

THE BOON OF CORONA VIRUS PANDEMIC: THE UPSURGE OF DIGITAL ADMINISTRATION IN THE NIGERIAN PUBLIC SERVICE

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ABSTRACT

The paper examined the boon of corona virus (COVID 19) pandemic: the upsurge of digital administration in the Nigeria public service. The aim was to find out the impact of the covid 19 pandemic in the use of digital administration. Specifically, the paper examined the impact of improved utilisation of digital means in administration. Secondary source of data such as books and journals were used to gather information. The challenges discovered and encountered in the application of digital administration were discussed. The paper argued that the corona virus pandemic era enhanced the use of digital administration in the public service of Nigeria. It also argued that the use of digital administration has had huge impact in the public service. It concluded that the upsurge in digital administration is a boon of the coronavirus pandemic. The study went further to recommend amongst others that the challenges encountered in the usage of digital administration requires a mix of technical, organisational, and social strategies in making it usable, secured and inclusive. This will ensure the promotion of digital administration in post corona virus pandemic.

Keywords: Administration, Digital Administration, Public Service, Coronavirus, and Upsurge

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 global pandemic has changed how the world functions, illustrating the limitations of many existing systems and highlighting, the need to reimagine the role of information technology as a lever for administrative efficiency. The outbreak of COVID 19 pandemic in late 2019 caused by the

novel corona virus (SWARS-coV-2, World Health Organisation (2021). According to Kristian et al. (2020), the virus responsible for COVID 19, known as SARS-Cov-2, is most likely of natural origin and not laboratory -made intrepidly evolved into an unprecedented global crisis affecting health system, economies and social structures worldwide. While the pandemic undoubtedly resulted in significant loss of life, economic disruption and psychological stress, it also acted as a catalyst for transformative changes across various sectors. To this extent, the pandemic can be examined not only as a global challenge but also as a phenomenon that brought certain unintended benefits or “boons” to society. Countries need resilient public administration to be prepared for future waves of COVID 19 and similar situations (Rajala & Jalonen, 2022). In attempting to contain the virus, countries established mobility restrictions and, in some cases, lockdowns, which fundamentally disrupted the functioning of society and the economy. This disruption has transformed the ways different organisations and institutions operate, communicate and transfer knowledge (Branscombe, 2020).

Before the pandemic, efforts towards digitising public sector operations in Nigeria had been gradual and, in some cases hindered by infrastructural deficits, resistance to change, and limited policy enforcement. The COVID 19 crisis most notable positive outcome has been the acceleration of digital transformation, and has served as a catalyst that necessitated immediate innovation and adaptation. Government agencies were compelled to deploy digital tools for communication, service delivery, record keeping, and decision-making processes, thereby reducing dependence on physical presence and paperwork. This sudden shift not only ensured the continuity of governance during a period of crisis but also highlighted the potential for increased efficiency, transparency, and accessibility within the Nigerian public service. Virtual meetings, e-governance platforms, and remote work systems became more widely accepted, signallying a departure from entrenched administrative norms. Consequently the pandemic can be seen as a paradoxical boon-one that despite its adverse effects, spurred a long-overdue digital transformation in public administration.

However, studies conducted during the pandemic revealed that most countries, regions, and cities were not well prepared for it (for example OECD, 2020; Joyce, Maron & Reddy, 2020). The Covid 19 pandemic therefore brought pressure on public services (Switzer, Wang & Hirschvogel, 2020). Weber, Cabras & Ometto (2021) suggest that, in some countries, the crisis was used to introduce reforms to deepen New Public Management (NPM) policies and practices.

This paper examines the impact of the COVID 19 pandemic on administration in Nigeria by examining the boon of the corona virus pandemic: an upsurge in digital administration in Nigeria public service. The paper looked at how the corona virus pandemic accelerated the upsurge of digital administration in Nigeria’s public sector, exploring its implications, challenges, and the prospects for sustaining these gains in the post pandemic era in the Nigeria public service administration.

