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Apeh, Andrew C, Didiugwu, Ifeanyi F.

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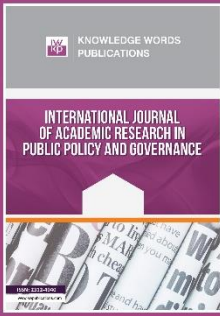
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Public Awareness and Use of Government Agencies Website in Nigeria

Apeh, Andrew C. (Ph.D.)

Department of Mass Communication,

Enugu State University of Science and Technology (ESUT), P.M.B 01660, Enugu, Enugu State, Nigeria.

Email: ochendoandy@yahoo.com

Didiugwu, Ifeanyi F. (Ph.D.)

Senior Lecturer, Department of Mass Communication,

Enugu State University of Science and Technology (ESUT), P.M.B 01660, Enugu, Nigeria.

Email: ifeanyididigwu@yahoo.com

Abstract

As a way of keying into the evolution of modern ICT and engender good governance through technology, Nigerian government agencies hoisted their websites. The launch of the e-government website was envisioned to serve the people better and improve government internal operations, while intensifying its external mutual relationship with its citizenry. In a way, the approach was to make the Government more responsive to the changing trends in modern governance. The aim was to establish a level of cooperation through faster and effective communication between the Government, and the citizens. This study was therefore, initiated to ascertain the level of public awareness and use of the Nigerian government agencies' website. As a result, the study was anchored on the Uses and Gratification theory. A qualitative research design was adopted in addressing the research objectives/ thematic problem. The process of information collection was carried out through phone in-depth interviews conducted among 200 respondents using judgemental sampling techniques from a population of 3,257,298 residents in Enugu state. Research data show low exposure level of government agencies' websites by the Nigerians residents.

Accordingly, the study recommended the improvement of government agencies' website services, the speed and quality of policy development, coordination and enforcement of government websites across all government ministries.

Keywords: Public Awareness, Usage, Government Agencies, Website.

Introduction

We live in a golden age of communication. Modern communication technology keeps everybody connected 24 hours and makes information immediately available anytime and anywhere. The

emergence of the Internet has created a new channel for machine-assisted and mass communication. The world wide web brings the internet into the realm of mass communication. Websites offers everybody including the government and citizens the chance to become mass communicators. This is possible because the Internet brings down the cost of mass communication to a level at which almost everybody can afford it. These new Web communicators represent exceptions to the features of traditional mass communication (Dominick, 2009, p.15). Many web sites bypass gatekeepers, a circumstance that has both positive and negative consequences to all especially the security and the image of the government. On the other hand, there is no guarantee that what is made available will be accurate or worthwhile. Rumors, conspiracy theories and truly tasteless content abound on the internet. Therefore, a government that wishes to survive in this era of digitalization must follow up with the trend to be able to tell its own stories faster and counter negative reportage meant to drag in the mud the good image of the government and as well, to uphold quality and effective mutual communication with its publics. When the world wide web and newsgroups offered a place where anyone could post messages and reach a large potential audience, businesses, educational organizations, government agencies, and individuals, all scrambled to stake out a site. "We can infer that being on the web would put any nation or organization on the right course of speedy and sustainable development in line with the emerging changes in technology, economic and political paradigms. Consequently, many organizations, ministries and institutions in Nigeria have their own websites through which they make relevant information available to members of the public" (Nwabueze & Ozioko, 2011).

However, the question now is, how effective is this web site in building government and citizen's relationship? Therefore, the need to examine the public awareness and use of government agencies websites in Nigeria.

E-government initiatives in Nigeria are designed to reach the publics' faster and establish a better feedback mechanism through paperless public sector which will strengthen relationship with citizens through greater transparency and information flow.

The ICT industry according to Nworgu (2007) appears to be making significant in road into the Nigeria society. Prior to 1999, ICT resources and facilities were grossly limited in the country. Only very few wealthy Nigerians had access to these facilities and services. Internet facilities and services were rare to come by and the facsimile (ie. Fax) remained for a long time, the only means available to Nigerians for transmitting and receiving data or documents to other parts of the world. Public awareness of ICT and its application was very low.

In 1990 therefore the internet technological revolution came rapidly and transformed most part of the world and its connectivity; from a few loosely connected millions now we have a thousand billion digitally connected world of networking people across borders and boundaries (Meetika, 2013). People these days spend more time on their Laptops, android phones and computers, just for various reasons ranging from assessing numerous reading materials like books, online newspapers, booking travel ticket, listening to music, watching videos for entertainment, buy any product through online shopping or engaging in public forums and discussions, reading e-books, e-journals, sharing pictures and videos and interacting with friends, family, business or government organizations via popular social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, YouTube, LinkedIn etc. To participate in the above mentioned; all they need is an internet connection and a phone or a computer.

The powerful effect of Information and Communications technology has been felt in so many countries like in Egypt political revolution, Nigerian 2011 general election, etc. With the advent of Information and communications technology and the growing broadband penetration in urban, semi

urban as well as rural areas. This has connected the masses like never before with a mere “click” of the button. Social media is the new medium through which individuals, businesses, organizations, government as well as civil society engages and interacts in this information age. Social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Whatsapp, Telegram, Instagram, BBM, etc can topple government regimes, boost political campaigns and contribute to presidential wins, bring about public protests, organize social demonstrations, mobilize social campaigns, and enable communications and discussions on public forum, spread awareness, provide instant news and information.

