

ECONOMIC IMPACT OF COVID 19 AND THE ROLE OF E-GOVERNANCE IN COMBATING COVID 19 IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

In this advanced era, information technology should promote a knowledge based society. E -governance stands for electronic governance, a unification of information and communication technology (ICT) in all the operations to augment the potentials of the government to satisfy the requirements of the public. The imperativeness of this research is hinged on the role of e-governance in combating Covid 19 and for sustainable development. It examined the major factors to be considered on e- governance implementation, challenges involved in e-governance implementation in Nigerian public service. This study therefore, using analytic method seeks to examine how e- governance can help in combating Covid 19 in Nigeria and the extent at which Covid 19 pandemic has affected the economy of the nation. This research discovers that a lot of harm has been done to Nigerian economy as a result of Covid 19 pandemic. It submits that if some factors are properly considered, e- governance implementation in Nigeria is a possibility. The paper recommends that the incumbent leadership should shun corruption and prioritize in the welfare of her citizens by considering the factors of e- governance implementation in Nigeria in order to make e- governance implementation a reality.

Keywords: E-Governance, Economy, Covid-19, Combating and Nigeria.

Introduction

E-governance is a unification of information and communication technologies (ICT) in all the operations to augment the potentials of the government to satisfy the requirement of the local public. The concept of e-governance has been broadly defined especially as it relates to the public sector. In fact, researchers vary in their definitions of what e-governance is all about (Shilubane, 2001, Budhiraja 2003,Ojo 2014). According to Shilubane (2001), e-governance is simply the use of the information communication technology (ICT) to carry out public services, that is to say, the Use of internet to ensure that services are delivered in a much more convenient, customer oriented and cost effective manner. Budhiraja (2003) define e-governance as the application of information technology to the process of government functioning in order to achieve simple, moral, accountable, responsive

and transparent (SMART) governance. In a similar vein, Ojo (2014) also sees e-book governance as the application of information technology (ICT) by the government to enhance accountability, create awareness and ensure transparency in the management of the government businesses. He also state that, it can be seen as a potential strategy of government through which their activities can be showcased to the public. Ayo (2014) defined e-governance as the governing of the states or country using ICT in executing government businesses. From the definitions so far, it can be deduced that e-governance is simply the use of ICT in Operations of government businesses, put it in another way, it is the shift from the traditional methods of carrying out government activities which is mainly hierarchical, liner and on way to the use of internet which enable the public seek information at their own convenience not really having to visit office in person or when government office is open (Agochukwu and Lawrence2015).

E- Governance is noteworthy because it minimizes corruption, enhances transparency, increases convenience, increase gross domestic products (GDP). Growth, allows a way for the citizens to be involved directly with their country, reduces the overall cost and broadens the speed of the government. Through an efficient e-governance system, government increases the amount and quality of information and services delivered to the local public by using ICT simple, economical and productive way.

However, the declaration of Covid 19 as a public health emergency by the world health organization necessitated a country across the globe to implement response and integration measures. Government needs to make full use of digital technologies to confront the Covid 19 pandemic and address a white range of pandemic related issues, according to another new policies brief issued by the UN department of economic and social affairs. The pandemic is compelling government and societies to turn towards digital technologies to respond to the crisis and increasingly, is requiring government to adopt an open government approach and to use digital communication channels to provide reliable formation on global and national Covid 19 development. With lock down and other social distancing measures in effect in many countries and with more people relying on the internet for information and advice, government are being urged to deploy effective digital technologies to curtail the outbreak(Mohamed, 2010). Government information has focused on information about the outbreak, travel restrictions, practical guidance on protection, and government response. Government as first custodian of data related to Covid 19 has also started publishing statistics that include the total number of cases in a country total facilities as well reporting of cases by jurisdictions. Governments have also design new app and services to help in the fight against Covid 19 , to facilitate services such as delivering food and other essential items to those most in need by optimizing the entire supply chain via digital government service (Abdulrazaq, 2015).Some member of states recoded 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.