Statement of the problem

The outbreak of the covid 19 in the late 2019 and its subsequent spread into Nigeria in 2020 significantly disrupted traditional manner of administration and public service delivery. Prior to the covid 19 pandemic, several sectors of public administration, operated in the analog style, where physical contacts were mostly made amongst public workers (Akala, 2020). The advent and sudden surge of the corona virus led to a total lock down of activities that were usually carried out by physical contacts. Many businesses closed down and some were made to work from home (Khetarpal, 2020). The unexpected pandemic of the covid 19 thus brought some administrative challenges to several countries, especially the developing countries like Nigeria. Physical distancing measures, lockdowns, and restrictions on movement exposed longstanding inefficiencies in Nigeria's public administration system, mostly as it has to do with its heavy reliance on manual paper based processes, and face-face interactions.

The situation required means other than physical contacts for businesses to survive and for administration in the public sectors to continue. In response, there was a quick and unplanned shift toward digital administration across government institutions. While this digital transformation exposed critical challenges, it also created opportunities for improved efficiency, transparency, and service accessibility. This study seeks to find out the positive gains of the corona virus pandemic on public administration in Nigeria. The following questions are asked to propel the objectives of the study. How was the administrative system in the public service in Nigeria before the COVID 19 pandemic? How was the administrative system sustained in Nigeria? How has the changes that were made during the pandemic helped to reshape the administrative system of Nigeria? What are the challenges and prospects towards digitalising the system of administration in Nigeria?

Objectives of the study

The objectives of this research are to:

- i.** examine the level of digital administration before the covid 19 pandemic
- ii.** discover the impact of digital administration during the covid 19 pandemic
- iii.** analyse the challenges of digital administration in Nigeria
- iv.** evaluate the prospect of digital administration in the post covid 19 period

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

Administration

The concept 'administration' is as old as man. However, several scholars have defined administration in line with their views and how it is practiced. Simon, Smithburg and Thompson (1950) define administration as the activities of groups cooperating to accomplish common goals

Correspondingly, Pfiffner and Presthus (1953) views administration as an activity or process mainly concerned with the means for carrying out prescribed ends. According to Augustus Adebayo, administration can be defined as the organisation and direction of persons in order to accomplish a specified end (Adebayo, 1981). Nwanisobi, B. C., & Christopher, I. C. (2020). From these definitions, administration can rightly be said to be the activities of groups cooperating to accomplish pre-determined goals. These definitions quite agree with the first statement that administration is as old as man. This is because once two or more people starts coexisting, the need for goal setting and accomplishment emanates, hence the need for administration,

Administration performs different functions in an organisation. These include; the formation of plans, policies and procedures, setting up of goals and objectives, enforcing rules and regulations and more. More so, administration can be classified into formal and informal. The formal administration is the one that is bureaucratic as it is okay to say that the best form of administration is a bureaucracy. Informal administration on the other hand is not bureaucratic. However, the focus of this chapter is on the formal or bureaucratic administration. A bureaucratic administration is one that has the characteristics of bureaucracy such as hierarchy, discipline, specialisation, career structure, impersonality, chain of command, line and staff structure and others. In addition, there must be a communication system. This takes us to the next concept.

Digital Administration

Digital administration is the form of public administration that uses information and communication technologies (ICT) to carry out its activities, focusing on three fronts: relations with the citizen, internal functioning and relations with other public bodies. The aim of digital administration is to convert paper processes into electronic processes with the goal being to create a paperless office. Its objective is to introduce total transparency and accountability leading to better governance within any organisation. Electronic administration therefore encompasses all administrative roles and activities, shaped by information and communications technologies (ICTs)