As the communications landscape gets denser, more complex, and more participatory, the networked population is gaining greater access to information, more opportunities to engage in public speech, with fast access to feedbacks and an enhanced ability to undertake collective action through an established empathized group(s). Social media have become a fact of life for civil society worldwide, involving many actors, regular citizens, activists, non-governmental organizations, telecommunications firms, software providers, politicians and governments.

As social media increasingly becomes part of everyday life, it would be very dangerous for any system of government to ignore, unless it wants to experience the effects of its spiraling powerful effects by surprise. However, these powerful effects can be channeled into positive productivity by any government that embraces these astounding trends. No doubt, more government agencies are carving out a social media presence online. Facebook, Twitter and YouTube not surprisingly, are perhaps the most common outlets for government social media efforts. Initially the governments worldwide were not that supportive of using social media for improving governance but slowly and steadily government world over are embracing this platform.

In the 21st century, the government needs to be more open and transparent about its working and these social networking sites can help in evolving a more participatory, innovative and inclusive governing model where the government not only spread awareness of its policies and plans but also engages in a two-way communication where they can get instant citizen feedback as well as incorporate suggestions made by common people for proper delivery of public services.

Social Media is defined by a Number of Tools. These Tools are

Blogs: this can be used to tell the public or stakeholder groups about agency activities and gives readers the opportunity to provide comments.

Wikis: examples include Wikipedia and govdx, the Government collaborative workspace. They are best **Microblogs:** the most well-known example is **Twitter**; best for short public announcements and drawing attention to new information on agency websites.

Social Networking sites: **Facebook** is probably the most well-known. These sites may be useful in raising public awareness of government services or initiatives and engaging with relevant pre-existing online communities.

Objectives of the Study

The major goal of this research was to evaluate public awareness and use of government agencies website in Nigeria. However, this research aims at achieving the following specific goals;

- i. To ascertain the extent to which government agencies in Nigeria have adopted e-technology in governance through the hoisting of their agency’s website.
- ii. To know the exposure level of Nigerians to these hoisted websites by government agencies.

- iii. To establish the interaction level between these government agencies and visitors to the agency's website.
- iv. To check if the adoption of these communication technologies have led to increased efficient government internal operations, while intensifying its external mutual relationship with its citizenry.

Implementing Social Media in the Public Sector

According to Mergel (2013) social media can be used to share information, educate the public, and direct updates and notices to the audiences and constituencies who need to receive them and who have potentially no access to them otherwise. As an example, the Public Service Commission of Wisconsin has found a way to use social media for information sharing only, and has moved comments from the public page to a specific commenting page instead of mixing two purposes on its social networking pages. Social media can still be used to publicize programs, provide eligibility requirements, inform citizens, and educate them about their rights.

Professionalizing social media implementation is therefore imperative for government agencies. There are three steps to take: (1) design a social media strategy; (2) regulate employee and citizen behavior with an appropriate social media policy; and (3) plan online tactics and interactions.

Designing a Social Media Strategy

In designing a social media, the first strategy focuses on answering the questions of why an agency should engage on social media and who might find social media content of interest. How can social media activities support the core mission of an agency, and what content can easily be created or recycled from other sources to push out through the additional social media channels? Given the widespread use of social media, the expectation is that most parts of the citizenry and other professional organizations would be available on social media, so therefore government agencies can through this medium increase public awareness for services and programs by delivering the information directly into the online awareness streams of their constituents.

Managing Online Behavior with Social Media Policies

At this stage, efforts should be targeted at managing and regulating online behavior of both employees and citizens. First, internal rules help guide employees who are creating online content and managing social media platforms on behalf of their agency. What content is suitable for circulation? Who is responsible for online updates? What is the proper tone, frequency of updates, and netiquette to respond to citizen requests on social media? Managing the public's expectations of prompt responses and regular posts is the second aspect of a social media policy. Often, citizens respond with inappropriate feedback or off-topics, or use a government agency's social media presence as an invitation to post comments using inappropriate language, and government agencies shy away from deleting or omitting these comments. As long as the language is appropriate, however, all updates should remain online to create a high degree of transparency and accountability. In cases where updates are clearly derogatory or don't follow the established netiquette, deleting them after publicly reminding citizens of the rules is an appropriate measure. The social media policy should be posted regularly as an update in the newsfeed, or by linking to it on an agency's website or having it prominently linked from the social media account description.

Planning Social Media Tactics and Daily Governance

Social media platforms can be used for many different types of online interactions. Depending on the mission of the organization, these platforms can range from informing and educating to participation and innovation creation. Government organizations are using social media to push out information and use social media as a broadcasting mechanism to increase awareness of their programs. As an example, the Nigerian government agencies websites Services explicitly state in its social media policy that the commission's social media outlets are only used to inform and educate the public about its mission, news, meetings, cases, or projects. Other organizations are using social media updates on Twitter to create awareness and to educate the public about issues they are representing.

Social media updates are also an important mechanism to create awareness for existing programs or the rollout of new programs, and to pull citizens to longer content available on an agency's website where they can inform themselves about eligibility.

The workload of updating social media accounts can easily be reduced by using a scheduling mechanism. Employee time does not necessarily have to be tied up in daily interactions, especially for agencies that only infrequently need to communicate with the public.