World Wild E-Book Government and the Covid 19 Pandemic

E-government is an interconnected system in which the government interacts with citizens and provides augmented services to them through electronic applications. With the assistance of ICT, e-governance has been implemented and digitalization opportunities in the world are being revolutionized (Khan et al. 2020). E-governance furnishes a rare possibility for government to increase identity record keeping and expand the ability to share social and economic results. Based on survey, 80 units of 1000 republics particular actions to certify e- governments, e-book services utilized by the highly sensitive portions of their populace in 2018, which was a marked increase from less than 30 percent in 2012. There is much importance for mobile e-government facilities to provide social services such as distance education and health which will have a positive effect on an individual's daily life. These services are particularly important for rural populations because, they tend to live in poorer conditions (Darker et al. 2018).

Worldwide, there are currently estimated 1.1billion individuals who are surviving in neediness, are refugees or migrants are living in agrarian societies or are part of ignoble clusters without a legitimate identity. Therefore, several SDG5 - SDG16 refer to peak, justice, and strong institutions and SDG 16.9 refers to providing a legal identity to all individuals including birth registration seek to ameliorate these issues by 2030.growing financial institutions and avoiding corruption and fraud can serve to improve the economic situation of individual, while providing social services can help furnish legal identities to these ignoble clusters. Together with the full advantage of connecting the quality and speed of mobile connections must also be augmented. Moreover, the rapid increase in cell. Phone acceptance in developing markets is furnishing support in ameliorating the connecting divide.

To gain advantage by shifting higher volume of information to cell phone system, the speed and network quality must be improved. Approximately 85percent of the global populace currently use the 3G network, which is the minimal speed for smart data functions. Moreover, the upcoming network generation that is 4G cell. Phone wide band contributions are lagging behind. The growing variety of government facilities that are furnished online makes digital divides refer to the gap between demographics and regions that have access to modern ICT and those that do not or have restricted access. This technology can include telephones, televisions, personal computers and the internet (Options et al. 2019).Governments may unintentionally generate fresh electronic divides by eliminating offline access for services that can utilize online methods, an action that encourages digital first method. There for, online services are being favored as countries move forward to accept more quality and availability.

Ma(2019), found that online payment systems are more efficient and economical than traditional payment system. The entire payment process can be done using mobile phones and the business can be more efficiently, conveniently, and secretly allocate money online with emails address. To create a simultaneous payment solution, the network only requires a bank and credit card. PayPal is the most popular online payment system around the world. It deals with 26 currencies from 193 markets. There are 137 million PayPal accounts and on daily basis, there are 8 million transactions. During Covid 19 lock down and other restrictions, PayPal users have been able to make payments while quarantine in their houses when the banks were closed. For many people, the only options was to make payment through the PayPal app because,. PayPal provides payment solutions around the globe. Offnotes, PayPal provides payment solutions around the globe.

Health care providers are at high risk for contacting Covid 19, free triage telehealth assessment has been offered by health institutions of many countries. Telegraph assessments are provided to portions by a mobile app or website that contains a short survey about the patient's current conditions. Moreover, this survey contains questions about the patient's eye, travel, history and symptoms. The patient may be asked to connect with the digital health care providers or visit a mobile testing site/hospital for Covid 19(Abdulrazaq, 2015).

Buoy Health (2020a,b)and Lark (2020a, b) are websites with health focused chat bots and can also provide help to interpret an individual's symptoms and propose the appropriate next step(Abdulrazaq,2015). Furthermore, to ensure continuity of care, the survey results are integrated with electronic medical records. In Singapore, the "Trace together"mobile app is currently used to assist in Covid 19 contact tracing. This app uses blue tooth technology to determine whether the person has had any close contact with Covid 19 diagnosed patient.

Siva health (2020a,b) Deployed Assistant (2020) have provided artificial intelligence systems that offer information and help the patients without smart assistance such as Google Home and Amazon. These interventions enabled health care providers to respond to any patient's need without entering their rooms and reduce their exposure to respiratory secretions. A rapid Diagnostic" drive through screening" kits developed in Korea has the potentials to diagnose Covid 19 infected patients in the early stage of the disease. This eventually reduces the fatality rate and prevents transmission, an Innovative methods that allows thousands of people to be tested daily. The new diagnostic kits reduced test time from 24 to six hours by employing the real time reverse transcription polymerase chain reaction and was rapidly approved by Korea centers for disease control and prevention (KCDC) and ministry of food and drug safety (MFDG). A kit is usually approved within 1 year from development, allowing it to be quickly applied in the field (Administration of China, 2020). During the Covid 19 pandemic, the implementation of digital health has aimed to reduce the risk or avoiding the transmission to medical service providers. The above mentioned technology

applications have the potentials to reduce transmission risk by abating physical contacts among patients and Healthcare providers. Moreover, digital health involvement enables medical service providers to tackle the global pandemic even when working remotely or practicing self isolation measures.