Public Service

Public service is a body or a department in the executive arm of government responsible for the execution of the policies and programmes of the government. It includes the central, state and local governments, the health authorities, education, defense, justice/home affairs and noncommercial semi state organisations authorities. Section 277(91) of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria of 1979 now section 169 of the 1999 Constitution defines public service as encompassing the civil service (Ministerial departments), statutory corporations or parastatals, judiciary, legislature, educational institutions, financially wholly or principally owned by government at the State, Local and Federal levels,

Nigeria Police or Armed Forces and other organisations in which the Federal or state governments own controlling share or interest. In Nigeria, the Country's government bureaucracy is the public service. This is because government at whatever level enunciates and implements its policies, programmes and projects through the instrumentally of the public service.

BRIEF BACKGROUND ON THE COVID 19 PANDEMIC

Coronaviruses are a large family of respiratory viruses that can cause illness in people and animals. An outbreak of the novel (new) coronavirus was first reported in December 2019 when cases of viral pneumonia with unknown origin were confirmed in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China (Nassiri, 2020). The Federal Ministry of Health announced her first case (index case) of COVID-19 on 27th February 2020 in Nigeria. The virus was said to have come from an Italian doing a business with Ogun State (Alagboso & Abubakar, 2020). The minister of Health, at this point assured Nigerians that the Government of Nigeria, through the Federal Ministry of Health had put up a policy and has been strengthening measures to ensure an outbreak in Nigeria is controlled and contained quickly (Ehanire, 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic is forcing governments and societies to turn toward digital technologies to respond to the crisis in the short-term, resolve socio-economic repercussions in the mid-term and reinvent existing policies and tools in the long-term. Navigating through these challenging times requires governments to adopt an open government approach and to use digital communication channels to provide reliable information on global and national COVID-19 developments. It is vital for governments to provide accurate, useful and up-to-date information to people, particularly during times of crisis. During the COVID-19 pandemic, governments started providing information on their national portals, mobile apps or through social media platforms. A review of the national portals of the 193 United Nations Member States showed that by 25 March 2020, 57 per cent (110 countries) have put in place some kind of information on COVID-19, while around 43 per cent (83 countries) did not provide any information; but a further analysis showed that by 8 April 2020, around 86 percent (167 countries) have included information and guidance about COVID-19 in their portals (UN/DESA, 2020)

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This paper adopted the Diffusion of Innovations Theoretical framework. It was propounded by Everett Rogers in 1962. The theory elucidates the mechanisms through which novel ideas, technologies, and practices disseminate throughout a population over time. Everett Rogers (1931–2004) was a prominent American scholar in communication and sociology, renowned for formulating the Diffusion of Innovations Theory, which stands as one of the most significant frameworks across communication, sociology, public policy, health promotion, and technology adoption. This theory has found extensive

application in fields such as communication studies, public policy, health promotion, and research on digital adoption. Rogers posits that the process of diffusion is a social phenomenon shaped by three fundamental components:

1. **The Innovation:** An innovation is defined as any concept, service, or technology that is regarded as new by its users. In the context of this study, the innovation pertains to the utilization of digital technologies, digital platforms and the internet —for obtaining information regarding the upsurge of digital administration in the covid 19 era.
2. **Communication Channels:** These channels denote the routes through which information regarding an innovation is conveyed. Rogers differentiates between mass media channels (radio, television, online news, official websites) and interpersonal channels like word-of-mouth, peer networks, community leaders and other analog means.
3. **Time:** Time affects the speed at which individuals or groups decide to embrace an innovation. Adoption is not instantaneous; rather, it unfolds in stages. According to Rogers (2003), there are five categories of adopters: Innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority and laggards

In Nigeria, the adoption of the digital means in administration has been in public administration, but the speed of adopting it in public institutions was slow. The emergence of the covid 19, changed the manner in which the innovation was adopted, thereby creating better communication channels amongst public servants and better administrative processes in such a short time. The Diffusion of Innovation Theory played out effectively in the outbreak of covid 19 in the Nigeria public service.

