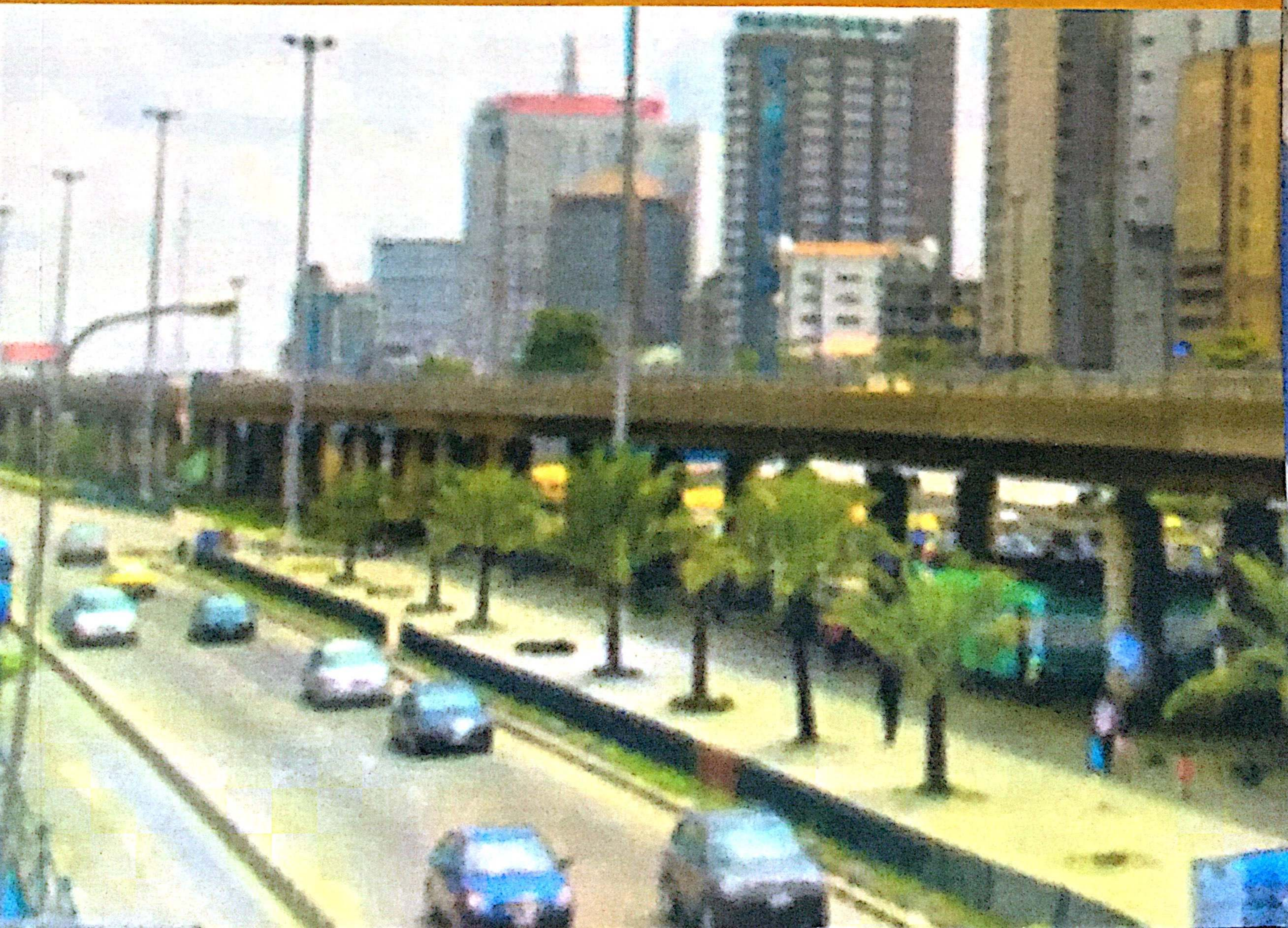




Governance and Contemporary Issues in Public Administration

Jacob O. Fatile | Phillip A. Oyadiran | Salami I. Afegbua



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*Aluko, Opeyemi Idowu, Abdulkareem, Abdulrazaq Kayode
& Ishola, AbdulrasaqAjadi*