Monitoring citizen opinions online is an important task that should not be neglected. A great example is the use of social media by the utility company Con Edison during Hurricane Sandy. The company listened to distressed citizens online, answered every single request, and provided minute-by-minute updates about power outages and repair progress as necessary.

ICT for Good Governance

Social media are designed to create bidirectional interactions between government and its audiences. However, social networking services were originally created to enhance communication and interactions between private citizens, not as a formal professional communication tool for organizations. In all intents and purposes, ICT is the acclaimed engine room of modern day global development and sustainable growth (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, 2005). The potential attributes and benefits of ICT to policy makers in the society have been accepted as imperative paradigm (Attama and Owolabi, 2008). In the same vein, Anehobi (2007) maintains that no institution or organization can still rely only on the traditional printed information resources to perform efficiently.

The infusion of ICT into public administration enhances ICT efficiency in the delivery of services to the people. Heber (1990) in his own view maintains that ICT helps in taking high quality decisions and at the same time saves time. It is in line with the laudable roles that the federal government of Nigeria in order to ensure the full exploitation of the potentials of ICTs in sustainable democracy laid foundation for e-government in Nigeria (Aragba-Akpore, 2004).

Countries that have adopted and applied electronic services (ICT) to their operations have witnessed dramatic improvement in their development efforts. Such countries as Singapore, United States, Canada, Japan and most European nations, ICT is a strong tool for sustainable development and improving governance, widening democratic space, increasing productivity, administrative effectiveness and cost savings (Adamali, Coffey and Safdar, 2006). It is not surprising therefore that the application of ICT in governance is engendering much concerns in many countries of the world.

According to Chen (2006) cited in Darren M. and Musa B. (2010) "eGovernment is a permanent commitment made by government to improve the relationship between the private citizen and the public sector through enhanced, cost effective, and efficient delivery of services, information and knowledge". However, as Cook (2000) has also pointed out that if the essence of establishing

government website is about changing the way people and businesses interact with government, it is essential that government actions are in line with this statement because when it comes to citizens, "it only makes sense to find out what they want, expect, do not want, and worry about" (Cook, 2000), therefore if the needs of the citizens are not taken into account as government website is being developed in a country, then we would ask who actually is government website meant for? Without the willingness of citizens to adopt government websites initiatives, these are bound to fail, the success of these initiatives then depends on bringing the citizens onboard from the onset, understanding what factors could influence citizen adoption of the initiatives and ensuring that their requirements are met (Carter and Belanger, 2005).

Governments around the world are at various stages of eGovernment readiness and implementation as confirmed by the United Nations eGovernment readiness reports such as (UN, 2010), with European countries generally taking the top spots and in the 2010 survey the first African country coming in at a very low 66th position. Indeed, across the entire African continent the regions fall well below world averages for eGovernment development.

This study is therefore seeking to identify the awareness and use of government agencies websites in Nigeria, matching citizen's expectations and requirements from the government. According to Carter and Belanger (2003) there have been a lot of studies carried out to identify user adoption of services provided online by businesses via e-commerce but none to identify factors that would make citizens use government websites services. This could be as a result of not having been consulted on the types of services they would like to see. This is evidence from the results of a survey carried out on government agencies websites by Carter and Belanger (2003) which revealed that of the 74.2% of government agencies which had websites, 90.5% of them did not conduct a survey to find out what citizens and businesses wanted on the websites. The success of eGovernment initiatives in the country ENigeria should depend on bringing the citizens, businesses and all stakeholders onboard from the onset, understanding what they require and ensuring that these requirements are met. Then developing eGovernment initiatives and frameworks from these requirements.

Different stages of eGovernment have been outlined by the various studies that have been carried out in the field. According to Parajuli (2007) these various stages or models all reflect a transformation that starts from a nascent static online presence to fully integrated and interactive maturity. According to West (2004) there are four general stages of eGovernment development while Hiller and Belanger (2001) present five stages in their study. The stages in both studies are similar, focusing around simple presentation of information, through transactional level services (including the provision of two way communications), through the clear integration of systems (with eGovernment services not being separated from the whole) to real transformational eGovernment made possible through services providing the capability for clear citizen participation in governance.

Theoretical Framework

This research work got its theoretical base on Uses and Gratification theory. This is because its basic tenets or assumption are fundamental to the understanding of the research problem under study. According to Haggell (1994), this theory expounded in 1974 by Jay G. Blumler and Elihu Katz is a reaction to traditional mass communication research emphasizing on the sender and the message. Uses and gratification theory attempts to explain the uses and functions of the media for individuals, groups, and society in general. At the core of uses and gratification theory lies the assumption that audience members actively seek out the mass media to satisfy individual needs. To identify the positive and the negative consequences of individual media use, a medium will be used more when

the existing motives to use the medium leads to more satisfaction. As explained by McQuail (2005, P. 424) the theory believes that “Media and content choice is generally rational and directed towards certain specific goals and satisfaction (thus the audience is active and audience formation can be logically explained). Audience members are conscious of the media related needs which arise in personal (individual) and social (shared) circumstances and can voice these in terms of motivation.” Kaye (2007, P. 129) argues that the uses and gratification theory “assumes that the media audience approach media with specific needs and for specific reasons.” In the process, the media audience select specific media content that would satisfy those needs”. Uses and gratification theory has always provided a breakthrough in theoretical approach in the initial stages of each new mass communication medium even the new media (Internet). As good as the theory is, it has been criticized by Littlejohn (1992, P. 374), “uses and gratifications makes the media consumption extremely rational, behaviouristic, and individualistic. Individual are believed to control their media consuming behavior according to conscious goals.