METHODOLOGY

This paper adopted the qualitative research method. Textbooks, journal publications and internet sources relevant to the study were consulted and analysed in order to explore the boon of corona virus pandemic: the upsurge of digital administration in the Nigerian public service. Authoritative scholarly sources were reviewed, during a desktop study. The purpose was to identify the relevant publications and apply them in the research.

DIGITAL ADMINISTRATION BEFORE THE COVID 19 OUTBREAK

Digital administration has been developing since the mid-1980s. However, most of the technological innovations in management practices have occurred outside in the private sector, while the public service has been significantly influenced by the need and capacities of the public (Upadhyay, 2020). E-administration is therefore an evolving concept in the public service as most public servants are increasingly getting used to its features and tools.

Technological changes have been absorbed into public administration. An early stage was the convergence of computing and telecommunications, resulting in the widespread adoption of distributed

computing system in the public service. This was followed by the adoption of the internet (in particular e-mail). In 1994, the World Wide Web Consortium was launched, there followed the development of government websites and web-based information provision and service delivery, making possible two-way on-line transactions between government and citizens and external access to government databases (Shallmo, Williams & Boardman, 2017).

ICT has increasingly influenced administrative thinking. A foundation was provided by the New Public Management, which emerged in the 1980s and provided different models of the role and instruments of government, emphasizing perspectives imported from the private sector such as empowerment of managers, focus on results and use of benchmarking and best practices in management innovation. This also led to the perception of the private sectors as partners to government and as alternative vehicles for delivering public services. They have introduced government to concepts that have been developed in the private sector. One of the innovations from the private sector is the use of digital administration. ICT has given new prominence to the public data, information and knowledge. Digital administration has become a major asset of government, as important as its resources, people and finances, but effective only if integrated with them.

In addition, an important characteristic of government in the electronic environment has been its generally larger scale and complexity compared to the private sector. The ability of government to integrate the public, the economy and society into the digital administration has been tasky. However, it was not until the outbreak of COVID-19 in Nigeria that it was taken more seriously, hence the boon of the coronavirus pandemic.

DIGITAL ADMINISTRATION IN THE COVID-19 PERIOD

E-administration has had a significant impact on the Nigerian public service, changing the environment in which the public service operates, adding new concepts and methods to its operations and changing the relative weight and relationships among established elements of public administration. As with government as a whole, the changes are ongoing and it is difficult to predict where they will lead. In Nigeria, it forced rapid adoption of digital tools in public administration; while the pandemic posed challenges, it created significant opportunities (boons) for advancing e-governance. It accelerated the adoption of e-governance as lockdowns forced agencies to adopt online platforms for services like tax filing, business registration and education (Ata-Agboni, & Ifatimehin (2021). The pandemic increased reliance on digital identification systems for palliatives and service access.

This section, however, focuses on the changes that have developed with clear and lasting impacts since the outbreak of the coronavirus. The COVID-19 crisis has brought new needs for digital government services and more demand on existing services. Online engagement initiatives led by governments have helped people cope with the crisis as well as improve government operations.

Developers in governments were mobilised and engaged in designing new apps and services to help in the fight against COVID-19. Some of these new services include delivering food and other essential items to those most in need by optimising the entire supply chain via digital government services. Some States recorded an increase in the usage of online services such as digital ID and digital signature, due to the spikes in applications for unemployment and other social benefits. In a crisis situation, it becomes more important than ever to reach out to vulnerable groups in society, respond to their needs and ensure social stability. Engaging with public service in digital administration allows governments to tackle socio-economic challenges in a more productive way that leaves no one behind.