Introduction

Public orderliness requires that everyone in the state maintain a reasonable level of freedom and restriction. For these contradictory positions to be properly maintained, an institution of the state called government was set up. It is from the responsibility of this body that different definitions of government emerged. In the opinions of John Locke, Thomas Hobbes and a host of other early writers, government is the entrenchment of social contract. The idea of a social contract that connects the people to the state through legitimacy requires that social services be delivered effectively and efficiently. In essence, the overall image of any government depends on the goodwill, legitimacy and performance trust it reposed in its citizens. To Adam Smith in his capitalist perspective, government is the mechanism or institution designed by the upper echelon of the society to ensure state harmony through suppression of the lower class (Schaffar, 2018). Regardless of the attached sentiments to their conceptual definition of the concept, government remains a social vehicle through which state programmes and policies are being generated, legitimized and implemented.

At the inception, the role of government was limited to the maintenance of law and order but with the re-inventing nature of governments, the scope of its institutions continued to expand. This expansion is less of a blessing than a curse. As applicable to most governments, in Nigeria and other developing democracies, the limitations in the traditional public administration practices are attributable to bureaucratic rigidity and complexity among government Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs), excessive and time-consuming duplication of paperwork which leads to long waiting time both for citizens and public administration officers (Al-Hakim, 2007). Using Nigeria as a case, Sabo (lecture note) gave a clearer description of the situation when he alludes that; "The general perfidy, poor performance, and inefficiency of public enterprises have been quite remarkable, comments across official and unofficial quarters have indicated that the enterprise has performed woefully bad that they remained a public disgrace."

Increasing demand for effective and efficient services has been accompanied by increasing skepticism about the inability of the public sector to conduct its affairs in a productive manner. The public sector is generally viewed as being administered by "incompetent bureaucrats" steeped in "red tape," indifferent to the needs of the public and, unable to effectively deliver the required goods and services, hide their inability by strict adherence to rules and regulations. Whether or not this sense of incompetence is based on fact, 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 performance of the public institutions due to poor public service delivery.

Why serve the citizens on the line when you can serve them online? To address the situation, governments around the world in an attempt to retain popular legitimacy now embrace digital revolution to enhance their performances. The rapid emergence and growth of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in governance has remained the cornerstone in savaging the incessant menace of poor social service delivery.

Service Delivery: A Brief Insight

To understand “service delivery,” one must first understand what is commonly termed “service,” which this study defines as a product or activity that meets the needs of a user or can be applied by a user. Service is an activity rendered by one party to another in an agreed manner. In many kinds of literature, there has been a persistent use of “goods and service” in a conjoined way. However, the unique characteristics differentiating services from goods are intangibility, perishability, 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 or perishes. More evident is that fact that a service is consumed as soon as it is delivered while production and consumption of services usually take place simultaneously. Policies and strategies that deliver public services have an overriding goal of improving the well-being of the people by providing the 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 continuous, cyclic process for developing and delivering user-focused services. Service delivery does not stop once the product or service has been delivered as user outreach and engagement must continue to ensure that services are received, acted upon and the user achieves the full intended benefit.

Transparency and Accountability in Service Delivery

A key function of government is to provide social services or public goods (Okojie, 2009 and Eigeman, 2007). Anuradha (2010) and Okojie in what looks more like a recent movement held that governments had an obligation to protect and provide basic services as “rights” that were protected under constitutions rather than “needs” which were at the discretion of officials to interpret and fulfil. A well-delivered public service requires the government to meet the needs of the citizens through an effective and efficient means.

The impact of transparency and accountability on service delivery has always been an underlying motif in the literature on service delivery (Anuradha, 2010). Since government engages public resources in the provision of social services to the populace, a reasonable measure of regular reporting (accountability) is therefore required to show to the citizens that their joint resources have been effectively used. Through accountability, transparency is established. Furthermore, when public services are provided in a professional and proper manner and do so at the lowest possible cost. This adds to the trust and strengthens the foundations of society (Eigeman, 2007).

