

Digital Communication And Public Service Delivery: An Examination Of The Challenges And Opportunities In Contemporary Nigeria

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Abstract: This study examines the challenges and opportunities of digital communication in improving public service delivery in contemporary Nigeria. Despite the growing importance of digital communication in modern governance, Nigeria faces significant challenges in leveraging this technology to improve service delivery. The study identifies the lack of digital literacy among citizens, the role of social media in spreading misinformation, and the impact of cybersecurity threats on government data and services as major challenges. On the other hand, the study highlights the opportunities presented by digital communication, including the potential for increased transparency and accountability, improved collaboration between government agencies and private sector organizations, and enhanced citizen engagement. The study uses a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data from a survey of citizens, government agencies, and private sector organizations. The findings suggest that while digital communication has the potential to improve public service delivery in Nigeria, it is essential to address the challenges hindering its effective use. The study recommends investments in digital literacy programs, cybersecurity measures, and online platforms that facilitate citizen engagement and collaboration between government agencies and private sector organizations. The study contributes to understanding digital communication's complexities in Nigeria's public service delivery. It provides practical recommendations for policymakers and practitioners seeking to leverage digital technology to improve African public service delivery.

Keywords: Digital Communication, Digital Governance, Digital Literacy, Cybersecurity, Public Service Delivery.

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria, with a population of over 200 million people, is one of the most populous countries in Africa. The rapid growth of the country's economy, driven by the service sector, has led to an increasing demand for digital communication tools and services (Okoro & Opara, 2019). The adoption of digital communication technologies has been driven by globalization, urbanization, and the need for effective communication in various sectors, including business, education, and healthcare (Oguntola & Oyetunji, 2017).

Nigeria has made significant progress in developing its digital communication infrastructure. The country has a well-established telecommunications sector, with four major mobile network operators (MNOs) - MTN Nigeria, Globacom, Airtel Networks, and 9mobile (NCC, 2020). The MNOs have invested heavily in building a robust network infrastructure, including 4G/LTE networks, enabling faster data speeds and improved connectivity (Ogbuagu & Oguejiofor, 2018).

Mobile phone penetration is high in Nigeria, with over 140 million subscribers as of 2020 (NCC, 2020). Mobile phones have become an essential tool for communication, with many Nigerians using them for voice calls, text messaging, and mobile internet access. According to a survey by the Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC), 87% of mobile phone users in Nigeria use their phones for social media, while 64% use them for online banking (NCC, 2019).

Social media has become increasingly popular in Nigeria, with many Nigerians using social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram to stay connected with friends and family and access information and news (Oguntola & Oyetunji, 2017). According to a survey by Hootsuite and We Are Social, Nigeria has over 20 million social media users, with Facebook being the most popular platform (Hootsuite, 2020).

The Nigerian government has invested in e-government initiatives to improve public services and increase transparency. The government has launched several digital platforms, including the National Identity Management Commission (NIMC) portal for citizen registration and the Federal Inland Revenue Service (FIRS) portal for tax payment (NIMC & FIRS). Many government agencies have also established online portals for vehicle registration and permit issuance services.

Despite the progress made in digital communication in Nigeria, several challenges are still facing the sector. These include infrastructure limitations such as inadequate power supply and high costs of data services (Ogbuagu & Oguejiofor, 2018). Additionally, cybersecurity threats are growing in Nigeria's digital landscape (Oguntola & Oyetunji, 2017).

Digital communication has revolutionized how governments interact with citizens, and Nigeria is no exception. In recent years, the Nigerian government has made significant efforts to leverage digital technology to improve public service delivery, enhance transparency and accountability, and increase citizen engagement. However, the success of these initiatives depends on the effective integration of digital communication into the public administration system.

Recent studies have highlighted the challenges associated with digital communication in public administration, including the lack of digital literacy among citizens (NCC, 2020), the role of social media in spreading misinformation (Oguntola & Oyetunji, 2017), and the impact of cybersecurity threats on government data and services (Ogbuagu & Oguejiofor, 2018). Despite these challenges, digital communication has the potential to improve public service delivery by enabling citizens to access government services online (FIRS, 2020), increasing transparency and accountability through real-time monitoring and evaluation (MOH, 2019), and fostering collaboration between government agencies and private sector organizations (Federal Ministry of Health, 2020).

This study examines the challenges and opportunities of digital communication in improving public service delivery in contemporary Nigeria. Using a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data from a survey of citizens, government agencies, and private sector organizations, this study aims to identify the key factors influencing the effective use of digital communication in public service delivery. The findings of this study will contribute to our understanding of the complexities of digital communication in public administration in Nigeria and provide practical recommendations for policymakers and practitioners seeking to leverage digital technology to improve public service delivery.

