

Chapter 58

Citizens and E-Government: Perceptions in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Governments and public-sector managers worldwide have within the last decade come to the realization that Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is a viable tool that can help them achieve their aims. The chapter reviews literature on e-Government services and applications and the perceptions of citizens of adoption in the context of Nigeria. The methodology is a review of related literature that draws conclusions specifically to propose a plan for the adoption and the use e-Government services in Nigeria. The chapter highlights the contemporary issues of e-Government adoption in Nigeria. This chapter suggests a link between the citizens' negative perceptions and distrust of government in general and their hesitance and reluctance to embrace e-Government in particular.

INTRODUCTION

E-Government allows governments to provide services to citizens in a timely, effective, and cost-efficient method. Governments in the developing world such as Nigeria have often been described as over bureaucratic, bulky, over-centralized and expensive to manage, inefficient, insensitive, dictatorial, egalitarian and corrupt (Nurudeen & Usman, 2010). Yildiz (2007) and Schuppan (2009) explain that with an understanding of complex processes of e-Government policy making and appropriate devises, strategies and interventions, e-Government can be a potential to reduce corruption, reduce bureaucracy, promote good

governance, enhance democracy and improve service delivery of government products to citizens. Choudrie, Umeoji & Forson (2012) highlight that the success of e-Government implementation lies in overcoming initial citizen resistance, requires cultural sensitivity and change to the way citizens and governments relate to each other.

The Internet is synonymous with twenty-four hour access, seven days a week and citizens expect efficient and fast e-Government products and services at their fingertips. While this seems to be the expectation of a few members of the public, a larger size of the population in Nigeria seems not to be interested in e-government. Choudrie *et al.* (2012) reports that the reasons for this lack

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of interest may be as a result of cultural, socio-economic and gender related factors rather than the expected lack of infrastructure that is often reported in literature that have made the vast number of citizens dissatisfied with governments over the years and the citizens' yearnings for the dividends of democracy. Albert (2009, p. 135) reports new evidence that supports the argument that the lack of infrastructure is not "as weighty in the explanation of the problem of corruption and lack of the political will to support e-Government in Nigeria." This suggests that the citizens under the harsh social, economic and political environments which they live may not be keen on pursuing e-Government.

Despite the shortcomings, there has suddenly been an escalation of e-Government initiatives across sub-Saharan Africa as has been the case in other parts of the world even much earlier. The success of these initiatives in Africa and Nigeria in particular is another issue. E-Government includes the use of information technology to support government operations, engage citizens and provide government services. E-Government is the use of information technology to communicate with citizens and organizations with more convenient access to government information and services and to provide delivery of public services to citizen, business partners, and those working in the public sector. E-Government incorporates four key elements that, when combined, create a unified process: e-services; e-commerce; e-democracy; and e-management (Janssen & Kuk, 2008). The World Bank Group (2000) defines e-Government as the use of information and communication technologies to improve the efficiency, effectiveness, transparency and accountability of governance. National eGovernment Strategies Limited, Nigeria (NeGst) describes e-governance as deploying ICT tools and processes for efficient administration and enhanced revenue generation for better governance. Emergence of e-Government was signaled by the initial part of implementation of e-governance which was "computerization" of

public offices enabling them to build their capacity for better service delivery and bringing in good governance using technology as a catalyst. The second part was the provision of citizen centric services through digital media-like developing interactive government portals. The UN Global E-Government Readiness Report by Hafeez and Sher (2006) defines e-Government as "the use of ICT and its application by the government for the provision of information and public services to the people. The aim of e-Government, therefore, is to provide efficient government management of information to the citizen; better service delivery to citizens; and empowerment of the people through access to information and participation in public policy decision-making."

Although, Dada (2006) says e-Government is a lot more than mere computerization of government services, but more of a belief in the ability of technology to transform relations between the government and the governed and bring improvements in governance, bordering on e-readiness and e-inclusion. The countries with remarkable e-governance initiatives are New Zealand, Canada and Singapore. The evolution of the concept of e-Government is traceable to the United States which was especially driven by the 1998 Government Paperwork Elimination Act and by President Clinton's December 17, 1999, Memorandum on E-Government, which ordered the top 500 forms used by citizens to be placed online by December 2000. The memorandum also directed agencies to construct a secure e-Government infrastructure.

The aim of e-Government and its spin-offs of E-Democracy, E-Participation, E-Procurement, E-Health, E-Learning, E-Transportation, E-tax and a range of other "E-'s" according to Bertot, Jaeger & McClure (2008) is basically to engage citizenry in government in a user-centered manner. In addition, it is aimed at developing quality government services and delivery systems that are efficient and effective. The authors also suggest that the concept can be user-centred and citizen centred. For the Southern African case, countries such as

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