The concerted and deliberate attempt by governments to make information or processes that were previously opaque in the public domain, accessible for use by citizen groups, providers or policy makers can be defined as transparency initiatives. Initiatives for transparency can be proactive or reactive disclosure by the government (Anuradha, 2010). Another set of claims is that transparency and accountability lead to increased responsiveness on the part of providers; improved access and quality of services; and consequently better developmental outcomes (Anuradha, 2010). Eigeman (2007) further submitted that quality and affordable service delivery is a condition for the good image of government.

Effective and efficient internal processes directly affect the quality of service delivery, the value of products and services and the cost effectiveness of an organization’s day-to-day operations should

be considered. Ideally, service delivery should continuously adapt to changing users, user demands, user capacity and external drivers such as new technologies or advances in science. Hence the adoption of ICTs in governance to satisfy the dual aim of internal efficiency, real-time transparency and accountability in service delivery, as well as catching up with the technological environment.

E-Government/E-Public Service Delivery

In the modern information society, innovations in information and communication technology have influenced citizens' behaviour as well as their desired information requirements by having fundamentally challenged how people work and communicate (Wirtz & Daiser, 2015). The concept of e-Government (electronic government) has been a major subject of scientific interest in public administration literature at least for a decade (Heeks, 2006; West, 2005; Garson, 2003 and Fountain, 2001). However, e-government is not constrained to the field of public administration alone, rather it is multidisciplinary in nature as it covers fields like information system, political science, information technology and computer science. More importantly, it is not just a movement that has transpired in one particular country; rather it is truly a global phenomenon, affecting both developed and developing nations. E-Government is still a new phenomenon where ideas are still pouring out from scholars and its practitioners. Thus, it is devoid of a standard and universal definition (Reddick, 2010).

The term e-government can be simply described as summing up "government-as-usual plus ICT." e-Government is not about business as usual, but should instead focus on using ICT to transform the structures, operations and, most importantly, the culture of government (Alshehri & Drew, 2010). Adeyeye and Aladesanmi (2011) quote former Obasanjo's definition of e-Government as the use of information & communication technologies, to improve efficiency, effectiveness, transparency, and accountability of governance through implementing data warehousing and integrated decision support system to manage the modern economy for the benefit of the governed.

However, an in-depth study of the definitions of e-Government shows that some scholars view e-government as an end in itself while many others see it as a means to an end. To the former, one of the cardinal duties of government is service delivery in an efficient and effective manner and e-government provides the platform to do just that. Thus, the successful implementation of e-public service delivery marks the realization of prominent objectives of the government. As such, e-government becomes a means to an end. Authors with this perspective are presented as follow;

The European Commission (2003) posits that e-government is the use of information and communication technologies in public administration combined with organizational change and new skills in order to improve public services and democratic processes and strengthen support for public policies. Similar to the European Commission's view is the perception of Denhardt and Denhardt (2009) and Olowu (2004) who see e-government as a tool for service delivery. i.e. the use of "all the information and communication technology platforms and applications in the public sector or the use of the internet for delivering government information and services to citizens." To buttress this perspective, Adah (2015) described e-Government as a two-way communication process, which deals with the use of information and communication technology to deliver government services and ensuring the availability of such services to citizens. Practically, e-government deals with the adoption of new leadership approach, a new mechanism of making decisions on policies and investment, new ways of making social services available to citizens, new ways of listening and attending to needs of the citizens as well as new ways of organizing and delivering information and services. Dhamodharam & Saminathan (2011) termed e-government as the government's use of ICT tools particularly web-based internet applications to enhance the access to and delivery of government information and service to citizens, businesses and arms of government. In the words of Jalali & Khorasani (2012), the concept of e-government indicates service delivery and information exchange both within the organizations (In-

ter-Governmental) and outside them (Inter-Governmental) which are performed using various technical tools and is seen as a mutual relationship between government and citizens, non-profit organizations, business persons, employees and the government itself.