However, the connection between this theory and the study lies heavily on the public awareness and uses of government agencies websites. This study clearly investigated the extent of the agencies awareness and usage among Nigerian public. Over the years related studies in connection to new media and usage have all justified their works with this theory such as Omenugha (2010); Kaye and Johnson (2004); Charney and Greenberg (2001).

Awareness and Uses of Social Media in Nigeria

The deregulation of telecom system in Nigeria brought about the major significant impacts we are experiencing today in the social media and ICT in general. Prior to 1999, ICT resources and facilities were grossly limited in the country. Public awareness of ICT and its application was tremendously low or without any significant. But now, the picture is entirely different. Huge investments have been made by both the public and private sectors in the ICT business in the country. Within the last eight (8) years, the country has witnessed tremendous expansion in ICT resources, facilities and usage. “About 70 million Nigerians now have access to GSM. With the liberalization policy of the Federal Government, more GSM operators and Internet Service Providers (ISPs) have been licensed and are now operating in the country. Millions of Nigerians now have access to these facilities and services even in the rural communities” (Nwabueze & Ozioko, 2011).

A significant milestone in the development of the ICT industry in the country is the formulation of a National Information Technology Policy (NITP), which was approved in March, 2001 by the Federal Executive Council. With the enactment of this policy came the establishment of an implementing agency-the National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA) in April 2001. This agency is charged with the responsibility of implementing Nigeria’s IT policy “as well as promote the healthy growth and development of the IT industry in Nigeria (Isoun, 2003).

According to Nwabueze & Ozioko (2011) “the major thrust of the IT policy in Nigeria can be gleaned from its vision and mission statement. According to the then Honourable Minister of Science and Technology, Professor Turner Isoun, the vision of the policy is to make Nigeria IT-capable country in Africa and a key player in the information society by the year 2015, using IT as the engine for sustainable development and global competitiveness”. On the other hand, its mission statement is to: Use IT for: Education, Creation of Wealth, Poverty Alleviation, Job Creation and Global Competitiveness. The policy relies on human capacity building as the major strategy for realizing its vision and mission (Isoun, 2003).

A list of Nigerian Government Agencies and their Websites

- Federal Republic of Nigeria. www.nigeria.gov.ng

Communications and Media

- Nigerian Communication Commission (NCC) <http://www.ncc.gov.ng>
- National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA) <http://www.nitda.gov.ng/>
- Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN) www.radionigeriaonline.com
- Nigeria Television Authority (NTA) <http://www.nta.com>
- News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) <http://www.nannewsngr.com>
- National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) <http://www.nbc-ng.org>
- Nigerian Communication Satellite (NIGCOMSAT) <http://www.nigcomsat.com/>
- Nigerian Press Council (NPC) <http://www.presscouncil.gov.ng/>
- Broadcasting Organisation of Nigeria (BON) <http://www.bon.gov.ng/>

Economic

- Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) <http://www.cbn.gov.ng>
- Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) <http://www.nddc.gov.ng>
- Bureau of Public Enterprises (BPE) www.bpeng.org/
- Federal Mortgage Bank of Nigeria (FMBN) <http://www.fmbn.gov.ng/>
- National Council on Privatization (NCP) <http://www.ncpng.org>
- Nigeria Export Processing Zones Authority (NEPZA) <http://www.nepza.gov.ng>
- Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC) <http://www.cac.gov.ng/>
- Nigerian Export Promotion Council (NEPC) <http://www.nepc.gov.ng/>
- Federal Inland Revenue Service (FIRS) <http://www.firs.gov.ng>
- National Insurance Commission (NAICOM) <http://www.naicom.gov.ng/>
- National Pension Commission PenCom <http://www.pencom.gov.ng/>
- National Sugar Development Council (NSDC) <http://www.nsdc.gov.ng/nsdc>
- Fiscal Responsibility Commission (FRC) <http://www.frc-nigeria.org/>
- Bureau of Public Procurement (BPP) <http://www.bpp.gov.ng>

Energy

- Nigerian Electricity Commission (NERC) <http://www.nercng.org>
- Energy Commission of Nigeria (ECN) <http://www.energy.gov.ng/>
- Power Holding Company of Nigeria (PHCN) <http://www.phcnonline.com>
- Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) <http://www.nnpcgroup.com>
- Department of Petroleum Resources (DPR) <http://www.dprnigeria.org.ng/>
- Nigerian Gas Company (NGC) <http://www.ngc-annpcgroup.com/>
- Petroleum Product Pricing Regulatory (PPPRA) <http://www.pppra-nigeria.org>
- National Petroleum Investment Management Service (NAPIMS) <http://www.napims.com>

- National Power Training Institute of Nigeria(NAPTIN) <http://www.naptin.org.ng/>

Intelligence

- State Security Service(SSS) <http://www.fas.org/org/irp/world/sss.htm>
- National Intelligence Agency(Nigeria) <http://www.nationalintelligenceagency.gov.ng>
- Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA) <http://www.fas.org/irp/world/nigeria/dia.htm>