Factors of E-Governance implementation in Nigeria

Without doubt, there are a lot of influences which contribute positive outcome of E-Governance in Nigeria. Nevertheless, Heeks, (2001) observes that the major objectives of e-governance are to improve government processes (e-administration) and connect citizens (e-citizens and e-services) and build external interactions (e-society) (Heeks, 2001). Despite these objectives, some factors to be considered in the e-governance implementations are:

- i. Making and implementing decisions
- ii. Proper leadership
- iii. Putting in place an organizational arrangements
- iv. Ensuring resources and funding
- v. Establishing accountability and measuring success, and skilled staffs
- vi. Better delivery of government services to citizens
- vii. Improve interactions with business and industry
- viii. Citizens' empowerment through access to information and more efficient government management are the factors

It is worthy of note that e-governance is not only the computerization of a government system but a belief in the ability of technology to achieve high level of improvement in various areas of government thus transforming the Nature Of politics and the relations between government and citizens (Doda, 2006, p. 1).

Challenges of e-governance implementation in Nigerian public service

The concept of public service differs from country to country but in this case, the concern is what it means in Nigeria. Section 318 of the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as amended defines the public service as the service of the federation in any capacity in respect of the government of the federation and includes services as:

1. Clerk or other staff of the national assembly or of each house of the national assembly
2. Member of staff of the Supreme Court, the Court of appeal, the federal capital territory Abuja, the Sharia court of appeal of FCT, the customary court of appeal FCT, or other Courts established for the federation by this constitution and by act of the national assembly.
3. Member or staffs of any commission or authority established for the federation by this constitution or by act of national assembly.
4. Member or staff of any commission or authority.
5. Staff of any area council.

6. Staff Of any educational institution established or financed principally by the government of the federation.
7. Staff of any statutory corporation established by an act of the national assembly.
8. Staff of any company or enterprises in which the government of the federation owns controlling shares or interest.
9. Members or officers of the Armed Forces of the federation or the Nigeria police force or other government security agencies established by law.

A lot have been said as regards the benefits of e-governance implementation in Nigeria or what it has to offer. Scholars have mentioned that when e-governance is implemented, there will be accountability, awareness, and transparency in the management of governmental business will be ensured (Ojo, 2014,p.79). Unfortunately, this is not the case in Nigeria. However, we are not ruling out the tendencies of any policy of government but we are of the view that there are things that must be taken care of before we expect so much from the policy of e-governance in Nigerian public service. This is also in line with the assertion of Dode (2007, p. 382) thus: the e-governance practice is bound to meet with strong opposition from the bureaucratic quarters of the policy. By this we mean the over bloated public services whose members will analyze this practice as a deliberate attempt by the government to throw majority of their members out of their jobs. Majority of the public servants are thus likely to use their position to frustrate the effective application of e-governance in Nigerian. They will definitely dislike a system that will reduce to the minimum, face to face contact between citizens and the government services providers.

However, the e-governance implementation in the Nigeria public services is accompanied with many challenges. According to Abbdeb -Fattah &Galal-Edeen (2008), the major challenge of e-governance in the Nigerian public service is lack of trained and qualified personnel to handle and operate it's infrastructures. They further state that due to the high cost associated with the procurement and training of the public servants with ICT skills, government sometimes feel reluctant in the actual implementation of the e-governance in the public service. The effective and successful implementation of e-governance requires expert to coordinate and operate the ICT related infrastructures because where there are no competent personnel to handle its infrastructure; it will be useless to procure the infrastructures (Ayo &Ekong, 2008).