Concisely, a common understanding in this service delivery group is that e-government refers to the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), particularly Web-based applications, to provide faster, cheaper, easier, and more efficient access to and delivery of information/services to the public, businesses, other agencies (non-profit), and governmental entities.

The latter group held that e-government is a means through which political values and mandates are being fulfilled. To them, through e-public service delivery, popular participation can be engendered, transparency can be achieved and accountability enshrined. This group of writers thereby take e-government as an end in itself. To back this up, Al-Hakim (2007) submitted that e-Government refers to the use of ICTs by government agencies 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) define e-government as the relationships between governments, their customers (businesses, other governments, and citizens) and their suppliers (again, businesses, other governments, and citizens) by the use of electronic means. 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 with the aim of improving the relationships between government institutions and citizens." The constant mention of "government-citizen relationship" in the above definitions portrays an element of politics. To Davies (2015), e-Government refers to efforts by public authorities to use information and communication technologies (ICTs) to improve public services and increase democratic participation. Therefore, the common thread in the political perspective group indicates that e-Governance has the ability to transform government and make it more responsive and accountable to citizens (Reddick, 2010).

Despite the scope disparity between the presented perspectives, there are still many common threads in their ideas and they are the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs): its ability to transform government and make it more responsive and accountable to citizens through participation and service delivery. However, this study shall adopt the perspective of the former that takes e-government as a means to an end where they defined e-government as the use of IT to deliver social services in an effective and efficient manner. Sequel to this, e-government, therefore, assumes the substitute for e-public service delivery.

E-Public Service Delivery Initiative around the Globe

In recent times, several countries around the world are making major efforts at improving their public sector and regenerating their public administration in order to make them more transparent, proficient, streamlined, and more service oriented through the use and application of ICT (Oni, Okunoye & Mbarika, 2016). E-government services have become an important instrument of public administration (Wirtz & Daiser, 2015). The core ideas and techniques associated with showcasing governments online first emerged in the most developed western countries in the mid-1990s (Reddick, 2010), although the utilization of a computer for government functions can be traced back to the early 1970s. Since the introduction of government online presence, continents around the world have joined the modernist trend.

Information and Communication Technology and its application in recent times have offered many opportunities for economic and human development within various nations in the global community (Adah, 2015). In Nigeria, the level of e-governance is advancing from a low level to a medium level. This means that a few of government establishment has implemented electronic communica-

tion and recording in daily transaction of events in the public administration. Although, a very large parts of the public institutions still transacts in manual communication and record keeping, the private sector have rapidly deliver services to the public through e-public delivery mechanisms (Aluko, 2018; Aluko & Aderiola; 2018).

Asian countries, for instance, presented an interesting contrast in the level of penetration and use of e-government services. In Asia, there are countries such as Singapore, South Korea, and Japan that have a high degree of Internet infrastructure penetration and are attempting to be 100% paperless. For example in recent years, both the central and local Chinese governments have paid increased attention to e-governance. The infrastructure includes "Three Networks and One Database," comprising internal networks, special networks, and external networks, and a database system. The three stages of building this comprehensive network include "Office Automation," the "Twelve Golden Projects," and "Government Online" (Singh & Sharma, 2009).

Australia and New Zealand, in the Australian continent also provided their citizen's several e-government services that have culminated into their placement in the transactional level of e-governance. In Europe, e-government is operating at the peak, as most government services are not just online related but also citizens inclusive.

In the North American continent, Canada is regarded as the "government most connected to its citizens." For instance, the first Canadian government Web sites began to appear in 1994, after Mosaic, the first effective browser, appeared in 1993, and by 1995, the federal government had established its first web portal. By the late 1990s, all provincial governments had their own web portals, as did many major cities. However, at this stage such facilities were portals in name only, essentially being a list of links to various services and information sites operated by disparate departments and agencies of each government (Reddick & Turner, 2012). Hence, Canada was placed in the Transactional category. The e-government waves did not exempt the South America Continent as Argentina continued to play the leading role in its e-government project through the development of a completely computerized voting system and, on the other initiatives.