The COVID-19 period can also be appreciated in terms of the improvement in e-service delivery in the Nigerian public service (Egberi (2022)). Public authorities have started cooperating with a variety of stakeholders during the COVID-19 outbreak. An integral part of the public service assumes many of the administrative tasks performed by the service provider. In the context of on-line services, these tasks can be performed on a round-the-clock '24/7' basis. Given that e-government is client-centered service delivery. Borrowed from the private sector, and predating the internet, this concept has come into its own with the World Wide Web. In this view, government services are designed to help citizens to meet their civic obligations. Taken together, these elements are major sources of cost savings. However, experience has shown that not all government services are amenable to delivery only on-line and, by the same token, not all members of the public are willing or able to seek them only electronically.

This has given rise to a renewed effort to provide integrated service delivery, bringing together the various 'channels' of interaction between government and the public, including in person, by telephone, by mail and through kiosks. The client and purpose orientation has also given renewed emphasis to the proposition that public goals do not necessarily have to be met through public vehicles, leading to the development of alternative instruments for delivering public services, including through other levels of government and even non-governmental actors. Another benefit of the coronavirus pandemic in the Nigerian public service is the use of the e-information system as a key resource of government. While activities such as records management and documentation have always been an essential feature of government, it has only been with the development of e-government that the information assets of government have been understood to be as important as the financial and human resources that have been the traditional focus of public administration (Schallmo et al 2017). A characteristic of information management in government is that it can be thought of in lifecycle terms, a concept long in use by archivists.

The stages of the government's information holdings begin with its collection and production and include use, storage, retrieval, dissemination, protection, disposal and longer-term retention. Information collected for one purpose can be re-used for other purposes, and storage of information in electronic databases opens up significant possibilities and related issues for sharing information and creating new

information and knowledge. Such information can be retained as individual data elements, as combinations of data to support decision-making and, with the application of judgment, as accumulated knowledge and wisdom (Brown, 2005). Information that is gathered and held this way can acquire tangible value, both in a financial sense and in terms of its ability to do well or harm, according to how it is used. From this perspective, information held by government is of particular value, both because of its quantity and because of government's ability to require individuals and businesses to provide reliable information about themselves that they would wish to safeguard in other circumstances. It is now easier for government to get information from its citizens and other relevant bodies related to what government wants to do at particular point in time.

However, it is important to note that as with financial and human resources management, digital administration has fostered its own environment of public administration institutions, laws, policies, procedures and skills. In some cases, these are new; in others, they have provided a new context and importance for existing institutions. This environment has become even more popular in the COVID-19 period and is evolving as it will take some time before it can be regarded as fully mature as the management of the public service. That is to say, the new information discipline is itself multidisciplinary, bringing together elements as disparate as archivists and librarians with publishers and marketers, engineers and computer scientists. In the government context, a vital component of information management is its identification as government information (or, when on the internet, as government space) to ensure proper accountability.

Apart from the above feature of e-administration in the COVID-19 period, another feature of e-administration in the COVID-19 era is the role played by technology in shaping the environment in which public administration operates and the knowledge and skills required by public service managers and workers. For practical purposes, the public service workplace is one where there is a computer on every desktop and routine use is made of e-mail, word-processing suites and the World Wide Web. This situation contrasts with the environment of ten or even fewer years ago, where the telephone and the post were primary working tools. The adoption of electronic technologies in government has been a remarkable story of organisational learning and adaptation that is still unfolding. The networking that is inherent in e-government has also given a new emphasis to working methodologies that emphasise group collaboration and information sharing, typically cutting across the vertical division of labour that is a characteristic of classic bureaucracy (David, Onyepuemu & Oazeem(2022). However, it wasn't taken so seriously until the outbreak of the COVID-19 which has now forced majority of the public servants to embrace the digital work style.

It can be re-called that the COVID-19 outbreak has made the Nigerian government to take certain decisions concerning how public servants should go about their day-to-day activities and also reducing the rate of physical contacts. This has made most of their contact to be mostly online, thereby leaving the

analogue workers with no choice than to embrace digital work style. The impact of this is that it creates a more interdependent relationship within government between policy-makers, programme administrators and technical specialists. It also creates a new relationship among the traditional disciplines of public administration: the administrative disciplines are all adopting information technologies for their own purposes and new linkages are developing between them. Perhaps the most significant is the link between information technology and human resources, which in combination provide the foundation for knowledge management.