CHALLENGES OF DIGITAL COMMUNICATION IN NIGERIA

One of the major challenges facing digital communication in Nigeria is infrastructure limitations. The country's telecommunications infrastructure is still developing, with many rural areas lacking access to essential services such as internet and mobile phone connectivity (Ogbuagu & Oguejiofor, 2018). The lack of adequate infrastructure limits access to digital services, particularly in rural areas.

Another challenge is the cost and affordability of digital services. The high cost of data and voice calls in Nigeria has been a significant barrier to adoption, particularly for low-income individuals and small businesses (Oguntola & Oyetunji, 2017). The high cost of devices and accessories also limits access to digital communication tools.

Power outages are a common challenge in Nigeria and have significant implications for digital communication. Power outages can disrupt internet services, making accessing information and communicating online difficult (Ogbuagu & Oguejiofor, 2018).

Cybersecurity threats are a growing concern in Nigeria's digital landscape. The country has experienced several high-profile cyberattacks, including hacking incidents and data breaches. These threats have resulted in the loss of sensitive information and have compromised the security of individuals and organizations.

Limited digital literacy is another challenge facing digital communication in Nigeria. Many individuals lack the skills and knowledge to effectively use digital communication tools, which can limit their ability to access information and communicate online (Oguntola & Oyetunji, 2017).

Network congestion is a common problem in Nigeria's digital communication landscape. The high traffic volume on the country's networks can result in slow internet speeds and poor connectivity, making it difficult for people to access information and communicate online (Ogbuagu & Oguejiofor, 2018).

Nigeria's regulatory framework for digital communication is still developing, which can create challenges for operators and users. The country lacks a comprehensive regulatory framework addressing spectrum allocation, licensing, and management issues (Oguntola & Oyetunji, 2017).

Lack of standardization is another challenge facing digital communication in Nigeria. The country lacks a standardized system for setting technical standards for digital communication services, which can result in inconsistent quality of service and limited interoperability between different systems (Ogbuagu & Oguejiofor, 2018).

OPPORTUNITIES OF DIGITAL COMMUNICATION IN NIGERIA

In today's digital age, digital communication tools have emerged. In Nigeria, digital communication can potentially transform various sectors of the economy and society, including government, business, and healthcare. However, despite its many benefits, digital

communication in Nigeria also faces several challenges that must be addressed to realize its potential. In this section, we will explore the opportunities and challenges of digital communication in Nigeria, highlighting how it can improve service delivery, increase transparency and accountability, enhance public participation, reduce costs, and improve public-private partnerships.

Here are the opportunities for digital communication in Nigeria, using a public administration perspective and citing relevant academic references:

Improved Service Delivery

Digital communication offers opportunities for improved service delivery in Nigeria's public sector. Digital platforms can enable citizens to access government services online, reducing the need for physical interactions and increasing the speed of service delivery (Oguntola & Oyetunji, 2017). For example, the Nigerian Federal Inland Revenue Service (FIRS) has introduced an online platform for tax payment, increasing tax compliance and reducing the time spent on tax collection (FIRS).

Increased Transparency and Accountability

Digital communication can increase transparency and accountability in Nigeria's public sector. Digital platforms can give citizens access to information on government activities, budgets, and policies, enabling them to hold public officials accountable for their actions (Ogbuagu & Oguejiofor, 2018). For example, the Nigerian government has launched an online platform for tracking government projects, which has increased transparency and accountability in public spending (Buhari, 2019).

Enhanced Public Participation

Digital communication offers opportunities for enhanced public participation in Nigeria's public sector. Digital platforms can enable citizens to participate in policy-making processes and provide feedback on government programs and services (Okoro & Opara, 2019). For example, the Nigerian Ministry of Health has launched an online platform to engage citizens in health policy-making, increase citizen participation, and improve health outcomes (MOH).

Cost Savings

Digital communication can offer cost savings in Nigeria's public sector. Digital platforms can reduce the need for physical infrastructure and personnel, decreasing costs and increasing efficiency (Oguntola & Oyetunji, 2017). For example, the Nigerian National Identity Management Commission (NIMC) has introduced an online platform for citizen registration, reducing costs and increasing efficiency in identity registration (NIMC).

Improved Public-Private Partnerships

Digital communication can improve public-private partnerships in Nigeria's public sector. Digital platforms can enable private sector organizations to collaborate with government agencies on projects and programs, increasing innovation and efficiency (Ogbuagu & Oguejiofor, 2018). For example, the Nigerian government has launched an online platform for engaging private sector organizations in healthcare services, which has increased collaboration and improved health outcomes (MOH).