E-Government Components

E-Government is composed of many evolving broad areas some of which are: Government to Citizens (G2C); Government to Business (G2B); Government to Government (G2G) (Adah 2015 and Al-Hakim 2007); Government to Employees (G2E) (Aluko, 2018; Aluko and Aderinola, 2018; Albeshier, 2015; Adeyemo, 2011; Alshehri, & Drew, 2010 and Akunyili, 2010) and the Government to Foreign National (G2FN) (Service portal, 2017). The first component, which is G2C, offers the government opportunity of reaching out to the citizens all day by posting information and activities of the government on the internet. It keeps the citizens abreast of government policies and activities and to the extent of running online transactions throughout the day and week (Adeyemo, 2011 and Pardo, 2000).

In the G2C category, the major objectives are to build applications to facilitate access and free flow of information between citizens and government institutions, and providing citizens with access to full range of e-government services online (National Research Council, 2002 cited in Alsaghier, Ford, Nguyen & Hexel, 2010) for specific programs like election, tax and rates payment, international passport processing etc. Collaboratively, Adah notes that in Government to Citizens (G2C) model, citizens of nations are given the opportunity to inquire about issues relating to government institutions, keep records of income taxes, pay tickets, renew driver's license etc. In addition, the government can also aid in giving out information on the web, provide downloadable forms online, assist citizens in finding employment and providing information about health and safety issues.

The G2B component enables the corporate entities to relate to the government in a more reliable, transparent and efficient ways. Here, a two-way interaction channel is created between commer-

cial ventures and government. In the G2G component, various government institutions have the opportunity to interact in both open and confidential manners. This service helps to remove the excessive bureaucracies that tend to slow down governance process. More elaborately, Adah (2015) stressed that the strategic objective of employing e-governance in the government-to-government model is to simplify and support the process of governance for the government, citizens, and businesses. It is also necessary that government activities more transparent, speedy and accountable. This is the main pillar of e-government, which creates the avenue for the implementation, and adoption of ICT government in many countries.

Therefore, by employing online platforms in every sphere of the society, government processes become more, harmonized, streamlined, efficient, effective and less dependent on human interactions. Thus, interconnecting various ministries, governments, departments, agencies, public employees, businesses, citizens and foreign nationals electronically will mean that the process of governance will be enhanced in the society (Adah, 2015).

Implementation Stages of E-Government

There have been inconsistencies in the stages of e-government adoption in many kinds of literature. The UN e-government survey e-government (2004, 2005 & 2008) and Palvia and Sharma (2007, cited in Adah, 2015) identifies five stages for Web measure index. These stages include:

- i. Emerging,
- ii. Enhanced,
- iii. Interactive,
- iv. Transaction, and
- v. Connected.

In another study by the same outfit in 2010, the stages were reduced to just four (4) as "interactive" was merged with "transactional," and renamed "seamless" as "connected," establishing a four-stage order of emerging, enhanced, transactional, and connected. However, this study will adopt the more elaborate five (5) stages levels of e-Government adoption.

Emerging information services

Government websites provide information on public policy, governance, laws, regulations, relevant documentation, and types of government services provided. A few independent government websites are provided, which provide users with static organizational or political information but without much activity (Adeyemo, 2011). Citizens are easily able to obtain basic government information in small scope and pertain to only specific issues on what is new in the national government (Adah, 2015).

Enhanced information services

Government websites deliver enhanced one-way or simple two-way e-communication between government and citizen; selected public policy documents such as an e-government policy statements, specific education and health policy statements, as well as government sources of current and anchored information are made available to the citizens (Adah, 2015). The sites have audio and video capabilities and are multi-lingual. Similarly, Oni, Okunoye&Mbarika (2016) explained that the content of government should be geared towards open administration, publicity and provision of unique and innovative services to citizens.

Interactive services

In this stage, a country's presence on the internet expands dramatically by entering the interactive mode with access to a wide range of government institutions and services (Adeyemo, 2011).

Transactional services

Government websites engage in two-way communication with their citizens, including requesting and receiving inputs on government policies, programmes, regulations, etc. (Adeyemo, 2011). Some form of electronic authentication of the citizen's identity is required to effectively complete the exchange. Government websites process non-financial transactions, e.g. e-voting, downloading and uploading forms, filing taxes online or applying for certificates, licenses and permits. They also handle financial transactions, i.e. where money is transferred on a secure network to the government.