Another boon in digital administration during the COVID-19 period is the relationship between government and the private sector. Unlike other areas of public administration, governments cannot be self-sufficient in their adoption and use of electronic technologies and, of necessity, they have developed a variety of collaborative relationships with the private sector. Although governments can and do develop a significant technological capacity within the civil service, they are typically in the position of responding to the rapidly evolving external environment in acquiring electronic technologies and in thinking about their use. Governments are, therefore, heavily reliant on consultants ranging from self-employed individuals to multinational firms that, in some cases, are larger than the governments themselves for policy advice and for assistance in implementing new systems and technology-enabled programs and services. In some cases, government relies on the private sector to implement and operate these new technologies through a variety of outsourcing and public-private partnership arrangements. The latter include private firms and other non-governmental organisations providing services to the public on behalf of government.

Government is also a great purchaser of technology-related goods and services and, therefore, has a major influence on the nature and development of that sector in the national economy. Governments are subjected to pressures to balance internal efficiency and productivity with national economic development concerns. This frequently involves making choices between established multinational partners offering wide experience and economies of scale and national firms that include the small and medium enterprise sector that in the knowledge economy is regarded as one of the key engines of innovation and wealth creation.

In addition to the above, a notable impact of e-administration on public service is on accountability and management. The perception that real accountability is to the public and not to ministers became clearer during this COVID-19 era. By the same token, politicians can feel that they are now closely monitored by the people through various internet platforms. These are all dynamics that need to be strengthened for digital administration to continue to make impact on the Nigerian public service and the country at large. Traditional accountability models are built on the view that leadership comes from above and is linked to the process of giving authority to subordinates and holding them to account for the results. New Public Management has built on this to encourage maximum autonomy

(empowerment) of subordinates, on the proposition that management practices should be tailored to the needs of the ‘businesses.

Finally, digital administration introduces two important variations. Much of the actual leadership and innovation in applying technology in the public sector comes from more junior and front-line civil servants, in particular those dealing with the public. Senior management is often less experienced and capable in the technological skills that it is supervising, and its role becomes one of sanctioning and enabling leadership provided by more junior staff. The COVID-19 outbreak and the need to carry out administrative duties using ICT have forced a good number of senior public servants to acquire more ICT skills and utilize them as well.

CHALLENGES OF DIGITAL ADMINISTRATION IN NIGERIA

Due to the evolving nature of digital administration, it is faced with several challenges. They include but not limited to the following:

1. **Poor ICT infrastructure:** One major challenge is poor ICT Infrastructure. Many people lack internet access, devices, or digital literacy especially in rural areas of the country. Limited access to reliable facilities, makes digital services difficult to access. Frequent network failures and low broadband penetration makes it difficult for effective utilisation of ICT facilities in the public service. Despite the fact that the use of electronic means in service delivery in the public service has provided useful insights for producing technology tools, it only works best in the context of service transactions involving an exchange of information or money for a tangible return, such as a certificate or a reservation (Bukht & Heeks, 2018).
2. **Unstable power supply:** Irregular electricity supply affects the use of digital systems forcing many government offices and institutions to rely on costly alternatives like generators, which further increases costs. It also reduces productivity of public servants as work stops during blackouts. This can also lead to data loss and system damage as sudden outages or voltage fluctuations can corrupt files and databases as well as lead to loss of critical government record among others (Oyedokun:2023, Oghuvbu et al. :2014).
3. **Cybersecurity threats pose serious risks:** Cases of hacking, online fraud, and data breaches discourage trust in digital systems. With the rate of cybercrimes in the country, hackers sometimes find their way into government websites, which makes the issue of privacy and the protection of commercially sensitive information a major problem in e-administration Egbara&Ayogu (2018). Another challenge of adopting e-administration in the Nigerian public service is public policy issues, together with their companions, security and intellectual property. Also, in the nature of their public role, governments are concerned with the quality of the information they hold including its accuracy and availability to the taxpayers who have ‘paid’ for it and they also have a responsibility to ensure that members of the public have the information they need to fulfill their rights and obligations. This leads to a concern with