Law Enforcement

- Nigeria Police Force (NPF)<http://www.npf.gov.ng>
- Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC) <http://www.frsc.gov.ng>
- Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) <http://www.efccnigeria.org>
- National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) <http://www.ndlea.gov.ng>
- Nigeria Copy Right Commission (NCC) <http://www.copyright.gov.ng/>
- Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) <http://www.icpc.gov.ng>
- Nigeria Immigration Service(NIS) <http://www.immigration.gov.ng/>
- Nigerian Customs Service (NCS)<http://www.customs.gov.ng/>
- Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) <http://www.nscdc.gov.ng/>
- Nigerian Prisons Services (NPS) <http://www.prisons.gov.ng>
- Nigeria Nuclear regulatory Authority (NNRA) <http://www.nnra.gov.ng/>
- National Agency for Science and Engineering Infrastructure (NASeni) <http://www.naseni.org>
- National Identity Management Commission (NIMC) www.nimc.gov.ng
- National University Commission (NUC) <http://www.nuc.edu.ng/>
- National Salaries, incomes and Wages Commission (NSIWC) <http://www.nsiwc.gov.ng/>
- Federal Aviation Authority of Nigeria (FAAN)<http://www.faa.gov>
- Federal Housing Authority (FHA) <http://portal.hud.gov/>
- Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) <http://www.inecnigeria.org>
- Legal Aids Council Nigeria (LACON) <http://www.legalaidcouncil.gov.ng/>
- National Agency for Food and Drug Administration Control (NAFDAC) <http://www.nafdacnigeria.org>
- National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) <http://www.nema.gov.ng>
- National Orientation Agency (NOA) <http://www.noa.gov.ng>
- National Oil Spill Detection and Response Agency (NOSDA) <http://www.nosdra.gov.ng>
- National Environmental Standard and Regulation Enforcement Agency (NESREA) <http://www.nesra.gov.ng>
- National Space Research Development Agency (NASRDA) <http://www.services.gov.ng/nasrda>
- National Planning Commission (NPC) <http://www.npc.gov.np/>
- National Centre for Remote Sensing, Jos (NCRS) <http://www.ncrs.org/>
- National Sports Commission (NSC) <http://www.sportscommission.gov.ng/>
- National Water Resources Institute(NWRI) <http://nwri.gov.ng/>
- National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) <http://www.nigerianstat.gov.ng/>
- Nigeria Maritime Administration and Safety Agency (NIMASA) <http://www.nimasa.gov.ng/>
- Nigerian Agricultural Insurance Corporation (NAIC) <http://www.naic.org>

- National Agricultural Extension, Research and Liaison Services (NAERLS)
<http://www.naerls.gov.ng>

National Taskforce to Combat Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (Natforce) Nigeria

- Nigerian Ports Authority (NPA)<http://www.nigerianports.org>
- National Poverty Eradication Program (NAPEP) <http://www.napepnigeria.org>
- National Office Technology Acquisition and Promotion (NOTAP) <http://www.notap.gov.ng>
- National Lottery Regulatory Commission <http://www.natlotregcom.gov.ng>
- Consumer Protection Council (CPC) <http://www.cpc.ng>
- Infrastructure Concession Regulatory Commission (ICRC) <http://www.icrc.gov.ng>
- Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN) www.trcn.gov.ng
- Nigeria Hydrological services Agency (NIHSA) <http://www.nihydro.gov.ng>
- National Examination Council (NECO) <http://www.neconigeria.org>
- Nigeria Christian Pilgrim Commission <http://www.ncpc.gov.ng>
- National Council of Arts and Culture (NCAC) <http://www.ncac.gov.ng>
- Corporate Affairs Commission. <http://www.cac.gov.ng>
- National Hospital and Medical Center. <http://www.thenationalhospital.com>
- Nigerian Postal Service (NIPOST) <http://www.nipost.com.ng>
- Federal Institute of Industrial Research. <http://www.fiiro.org>
- Voice of Nigeria. <http://www.voiceofnigeria.org>

Citizens' Requirements, Benefits and Uses of Nigerian Government Websites

Citizens requirements are a very key factor to consider in designing effective government websites and at its heart, on the side of the government lies the desire to change the way people, businesses, companies tourists etc. all interact with government. According to Cook (2000) it is very sensible to ascertain what citizens want and expect from their government and also what they don't want and what they worry about. This is a valid point because as many governments all over the world are developing and implementing strategies for the delivery of efficient and quality services to citizens through its websites, it is important for them to examine the publics awareness and use of digital content of these government websites beyond other things that exist such as its financing, content and responsiveness (West, 2004; Borrás, 2004). According to Wang, Bretschneider and Gant (2005) recent trends in the development of eGovernment are the creation of "citizen centric websites" whose content and services are built in line with the anticipated needs of web visitors therefore understanding citizen requirements will take the government even further and enable it to apply involved planning in the design and deployment of initiatives which citizens would more likely be able to adopt (Yonazi, Sol and Boonstra, 2008; Carter and Belanger, 2005).

A survey administered by the international city/county management association (ICMA) to chief administrative officers at government agencies, according to Carter and Belanger (2003), reveals that 74.2% of the agencies developed websites without conducting a survey to determine what the citizens wanted on the websites. Furthermore there have been cases where plans to have citizens vote on policies were dropped before they reached the city councils for fear that they would support plans the city was not interested in fulfilling (Kolsaker and Lee-Kelley, 2009). This shows that there is the possibility that governments are proceeding with the implementation of eGovernment initiatives without getting the views of the citizens. Further findings of studies showed that there exists an

absence of political, managerial and financial interest and support for proactive engagement of citizens through the web. This attitude where governments are not responding to what citizen needs are, in the development and adoption of eGovernment, is common to both developed and developing nations as sometimes the aspirations of the leaders are not in line with the expectations of the people (Heath, 2000).