Infrastructural deficit: Infrastructural deficit is another serious challenge to e-governance implementation in Nigerian. There is serious deficit in the level of infrastructure that is placed in the rural areas compared to the urban areas despite the rural areas accounting for more than 60 percent of the population. Most of the telecoms base stations are situated in the urban areas leaving the rural areas with little or no access to telecommunication facilities. Although the tele-density rate of Nigeria is high which is almost reaching as high as 90 percent. This is an

indication that almost every Nigeria owns a hand phone. However, e-government goes beyond the use of internet to be able to access government electronic services. The level of internet usage in Nigeria is not encouraging due to low level of penetration most especially in the rural areas where education is low. Based on the 2011 study by the Nigerian communication commission, only 17 percent of the rural communities had internet facilities compared to 79 percent in the urban centers. Out of the 17 percent only 11 have access broad band (ITU news 292).

Digital divide is also another impediment to a successful implementation of e-governance in Nigerian public service. Digital divide is the difference in ICT access and usage between different regions that shares similar characteristics. In explaining digital divide in Nigeria, it can be perceived as the difference in the accessibility and usage of ICT service between the rural populations and the urban population. Digital divide in Nigeria is caused by low literacy, poverty infrastructural gap, and high cost of internet connectivity.

Low ICT skilled manpower: ICT education is another issue of importance here. The director of NIC in the interview highlighted the fact that majority of the staffs in the ministry do not have the required level of knowledge in ICT to carry out the task of e-services. Thus, the very few with ICT knowledge are overburdened with huge tasks.

Incessant power failure: the major technical challenge disrupting the full success of e-governance implementation in Nigeria is epileptic power supply. Power blackout is a regular phenomenon in most Nigerian cities, towns, and villages with negative impact on the robustness of ICT. Most telecommunications base stations are equipped with power generating plants as an alternative source of power for these equipments. The cost of procuring these generating plants maintenance and fueling them have added to the operation cost of these companies and as such, the financial burden will be borne by the final consumers.

Theft and vandalization of ICT equipment: Another setback to the progress of ICT infrastructural development in Nigeria is the theft and the vandalization of the internet and telecommunication facilities most especially in the conflict prone areas of the north east and south geopolitical zone. For example, in 2012, the largest telecommunication company in Nigeria, MTN Nigeria recorded more than 70 cases of facility vandalization (Daily independent 2013). And on the national level, the country records more than 1000 cases of vandalization every year (Hamanipo, 2013). The security of assets possesses a serious challenge due to the volatile security status of the country. Moreover, the perpetrators of the act are mostly left unpunished due to lack of law that protects these infrastructures. Recently, a motion was raised in 2013 in the national assembly for the passage of the telecoms infrastructural protection act that will seek to prosecute the perpetrators of vandalization (vanguard, 2013).

Recommendations

It is important at this juncture to suggest what can be done to achieve a successful implementation of e-governance in Nigerian public service. Based on the issues identified as implementation in Nigerian public service, the following recommendations are advanced:

Government ministries department agencies should set up e-governance implementation committee who will work out modalities for the effective implementation of the concept with performance evaluation units, establish to evaluate the success and failures in its target as well as feedback mechanism to report implementation effectiveness. The federal government should establish ministry of ICT affairs to set up ICT implementation framework evaluation units in each of the ministries and the parastatals with the permanent secretaries as the head. The ICT ministry will liaise with the implementation committee at the various ministries including state ministries to evaluate performance as well as feedback to help in its effectiveness. Nigerian public service ministries department and agencies must show a high level of e-readiness in other operations. All that is needed must be put in place by the government especially that which is within their capacity. For instance ensure that all offices are equipped with functional computers, employ highly skilled personnel in ICT provisions of continuous training of the personnel to keep them informed on how best to utilize e-governance in engendering effective service delivery among others.

Conclusions

However, the challenges have been identified and the research recommends that government and stakeholders in the ICT sector will quickly find quick and lasting solutions to them. For adequate solution to the challenges. The paper, therefore conclude that e-governance service delivery will lead to transparency and accountability in government businesses and operations for Nigerian public service. But it has to contend with the challenges to the successful implementation of e-governance in the country public sector.

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