information dissemination and freedom of/access to information. The collection of sensitive personal and commercial information creates reciprocal obligations between the providers of such information, to be honest and complete in what they tell government, and government, to ensure that it is well managed and with due regard to its sensitivity. The sensitivity of information collected and generated by government is also the basis of approaches to security, both of the information itself and ultimately of the state and society.

4. **Lack of Skills:** Many citizens and government workers lack the necessary skills to use digital tools effectively, which slows down adoption (Abasilim & Edet (2015).

5. **Resistance to change.** Some government officials prefer traditional (manual) methods and fear of job loss or lack of trust in digital systems, digital citizens may distrust digital platforms.

6. **Inadequate funding** further limits progress. Government lack sufficient resources to invest in setting up and maintaining digital infrastructure. Another issue is corruption and bureaucracy, which can delay or undermine digital initiatives. Processes are sometimes manipulated, reducing efficiency.

7. **Poor policy implementation** is yet another problem. Even when good policies are introduced, they are not properly executed or sustained. Also digital divide between urban and rural areas creates inequality, as many people cannot access digital services due to lack of devices or internet connectivity in the rural areas (Ameh (2021)

In addition to the above, from a management perspective, the introduction of electronic technologies has been a major challenge, as lay managers have been called upon to make decisions about costly investments in highly sophisticated information systems. A further challenge is the open-ended nature of the investments all too frequently the technical and costing assumptions that can be made at the beginning of a major project are overtaken by the time it is completed, with the result that risk management has become a major preoccupation of government.

PROSPECTS OF DIGITAL ADMINISTRATION IN NIGERIA PUBLIC SERVICE

The upsurge of digital administration triggered by the covid 19 pandemic has created several promising prospects for the future of digital administration in Nigeria public service. Covid 19 significantly strengthened the case for digital governance in Nigeria in various ways such as: in institutionalisation of e- government systems. The pandemic showed that services can run online, ministries and agencies are more likely to digitalise operations permanently. Digital platforms reduce delays in processing documents and makes services delivery faster. This in the long run reduces corruption. This can be exemplified with the Federal Inland Revenue Services efforts on the expanded online tax services. Another prospect of digital administration is that it increases transparency and accountability, thereby reduces corruption and improves public trust in government institutions.

Digital administration limits human interferences, providing audit trails and real time monitoring, and minimises bureaucratic bottlenecks and enable faster decision making through automated systems. This

will lead to a more responsive and citizen-centred public service. This is because digital systems create traceable records; it therefore reduces manipulation of files and financial leakages.

Capacity building and digital skills development of public servants are other areas of prospect for digital administration in Nigeria public service. Public servants are likely to acquire new ICT skills, adapt to modern administrative tools, become more productive and globally competitive. With proper investments, digital services to rural and underserved areas, will promote inclusive and wider reach governance. This will bridge gaps between citizens and government and also promote equity among citizens. Growth in supporting infrastructure: the need for effective e-administration will drive improvement in electricity supply, expansion of internet connectivity and investment in ICT infrastructure nationwide

Digital governance can attract foreign investment, support ease of doing business and strengthen Nigeria's position in global digital economies. This will enhance Economic and administrative transformation. Expansion of e-government: There is strong potential for more government services moving fully online, development of integrated national digital platforms, wider use of portals for taxes, licensing, and identity management. This enhances convenience and accessibility for citizens. Increase innovation in public administration; the shift encourages adoption of emerging technologies (AI, data analytics, cloud systems), development of smart governance solutions and collaboration with private tech companies and startups

In addition to the above, e-participation platforms can represent useful tools to engage with vulnerable groups online and to establish digital initiatives to collectively brainstorm for policy ideas to critical social and economic challenges.