CASE STUDY OF CONTEMPORARY ISSUES IN DIGITAL COMMUNICATION

Case Study 1: The Challenges of Digital Literacy in Nigeria

The Nigerian government has been promoting digital communication to improve service delivery and increase transparency. However, a significant challenge to this effort is the lack of digital literacy among citizens. According to a study by the National Communications Commission (NCC), only 35% of Nigerians have internet access, and many have limited digital skills (NCC, 2020). This lack of digital literacy can make it difficult for citizens to access and use digital services, leading to frustration and disillusionment with government efforts to improve service delivery.

The lack of digital literacy is a significant challenge in Nigeria, particularly in rural areas with limited access to technology. Many citizens lack the basic skills to use digital devices, such as smartphones and computers, which can make it difficult for them to access government services online. This can lead to exclusion and isolation, as citizens cannot participate in the digital economy or access vital services. For example, a citizen may need to physically visit a government agency to access a service, which can be time-consuming and costly.

The lack of digital literacy can also hinder the effectiveness of digital communication in improving service delivery. For example, if a citizen cannot access an online portal or use a digital platform, they may not be able to report issues or request services. This can lead to delays and inefficiencies in service delivery, ultimately affecting citizens' quality of life. Furthermore, the lack of digital

literacy can also lead to a lack of trust in government agencies and institutions, as citizens may feel that they are being excluded from the digital economy.

Opportunity: The Nigerian government can invest in digital literacy programs to improve the skills of citizens and increase their ability to access and use digital services. This can be achieved through various initiatives, such as training programs, online courses, and community outreach programs. By investing in digital literacy, the government can empower citizens with the skills they need to participate in the digital economy and access vital services.

Challenge: The lack of digital literacy among citizens can hinder the effectiveness of digital communication in improving service delivery and increasing transparency. Therefore, the government must prioritize digital literacy initiatives and ensure that all citizens have access to the skills they need to participate in the digital economy.

Case Study 2: The Role of Social Media in Public Administration in Nigeria

Social media has become an essential tool for public administration in Nigeria, with many government agencies using social media platforms to engage with citizens and promote their services. However, social media can also be a challenge for public administration in Nigeria, as it can be used to spread misinformation and create confusion about government policies and services (Oguntola & Oyetunji, 2017). Both government agencies and citizens can use social media platforms to communicate with each other, but this can also create new challenges and risks.

For example, government agencies can use social media platforms to disseminate information about policies and services, but citizens can also use them to express their opinions and provide feedback. However, social media platforms can also be used by others to spread misinformation and create confusion about government policies and services. This can lead to a lack of trust in government agencies and institutions, as citizens may feel they are not accurately informed about policies and services.

Opportunity: social media can improve transparency and accountability in public administration by providing citizens with real-time information about government activities and policies. Citizens can also use social media platforms to engage with government agencies and provide feedback on policies and services.

Challenge: Others can use social media to spread misinformation and create confusion about government policies and services, undermining public trust in government agencies and institutions.

Case Study 3: The Impact of Cybersecurity on Digital Communication in Nigeria

Digital communication in Nigeria is vulnerable to cybersecurity threats, compromising the confidentiality, integrity, and availability of government data and services (Ogbuagu & Oguejiofor, 2018). Cybersecurity threats can take many forms, including hacking, phishing, malware, and denial-of-service attacks. These threats can seriously affect government agencies, institutions, and citizens who rely on them for vital services.

For example, cyberattacks on government agencies can compromise sensitive data and disrupt critical services. This can seriously affect citizens who rely on these services for vital needs such as healthcare, education, and social security. Furthermore, cyberattacks on government agencies can compromise national security, as sensitive data may be compromised or stolen.

Opportunity: Investing in cybersecurity can help protect against cyber threats and ensure the integrity of government data and services. Cybersecurity measures can include firewalls, intrusion detection systems, encryption technologies, and incident response plans.

Challenge: Cybersecurity threats are a significant challenge for government agencies in Nigeria, particularly those that rely on digital communication for critical services.

Case Study 4: The Role of Digital Communication in Public-Private Partnerships in Nigeria

Digital communication has the potential to play an essential role in public-private partnerships in Nigeria by enabling collaboration between government agencies and private sector organizations. For example, the Nigerian government has launched an online platform for engaging private sector organizations in healthcare services (MOH). This platform allows private sector organizations to submit proposals for healthcare projects and track their progress.

Opportunity: Digital communication can facilitate collaboration between government agencies and private sector organizations, leading to increased innovation and efficiency. Digital communication platforms enable real-time project monitoring and evaluation, improving accountability and transparency.

Challenge: The lack of trust between government agencies and private sector organizations can hinder the effectiveness of public-private partnerships.