There are various services which governments provide for their citizens through government websites. Many governments, according to the definition by Hiller and Belanger (2001) are continuously optimizing service delivery to ensure that the services offered are at par with the type of relationship between the government and the user at the time of interaction and the stage of integration at which the government website has reached. If it is at the first level of eGovernment then the services offered are more static and require further actions from the user such as going in person to city hall to submit complaints or applications. At the last stage, then fully functional eGovernment is in place and would not require the user to go beyond their computer systems, so from the convenience of their homes or offices, users can, for example, renew driving licenses, book transport ticket, for example the Y-Unit built for Nigeria, make job applications, view ongoing road works in the city, check car park availability, make complaints online and contribute in some way, shape or form to local democracy, among other things (Hiller and Belanger, 2001; West, 2004). These services provided by the government through their websites have “many benefits” (Hiller and Belanger, 2001) both for the government and its citizens or users of the websites. Both parties are able to save time, money and energy to be invested elsewhere. By providing the services the government appears to have a more human face by providing links to government officers and offices, attending to citizen complaints and responding to their suggestions. Government is also able to save money on paper work and labour while at the same time providing the services required by citizens in an efficient and timely manner. Citizens are then also able to interact with government when they want to and from anywhere they choose (Layne and Lee, 2001; Hiller and Belanger, 2001). Also it is thought that in some nations government websites could help citizens to benefit from a less corrupt government due to increased transparency, reduced corruption and greater accountability (Ndou, 2004).

Challenges to Public Awareness and Uses of Nigerian Government Websites

A lot numbers of challenges are facing public awareness and use of government websites. These vary from country to country, with some few which are common to all. Some of this differences are:

Technical Issues

The primary problem in the implementation of government websites in the world is the disparity of technological quality between developed and developing nations (Norris, 2001; Jaeger and Thompson, 2003; Ndou, 2004). There also exists a shortage of IT skills and knowledge in the implementation of government agencies websites and at the same time, lack of standards for IT. The costs of internet usage in many countries still remains too high for a majority of the people and these people regard internet usage as a luxury they cannot afford (Backus, 2001). If the costs of internet usage are not brought down then the people for whom the government is going online for will not be able to benefit from it (Backus, 2001; Ndou, 2004).

There are also problems relating to the system of government agencies websites designing. In designing systems for government agencies websites, designers, developers and business analysts have to contend with the portability and compatibility of present systems with new technologies; this

is because there is great uncertainty regarding new technology and the rate at which it changes (Lau, 2003; Signore, Chesi & Pallotti, 2005). With the plethora of government services which can have an online presence, all have varying demands, requiring different levels of resources to function. The formats and differences in user interface from one agency to another should also be considered and it must be that these systems all have interoperability both with new and with existing systems (Layne and Lee, 2001; Signore, Chesi and Pallotti, 2005). Regardless of the urgency of implementing eGovernment, it should be noted that all “necessary technological infrastructure” (Jaeger and Thompson, 2003) must be present to provide services to the citizens (Jaeger and Thompson, 2003). Therefore the development of the basic infrastructure should not only be a priority but alternative methods such as “remote access by mobile phones, satellite receivers or thorough kiosks” should also be considered (Ndou, 2004). And steady power supply is a major factor.

Security of the Citizen’s Privacy

The privacy and security of citizens when using government services is of a major concern here. If citizens feel the security of their privacy is not guaranteed or at risk by participating in government websites then they will be reluctant to use these services (Lau, 2003). In their interaction with government online citizens would at times be required to provide personal information. Therefore the government must guarantee the security of privacy to these informations. In addition, the government must also ensure that technical solutions are applied and that there is a “transparency of procedures and possibly independent auditing” (Lau, 2003). The coordinators and implementers of eGovernment must respect accepted privacy principles while at the same time “allowing the benefits of the internet and other technologies to flow to citizens” (Lau, 2003). It would also be a step in the right direction if governments take an active role in the development of policy related to security of privacy (Lau, 2005). With a proper security and privacy policy in place, and with accompanying technology which ensures this, transactions involving personal details and payment for services could be more easily conducted on government websites (Signore, Chesi and Pallotti, 2005).

Citizen Expectations

Another difficulty that government face in the development of government websites is that of understanding the citizen’s needs and meeting up with these expectations (Lau, 2003). As governments develop websites, there are certain things the citizens desire from their government which they would reach out to these websites in search of, and which the government websites seek to satisfy. Therefore, for government website to be successful it must be abreast with the kind of services their people want and how this will effect responses to the services offered (Lau, 2003). In regard to this, governments must in her processes of designing programs for these websites “plan with the citizens instead of planning for them” (Okenwa, 2002) to ensure that their efforts are not wasted and that the citizens receive the implemented initiatives.

Political Challenges

This can be classified as one of the major challenges that have to be surmounted for government websites to be successful. One of these is bridging budgeting barriers (particularly relevant in the current economic context), most of the time, the scope, breadth and depth of eGovernment is not properly put into perspective and does not receive the necessary monetary allocations (Lau, 2003; Backus, 2001).