Finally, effective public-private partnerships, through sharing technologies, expertise and tools, can support governments in restarting the economy and rebuilding societies. Developing countries, in particular, will need international cooperation and support in mitigating the crisis. Therefore, regional, national and local project-based collaborations with private sector companies, international organisations and other stakeholders are necessary.

In the long-term, government needs to accelerate the implementation of innovative digital technologies such as AI-powered technology, block chain, and drones. Investments in these technologies can tremendously support the future resilience of the health economy and the public services delivery. Success in digital administration depends on; infrastructure (internet and electricity) strong institutions and policies, capacity building and public trust and transparency as has been discussed in this paper. When these are addressed together, digital governance can significantly reduce corruption, improve efficiency, and enhance service delivery nationwide.

If Nigeria invest in infrastructure, legal frameworks, skills, and inclusion, digital administration can transform public service delivery into efficient, transparent, and accountable systems.

CONCLUSION

The paper examined the upsurge of digital administration in Nigeria public service as the boon of the COVID-19 pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic, proved to be a significant turning point for public service delivery in Nigeria. Though digital administration has been in use before the advent of the COVID-19 period, its adoption in the public service gained popularity as it helped to improve the Nigerian public service delivery in doing things digitally against the analog/physical contact administration. Faced with restrictions on physical interactions, government institutions were compelled to rapidly adopt digital tools and platforms, leading to a notable upsurge in digital administration across various sectors of the public service. However, there are several challenges militating against e-administration in Nigeria. These challenges range from the issue of ensuring privacy and protection of information, getting accurate information, expensive technological facilities among others.

The paper found that digital transformation enhanced efficiency, reduced bureaucratic delays, and improved access to government services, particularly through online portals, virtual meetings, and electronic documentations. The paper also found that to fully prioritise and sustain the adoption and utilisation of digital administration in the Nigerian public service, deliberate efforts must be made to strengthen infrastructure, bridge the digital divide, and institutionalise e-administration as a core component of effective governance. The paper concluded that the COVID pandemic period was a paradoxical catalyst for digital transformation in Nigeria's public service, turning a period of crisis into an opportunity. Successful digital administration is not just about technology but about people, policy, and processes working together. Government that focuses on inclusivity, security and usability tend to see the best results.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Capacity building and training: There should be regular ICT training programmes and awareness campaigns for public servants. This will promote digital literacy across all levels of government and encourage continuous professional development in e-governance.

Strengthen Cybersecurity systems: Strengthening cybersecurity develops strong protection policies, invest in secure digital systems and infrastructure, and protect government databases from cyber threats, and ensure compliance across all government agencies

Expand ICT infrastructure: This increases broadband penetration across urban and rural areas, improving internet speed and affordability, and strengthens telecom networks to support digital services.

Improve power supply: Government should invest in stable electricity infrastructure, adopt alternative energy like solar in public offices, and reliable which is essential for sustainable digital systems.

Allocate more budget to ICT projects and seek to promote public-private partnerships (PPPs): collaborate with tech companies and innovators, encourage investments in digital government solutions and leverage private sector expertise for efficiency.

Institutionalise e-government: Make digital processes permanent, not temporary solutions, integrate digital platforms across ministries and agencies, and reduce reliance on manual systems.

Formulate and enforce digital policies and anti-corruption policies: establish clear policies guiding e-administration, ensure proper implementation in ICT laws and regulations, and promote standardisation across government agencies.

Monitoring and evaluation; regular assess performance of digital platforms, fieldbacks should be collected and continuously improve service delivery systems and also implement proper digital record-keeping system and cloud storage.

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