to assess the level of effectiveness and efficiency of online service delivery in Nigeria.

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IV. Findings

a) Socio-Demographic Features of the Respondents

As presented in Table 1, 5624 (40.9%) of the respondents are between 20 - 40 years, 8117 (59.1%) of the respondents fall within the age range of 41-60 years. This indicates that the totality of the respondents are considerably matured and at their service age of 20-60 years, and this feature of respondents engendered very detailed and reliable responses for this study.

Table 1 also showed that 3179 (23.1%) of the respondents are female, while 10564 (76.9%) are male. Since it is not a gender-based study added to the fact that respondents consciously chose to respond to the survey, no bias can be inferred. Rather, the distribution is an indication that both male and female Nigerians patronize the government online. More remarkably, all of the respondents have attained the tertiary level of education in their respective disciplines. This implies that all respondents have relatively required academic level and exposure for providing reliable answers to the questions.

Also, 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 organizations with notable interface with government services; 7.5% of the respondents were self-employed; while 12.9% of the respondents constituted students in various higher institutions of learning across the country. Just a few of the respondents were unemployed. To this end, these respondents are considered capable of providing comprehensive information on the effectiveness and efficiency of online public service delivery in Nigeria.

Table 1: Respondents' Socio-Demographic Features

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

Source: Field Survey, 2020

b) Data Presentation and Analysis

The first question put forth to the respondents was aimed at ascertaining their awareness of the existence of, and interaction with, online government services. To the question, 13,677 (99.5%) of them acknowledged the existence of the government online services and claimed to have transacted on the platforms at one time or the other. This makes the information obtained through the survey reliable.

Table 2 shows the frequency and percentage distribution of the respondents on assessment indices for the effectiveness and efficiency of online public service delivery in the country. The respondents were requested to rate the services provided online by the government against eight (8) indices of effectiveness and efficiency using a 3-level scale of 'High', 'Moderate' and 'Low.' The last column on the table shows the frequencies and percentages of participants that did not respond to a particular index. Where a majority of the users rate the services against the indices as moderate, the online service delivery is considered moderately effective and efficient; and when rated high, the online service delivery is considered highly effective and efficient. On the other side, if the services are rated low against the indices by the majority, it can be concluded that online service delivery is ineffective and inefficient.

As shown in Table 2, across the eight (8) indices, the majority of the users rated the services as either moderate or high. Specifically, on the cost effectiveness of online services when compared with the physical method of service; and convenience of transactions, the majority of the users rated the online service delivery high. Regarding successful completion of transactions, the majority of the users, though less than half (47%), rated online service delivery as moderate, another 31.5% rated it high. The implication

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of this is that most services were successfully completed online. On timely response to users' online requests, 48.2% and 12.3% of the users respectively rated online service delivery moderate and high. This is though an acceptable level of rating, with 36.4% rating online service delivery low in this area implies a need to do more by the government. This is the area that requires attention most from the government. For the remaining four (4) indices, namely: the safety of identity, privacy of transaction, availability of desired and other essential information online, and satisfaction from services rendered; the majority of the respondents rated the online service delivery as moderate. A moderate performance simply implies there is much room for improvement. A deduction from the analysis is that online public service delivery in Nigeria is considerably effective and efficient. This notwithstanding, much room still exists for improvements. Particular attention is needed to be given to timely response to users' online requests.

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

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

Source: Field Survey, 2020

V. Discussion and Conclusion

While investigating the effectiveness and efficiency of online public service delivery in Nigeria, some indices like the safety of identity, the privacy of transaction, timeliness, cost, convenience, and result orientation, etc. were considered, and it is upon such indices that this discussion is based. On the safety of online transactions, the study found that a moderate level of safety is provided. Online safety is crucial even for the developed nations as hackers and spies have defied the most protected servers of the world. Similarly, Nigeria as a developing world, is only capable of providing reasonable online safety possible in terms of the level of her economy, technological advancement, as well as her national orientation. Writing on the extent of online vulnerability are scholars like Davies (2015), Alshehri & Drew (2010), and Colesca (2009).

As regards the timely response to users' online request, this study put this also at a moderate level. This is equally understandable as the waiting time is dependent on the extent of server capacity and capability rather than the long waiting time usually encountered 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 a great cost also adds to the delay in transaction responses. Similarly, the study placed the cost-effectiveness when compared with the physical method of service delivery as high. This indicated that online service delivery reduces cost than the traditional method of transaction with public institutions in Nigeria. This is partly because of cost of transportation to the center of service and other logistics costs have been eliminated since the services are online-based that requires no physical movement. This submission matches that of Albesher (2015) and Davies (2015), who added time and cost-savings as part of the benefits of online service delivery.

In the findings of the study is the assertion that the chance of having a successful online transaction is moderate and that convenience is created in the process. 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

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successfully pursued at any location and time, so choose by the citizens (Ayanso, Chatterjee & Cho, 2011).

As regards the effectiveness and efficiency of electronic public service delivery, users' perspective, as found by this study, reveals that online service delivery in Nigeria is effective and efficient. This corroborates findings of some previous studies that online delivery of public services is associated with effectiveness and efficiency. Some such studies are Albesher (2015), Davies (2015), Singh and Sharma (2009), Ayanso, Chatterjee, and Cho (2011) and Dhamodharam and Saminathan (2011).

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