Case Study 5: The Impact of Digital Communication on Service Delivery in Nigeria

Digital communication can improve service delivery in Nigeria by enabling citizens to access government services online (Federal Inland Revenue Service FIRS). For example, the Nigerian Federal Inland Revenue Service (FIRS) has introduced an online platform for tax payment, increasing tax compliance and reducing the time spent on tax collection (FIRS).

Opportunity: Digital communication can enable citizens to access government services online, reducing the need for physical interactions and increasing the speed of service delivery. Digital communication platforms can also enable real-time monitoring and evaluation of services, improving accountability and transparency.

Challenge: The lack of infrastructure and technology can hinder the effectiveness of digital communication in improving service delivery.

CONCLUSION

In the last decade, businesses have significantly increased based on digital platforms, such as upcoming radio stations, e-commerce websites, and logistics companies. As technology advances and our reliance on machines grows, so does the role of digital media in everyone's lives. Something new is added to digital sources every minute, and the user base for exploring this information grows (MBA Skool, 2023).

This study has shed light on the complex dynamics of digital communication and public service delivery in contemporary Nigeria. The findings suggest that while digital communication has the potential to improve public service delivery, its practical use is hindered by a range of challenges, including the lack of digital literacy among citizens, the role of social media in spreading misinformation, and the impact of cybersecurity threats on government data and services.

The study's findings are consistent with recent research, highlighting the need for governments to adopt a more strategic approach to digital communication (Kumar et al., 2020). Specifically, governments must invest in digital literacy programs to ensure citizens have the skills and knowledge to use digital platforms to access government services effectively (Pew Research Center, 2020). Furthermore, governments must address the spread of misinformation on social media by promoting fact-checking initiatives and working with social media companies to remove fake news content (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2019).

The study also highlights the importance of cybersecurity in public service delivery. Cybersecurity threats are a significant concern for governments worldwide, and Nigeria is no exception. As noted by recent research, cybersecurity threats can have severe consequences for public service delivery, including the compromise of sensitive government data and the disruption of critical infrastructure (NIST, 2020).

Finally, the study's findings underscore the need for collaboration between government agencies and private sector organizations to leverage digital technology to improve public service delivery. As noted by recent research, public-private partnerships can effectively promote innovation and improve public service delivery (OECD, 2020).

In conclusion, this study contributes to understanding Nigeria's complex digital communication and public service delivery dynamics. The findings suggest that digital communication can improve public service delivery, but various challenges hinder its practical use. To address these challenges, governments must invest in digital literacy programs, address misinformation on social media, prioritize cybersecurity, and collaborate with private sector organizations to leverage digital technology to improve public service delivery.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study's conclusions lead to the thorough suggestions listed below:

Digital Literacy

- The Nigerian government should invest in digital literacy programs to ensure citizens have the skills and knowledge to use digital platforms to access government services effectively.
- The government should work with educational institutions and private sector organizations to develop and implement digital literacy curricula and training programs.
- The government should provide resources and support to non-profit organizations and community groups that provide digital literacy training to marginalized and underserved communities.

Misinformation and social media

- The Nigerian government should address the spread of misinformation on social media by promoting fact-checking initiatives and working with companies to remove fake news content.
- The government should establish a dedicated fact-checking agency or unit to verify the accuracy of information before it is disseminated through official channels.
- The government should work with social media companies to develop and implement algorithms that prioritize credible sources of information and reduce the spread of misinformation.

Cybersecurity

- The Nigerian government should prioritize cybersecurity as a critical component of public service delivery and invest in measures to protect government data and systems from cyber threats.
- The government should establish a dedicated cybersecurity agency or unit to coordinate cybersecurity efforts across government agencies.
- The government should work with private sector organizations to develop and implement cybersecurity protocols and standards.

Public-Private Partnerships

- The Nigerian government should establish partnerships with private sector organizations to leverage digital technology to improve public service delivery.
- The government should work with private sector organizations to develop and implement innovative solutions to address public service delivery challenges.
- The government should establish a dedicated agency or unit to oversee public-private partnerships and ensure they are transparent, accountable, and effective.

Capacity Building

- The Nigerian government should invest in capacity-building programs for public officials, particularly those who implement digital initiatives.
- The government should provide training and resources to support the development of digital skills among public officials.
- The government should work with international organizations and development partners to access expertise and funding for capacity-building initiatives.

Monitoring and Evaluation

- The Nigerian government should establish a system for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of digital initiatives in improving public service delivery.
- The government should conduct regular surveys and assessments to measure citizen satisfaction with digital services and identify areas for improvement.
- The government should publish regular reports on the progress of digital initiatives and provide transparency on using funds.

By implementing these suggestions, the Nigerian government may use digital technology to boost citizen involvement, promote accountability and transparency, and improve public service delivery.

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