Many scholars advocate appropriating laws and cyber laws” (Backus, 2001; Ndou, 2004) with which citizens can be protected. These they justified by stating that it shall help to guide individuals use of the internet (Backus, 2001; Ndou, 2004). To them lack of laws allows people to do as they will, thus discouraging a large number of citizens from being a part of the online community or eGovernment (Backus, 2001). However, I am not an advocate of this cyber law. In my opinion, total freedom of social media is the idle thing in strengthening democratic ideology in our society. We should therefore refrain from any guise that agitate any atom of regulation to social media. When we allow every ideas and opinions into the market place, definitely the truth shall prevail over the falsehoods. And in the course of debating the impacts of social media, we should not try to rule out the unique powerful effect of human psychological engravement which distinguishes us as rational beings, that have the power of choice (selectivity).

More so, the impact of government websites can be affected by the bureaucracy within government where decision making is done at a snail pace and where there exists a “no problem owner within government” (Backus, 2001) mentality and where no one is willing to take responsibility for any issues that may arise or goes wrong (Backus, 2001). Most government agencies in Nigeria are known with this lesser fair or nonchalant attitude towards issues, including important issues of lives. This is as a result of lack of political will to clinch on the good part and selfish mentality of the leaders. EGovernment is also affected by a “short term approach due to elections” (Backus, 2001) where due to political instability there is only a hurried implementation (Backus, 2001).

Factors Affecting the Impacts of Government Agencies Websites Usage in Nigeria

Although the impacts of government agencies website are gradually and consistently beginning to be felt in Nigeria, there is little evidence of research to suggest that a clear framework for the adoption of eGovernment is being followed, likewise, research evidence on the impact of usage. According to (Yusuf, 2006), eGovernment activity in Nigeria is low. Most government websites are in the publish stage and a few government organisations are at the transact stage. Some organizations have even by-passed the interact stage, thereby giving no opportunity for citizen requests or feedback (Yusuf, 2006). Like many other African nations, there are some clear problems which influence the achievement of government agencies websites in Nigeria. These problems impacting on web implementation for Nigeria are outlined below:

Electricity Supply

Nigeria at present generates less than 3000MW of electricity for a nation of over 140 million people, this is very low thereby forcing many households and companies operating in the country to depend on generators and other alternative sources for their electricity (Ayo and Ekong, 2008). This would have adverse effects on the citizens usage of government websites in the country. It would not make any sense if government websites is introduced and the people to benefit from it cannot access it to make use of it. An option for the government would be to find an alternate source of energy such as solar power, or subsidize the cost of inverter for devices such as kiosks and for internet cafes so that they can function always regardless of the power situation.

Teledensity

According to statistics from the Nigerian Communication Commission (NCC) there are more than 67 million phone users in Nigeria as at April of 2009 and a teledensity of 47.98. The telecoms industry in Nigeria is the fastest growing in Africa and the third in the world going from a teledensity of 0.73 in

2001 to 47.98 in 2009 (Ayo and Ekong, 2008). This will definitely have a positive impact on the implementation of eGovernment in the country.

Internet diffusion

Internet diffusion in Nigeria was virtually non-existent in 1999 and it has now risen to a population of over 10 million users, second only to Egypt with an online population of 10.5 million (Ayo and Ekong, 2008). Although the figure seems very little considering the population on the country it is expected to keep growing, this does not take into account the number of people who go online from their mobile devices. The key to successful implementation of eGovernment anywhere is the level of internet diffusion in the country therefore more has to be done to improve on this.

Adult Literacy Rate

According to Ayo and Ekong (2008), adult literacy rate in Nigeria is above average and therefore would be a good factor in the implementation of eGovernment in the country. Furthermore with the introduction of initiatives such as the Universal Basic Education scheme (UBE) which ensures free education for children till 15 years of age, and nomadic education in the north, the literacy level is likely to improve in the near future (Ayo and Ekong, 2008).

Unemployment Rate

The rate of unemployment in Nigeria is a factor that has remained high due to corruption, mismanagement of national resources and the absence of basic infrastructure, good electricity and proper implementation strategies for government initiatives. This also has the potential to adversely affect the use of government website in Nigeria.

Methodology

This study is aimed at appraising the public awareness and uses of Nigeria government website. In order to achieve this goal, qualitative research method was used to generate data from 200 respondents, sampled from the total population of 3,257,298 residents in Enugu state, Nigeria. The process of information collection was carried out through phone in-depth interviews conducted using purposive simple random sampling techniques. This is in regard to the fact that Enugu state is housing various people from various states in Nigeria. Therefore, the researchers randomly selected respondents from the three senatorial zones of Enugu state (Enugu North, Enugu East and Enugu West) to ensure equal representation to all IT literate citizens.

Analysis / Discussion of Findings

It has been commonly accepted and proven that information and communication technology (ICT) is the engine of the 21st century and beyond; as it will chart the economic, religious, cultural, legal and social life of nations, particularly that of developing countries (Ukodie, 2004). Hence, according to Nkereuwem (1996), the importance of information and communication technology for sustainable development, has long been recognized by developing countries.

The components of the criteria used for assessing the awareness and usage of these websites were examination of the following; Citizens outreach/digital democracy, usability, online services, accessibility, website content, and Adverts and user fees.