Connected services

Government websites have changed the way governments communicate with their citizens. They are proactive in requesting information and opinions from the citizens using Web 2.0 and other interactive tools. E-services and e-solutions cut across the departments and ministries in a seamless manner. Information, data, and knowledge are transferred from government agencies through integrated applications. This stage represents the most sophisticated level in the online e-government initiatives as it is characterized by an integration of G2G, G2C and C2G (and reverse) interactions (Adeyemo, 2011). Governments create an environment that empowers citizens to be more involved with government activities to have a voice in decision-making.

Rationale for E-Government Adoption and Its Benefits to Nigeria

Despite the challenges and barriers usually attributable to e-government, its benefits are potentially great (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2009; Iyer, Baqir, & Vollmer, 2006; Navarra & Cornford, 2003; Cud-dy, 2003). E-government promises to provide manifold game-changing advantages (Wirtz & Daiser, 2015). One of the main objectives of e-governance, which is the use of information and communication technology to disseminate information from one sector to another, is being projected by various nations in the global community (Adah, 2015). Although there are disparities in the implementation process of e-government in various nations. Yet, similar reasons can be established for e-government adoption world over. E-Government has emerged as a viable means to address development issues and challenges because citizens find empowerment through access to information. Emerging developing economies such as Nigeria, South Africa, Republic of Korea, Singapore, and Malaysia have embarked upon e-government initiatives to provide a just, fair and equitable governance environment to the governed and they have achieved tremendous success (Dhamodharam & Saminathan, 2011).

In a more liberal sense, Albeshier (2015) and Davies (2015) opined that e-government provides citizens, organizations, and government itself with a number of benefits, such as enhancing accountability, transparency, and responsiveness of government agencies and helps in saving time and costs. Similarly, e-Government is expected to allow for less corruption, provides increased transparency, affords greater convenience, improves revenue and reduces costs (Singh & Sharma, 2009). While commenting on the UNPAN Survey, Ayanso, Chatterjee & Cho (2011) and Aluko (2018) held that given the all-encompassing nature of the effect that ICT can have, the survey envisages ICT as ushering in "connected governance" that increases efficiencies of intra-governmental linkages, resulting in better service delivery and enhanced citizen participation in governance. Thus, e-government in Nigeria is not just about digitizing existing bureaucratic processes. It should rather be seen as a transformation of e-business models onto the public sector and in terms of how governments operate (Wirtz & Daiser, 2015; Aluko 2018).

This age of globalization thereby requires that government world over changes and improves the mode of interacting and providing services to the citizens. More so, there are pressures growing from the citizens demanding services to be provided online due to the stage of technological advancement (Accenture, 2004). Apart from citizens' pressure, international pressures on governments cannot be ignored as well, countries are being pressurized to join in the e-economy and be part of the

global market (Ifinedo, 2005). Therefore, the emergence of e-Government in Nigeria emanated from the need for improving government's internal efficiency in terms of administration and establishing a quality mode of providing information and services [to the people] (Fountain, 2001; Aluko, 2018).

Furthermore, governments around the world are introducing e-government as a means of reducing costs, improving services for citizens and increasing effectiveness and efficiency at national, regional and local levels of the public sector (Alshehri & Drew, 2010). Dhamodharam & Saminathan (2011) also held that the overall aim of e-government project is to have SMART governance, which means: Simple, Moral, Accountable, Responsive and Transparent governance. In addition to access to information and services, the internet also offers opportunities for new kinds of two-way communication between the citizens and the government (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2009). Conclusively, E-government has therefore been proposed as a way to increase citizen trust in government and improve citizen evaluations of government generally (Tolbert & Mossberger, 2006).