Usability

Nigerian government websites scored low on their usability. The sizes of the homepages were within acceptable parameters not exceeding two pages, but none of the sites had a site map and only 80% of the websites had a navigation bar on each page. There was also no consideration to accommodate different categories or groups of visitors to the sites such as young people, elderly people, disabled, students, kids, etc, unlike what is obtainable in UK websites where navigation bars on each page were of appropriate sizes, there were site maps available and different groups of users such as young, old etc. were considered in the development of the websites.

Online services

Here there was no support for online services on the Nigerian websites which allows active feedback mechanism within the page. Only 20% of the websites allow complaints to be registered and post notifications of ongoing works in the city with frequent updates posted.

Accessibility

There were many accessibility errors found on the Nigerian websites. The home pages of the sites were first assessed before the rest of the other pages were assessed. Therefore, 82% of the homepages of the websites assessed had more than five errors while only 18% had less than five errors on its homepage. Other pages of the sites were filled with numerous errors. In all the sites all scored low on accessibility.

Levels of E-Government

From the analysis carried out, we found that only 37.3% of the Nigerian state websites could be described as having reached the second stage of E-Government. So far, the states are Lagos, Imo and Abuja. They have generated 24/7 online services that invite citizens to interact with them such as message boards and chat forums. Also they have provided facilities for their web users to give online feedback. However, 62.7% of the state websites were still very much in the first stage of E-Government. It was also found that at this stage, most of the published content were not updated regularly.

Citizen requirements for E-Government

Nigerian citizens show a willingness to engage with the government through online services of the government agencies websites and to fully participate in the act of governance through this means. The in-dept interview carried out showed that there is a high level of expectation from the citizens' towards government agencies website. Respondents were also asked to rate the current level of government agencies websites in the country on a low to high scale. 57.7% of Nigerian citizens rated the level of government websites in Nigeria as low in satisfaction of its online services.

Adverts and user fees

Research data reveal that 80.5% of the Nigerian websites had links to various commercial services such as newspaper websites and others.

Citizens Outreach/Digital Democracy

The analysis of citizens' outreach and digital democracy revealed that only 46.7% of the Nigerian government sites had the status of online feedback and only 30% had the character of contacting

officials other than the webmaster. While only 20% of the sites had an online poll. Therefore, the Nigerian government sites had no online opinion polls although there were avenues for users to register complaints. 60% of the Nigerian sites didn't have email updates but people could follow them on the other social networking site or through twitter and Facebook.

Website Content

The outcome of the research revealed that Nigerian websites considered, scored low when their page contents were evaluated. Only 42.4% of the websites advertised job vacancies and only 15% had audio and video clips. Also only 40.1% of the websites had links to websites of other ministries within the state. 60% didn't have the date of last update, although it was obvious from the content that the sites were not updated regularly.

Key Findings

This research has the following findings as summarized below;

- i. The study found that government agencies in Nigeria have adopted e-technology in governance through the hoisting of their agency's website.
- ii. There is low exposure level of Nigerians to these hoisted websites by government agencies. Thus, this has affected the effective and proper utilization of these government agencies' websites.
- iii. Nigerian citizens show a willingness to engage with the government through online services of the government agencies websites and to fully participate in the act of governance through this means.
- iv. The extent of the interaction between the Nigerian government agencies' websites and their visitors/web users are very minimal.
- v. The study revealed that there is no support for online services on the Nigerian websites which allows active feedback mechanism within the page.
- vi. The study found that government websites scored low on their usability and lacks follow-up on the information found on the homepage.
- vii. There were many accessibility errors found on the Nigerian websites
- viii. Communication technologies have led to increased efficient government internal operations, while intensifying its external mutual relationship with its citizenry.

Summary and Conclusion

ICT has impacted on different sectors of the Nigerian economy. The application of ICT has emerged as the most radical development of the 21st century. It has facilitated speedy information transmission, high level decision making, reduces cost in resources/organizational management and as well opens vast opportunities for information sharing among individuals, companies and governmental institutions. It is a truism that information and communication technology (ICT) is very indispensable to Nigerian sustainable development drive. Today, ICT has been successfully integrated in the process of so many government agencies administration, leading to a view concept of e-government. The potential benefits of ICT to sustainable development in Nigeria has been accepted as an imperative paradigm. The implementation of e-government infrastructure in Nigeria is undeniably progressing.

However, this study concludes that the e-government awareness and uses in Nigeria is yet to reach the expected level of efficiency, effectiveness and speed as it is in the so many developed nations like

in the UK and USA. Although Internet technology is rapidly growing with many government agencies establishing an official website for its citizens, and with the emergence of 3G and broadband networks, Nigerian citizens are still not aware of e-government services. 40% of the Nigerian citizens are found to be moderate in understanding the concept of government website and e-government in general. .

Citizens believed that e-government implementation will make information seeking much easier and doing transaction will be more transparent but they are still uncertain whether e-government can improve the government's quality of service or improve communication between government and citizen since most government agencies websites are established without proper cognizance of the citizen's needs and true desires.

In response to the low-usage users of government agencies websites in Nigeria, citizens cited lack of promotion to introduce government agencies' website services and lack of exposure and awareness of e-government initiatives by the government to the public.

Recommendations

Accordingly, the researchers recommend the improving government agencies' website services, the speed and quality of policy development, coordination and enforcement of government websites across all government ministries.

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