E-Government Challenges

Denhardt and Denhardt (2009) noted that while e-government offers many opportunities for better information sharing, efficiency, and better service to citizens, it also creates significant challenges. Thus, regardless of how advanced is a country in terms of ICT infrastructure and deployment, many technical and non-technical obstacles must be faced in the adoption and dissemination of e-Government (Colesca, 2009). E-Government implementation by governments has been plagued by a number of factors prominent among which are:

- **Priority misplacement:** An effective e-government project is supposed to be citizen-centered but the opposite is actually the case in Nigeria. In the words of Adah (2015), the major setback that is experienced in the process of implementing e-governance in Nigeria is the fact that the primary objective of making it citizen-centered approach usually becomes a displaced priority. This is why despite the huge financial commitment; only the elites enjoy the benefit of the project more. In a more elaborate approach, Srivastava & Teo (2005) noted that though e-Government promises a service transformation economically, citizens in many countries feel that the outcomes of e-Government initiatives do not commensurate with the effort and resources expended.
- **ICT infrastructural deficiency:** The implementation of e-government initiatives face some technological difficulties such as lack of shared standards and compatible infrastructure among departments and agencies. ICT infrastructure is recognized to be one of the main challenges for e-government (Alshehri & Drew, 2010).
- **Unstable power supply:** It is already common knowledge now that planning for ICT based businesses in Nigeria cannot rely on the public power supply. Some companies had resorted to "operate on generator and put the public power supply on standby," which is very expensive (Ajayi, 2007).
- **ICT illiteracy:** To be educated is to be able to read, write and use the computer -New paradigm (Dhamodharam & Saminathan, 2011). Following this paradigm, low information technology literacy is tantamount to illiteracy. The ICT illiteracy in Nigeria is very alarming and it slows down the process of e-Government progress (Adeyemo, 2011).
- **Abuse of privacy:** There are wild concerns about website tracking, information sharing, and the disclosure or mishandling of private information such as through unwarranted access to sensitive personal information or vulnerability to online fraud or identity theft. Such concerns can be a major impediment to the take-up of e-Government services (Davies, 2015, Alshehri & Drew, 2010; Colesca, 2009).
- **Connectivity problems:** These are challenges peculiar to the Internet sector. It is sad to note that up until today there is no internet exchange point in Nigeria. Local Internet traffic still has to transit through points in Europe and America at great cost (Ajayi, 2007).
- **Lack Partnership and Collaboration:** Collaboration and cooperation at local, regional and national levels, as well as between public and private organizations, are important elements in the e-gov-

ernment development process. However, collaboration and cooperation are not an easy factor to achieve (Alshehri & Drew, 2010).

Conclusion

E-government has been proffered as a panacea to government's inefficiency, the absence of transparency. It will facilitate an increase the level of interaction between the government and the citizens (Aluko, 2018; Dhamodharam & Saminathan, 2011; West, 2005). In many developed and a few developing countries, e-government is fast replacing the traditional and conventional bureaucratic mode of public service operation, though much faster in some than other countries. In Nigeria and other African countries, though the rate is steadily growing, but the rate is quite slow because most of the public bureaucracies "are still hierarchical and lack accountability and transparency" (Ngulube, 2007).

The emergence of information technology in Nigeria serves as a new paradigm shift in the manner, process and pattern of communication between, within and outside the public sector. E-government is gradually posing as a tool for enhancing the external and internal relationship between the government and the citizens through constituency participation and efficient service delivery through technology and the new media (Gartner Group, 2000; Aluko, 2018; Aluko & Aderinola, 2018). It improves the extent of effectiveness and efficiency of the government establishments and the level of trust will be enhanced on the general populace due to the transparency in governance involved e-governance transactions.

For any public sector or government to achieve a great success, there is a need to digitalise its governance and administrative process. In Nigeria, the level of literacy about e-governance and e-connectivity are not very strong but the little awareness available is able to revolutionise government and promote accountability, transparency, good governance and sustainable development. The government in Nigeria should have a time limit to end manual transaction within the public sectors as a major communication medium so that a period of time will be given for the public sector to advance to full e-governance in Nigeria. This transformation period should be five years maximum period of time for effective full compliance with digitalisation and modern development. This will make Nigerians to enjoy good service delivery from its public institutions with minimum stress and corrupt tendencies.

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