LEVERAGING ON ELECTRONIC GOVERNMENT INFORMATION PLATFORMS FOR THE PROVISION OF GOVERNMENT SERVICES: A TRANSFORMATIVE POTENTIAL IN NIGERIAN PUBLIC SERVICE

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ABSTRACT

Due to the rapid development of information and communication technology, the previous few decades have seen extraordinary changes in every aspect of society. This abrupt change has increased residents' expectations for better lifestyles in both developing and developed nations, spurring innovation in the public sector to strengthen it. Governments, all across the world, have opened their websites in response to the democratisation of the states, applying comparable concepts and technologies to the government to publish information more effectively and provide public services more successfully. Although electronic-government information platform (e-GIP) is a crucial platform for citizen engagement in politics and decision-making, early e-government practices tended to neglect democratic goals in favour of e-business and information system capabilities. There have been increasing numbers of accusations that the provider's perspectives have shaped the e-government system's design. This paper, therefore, argues that E-GIPs should encourage democratic processes that involve dialogue and coproduction in addition to information exchange and the delivery of better public services in light of the theoretical implications of this. The purpose of this study is to look into the factors that enable E-GIPs to live up to their claims, which include their origin, scope, role status, potential benefits, and challenges. It has become imperative that the Nigerian government should make use of E-GIPs to expand new concepts, improve oversight, provide an easy review, and increase the impact on businesses and citizens.

Introduction

E-government is the use of information and communication technology by the government to connect with citizens, businesses, and other governmental agencies (Wide Area Networks, the Internet, and mobile computers). It results from ICT penetration of the governmental sector. E-government transforms the conventional and well-known form of governmental operations, services, and structures into a new form,

which has a big impact on how individuals interact with governmental services online (Kim & Kim, 2021). More and more governments are using information and communication technology, especially the Internet or web-based apps, to provide services between governmental organisations and individuals, businesses, employees, and other nongovernmental entities. E-government heralds the coming of big technology innovation and a reinvention of government, much like e-learning, e-health, and e-commerce have done (Joshi, 2019).

In particular, web-based applications are used by the government to provide organisations and citizens with access to information and services from the government, to improve the quality of those services, and to increase and provide more opportunities for citizens to participate in democratic institutions and processes (MacDonald, Nnaji & David, 2022). The administration of government through the use of ICT aims to make communication between government and citizens (G2C), government and business enterprises (G2B), and inter-agency relationships (G2G) more friendly, convenient, transparent, and inexpensive. Lack of accessibility to information about governance has had a significant impact on unsuccessful e-government project implementation in developing countries, where only approximately 15% of the citizens were participating (Zeebaree & Aqel, 2021). European countries are leading the development of e-government globally; the Americas and Asia share almost equal standing in high and middle e-government index levels, and many African countries continue to struggle to improve their e-government standard (Mingst, Karns & Lyon, 2018).

From the mid-1990s onward, there is a growing consensus among governments across the globe of the need to change public administration and services from manual methods to electronic operation to facilitate customer-centred, cost-efficient delivery and user-friendly services to citizens and businesses, thereby improving the quality of governmental activities. Public administration emphasizes how ICT can be used to support transformational change in governmental functions globally to achieve efficiency and cost-effective service delivery to citizens (Balisany, Özgit & Rjoub, 2022). ICT have productively transformed the provision of traditional government services into an electronic governance process. Tang, Hou, Fay and Annis (2021) emphasised that this socio-technological development has led to organizational transformation, the adoption of political administration and the public apparatus. The initiation of e-government provides an extension for the use of e-government information platforms (e-GIP), these platforms provide benefits such as convenience, efficiency, lower costs, increase productivity and transparency for its stakeholders. This innovation enables not only electronic services but also contemporary government activities to become a reality, especially at all levels of society.

Development of e-Government Information Platform in Public Service

This e-GIP emerged from the concept of e-government and it is an institutional approach which focuses on carrying out decisions related to information service delivery. It is the use of ICT to transform the traditional public sectors by making them accessible, transparent, effective and accountable. The revolution in the operations of government has greatly changed the pattern of interaction between government and citizens which had also turned into a new phase called e-GIP. The word e-GIP is an Internet-based tool used to facilitate communication and interaction of information between the government and the public. It is a means by which government can reach

out to people electronically. It is also an online system by which government can pass information and receives feedback or the easy system of citizens performing their civic duties and responsibilities without having to meet government officials or workers directly.

According to Moreno and Martínez (2019) the term e-GIP is synonymously called Government Official Websites (GOW) and it is becoming a global phenomenon attracting the attention of political actors, policymakers, practitioners, academicians and ordinary citizens. E-GIP is thus, the use of ICT tools to improve the activities of public sectors, and organizations and allow online services (including electronic information and electronic transactions) to be available to different stakeholders in the country. The so-called E-GIP has been a common phenomenon among public organizations to support their administration and governance that covers effectiveness, efficiency and transparency. It promotes interaction between authorities and their stakeholders that enable integrated information service, assures easy access and convenience, and opens the chance for voice participation instrumental for information service improvement and checks that all grasp service quality.

Oyewole, Omotayo and Nwobu (2018) affirmed that in Nigeria, the government of Lagos State, which is the economic nerve centre of the country, has launched an e-GIP to render information services and projects vital information to the citizens in the state. The information platform is called the Citizens Gate App, aligning more with the Government to Citizen (G2C) mode. The platform was created to serve the people of Lagos State better and interact with them more, to deliver more dividends of democracy. Due to the massive amount of internally- generated revenue in the state, the government of Lagos State seems to have the financial support that is needed to keep this laudable idea running. Abasilim, Gberevbie and Ifaloye (2017) also examined the views of scholars that e-GIP services could be carried out on a basis of; G2C, Government to Business (G2B), Government to Government (G2G) and Intra-government. G2C provided the information platform whereby the citizens can easily access needed information about government services. G2B enables the government to communicate with those in the private sector of the economy. G2G focuses on the exchange of information among those at the government level in the local, state and federal establishments. Intra-government relates to the exchange of information among the different departments at each level of government.

Scope of e-Government Information Platforms in Public Service

According to Nwinyokpugi and Bestman (2020), the scope of e-government revolves around e-participation, e-education, e-registration, e-mobilization, e-service delivery, e-policing, e-feedback, e-taxation, e-debate, e-health and the analysis of public financial statements. However, e-government has become a network of organizations such as the government, non-profit organizations, and private institutions that work together to achieve a common goal. Lee-Geiller and Lee (2019) posited that the primary aim of ensuring the application of e-government in the affairs of government is to promote good governance which is characterized by equality, partaking in the democratic process, transparency, and accountability in the various sector of the nations. Mostly, e-government evolved based on the revolution in ICT which finds expression in digital technologies such as; the internet, mobile phones, personal computers and different electronic platforms. The emergence of these technologies enabled the easy transaction of services between the government and

other areas of society (Bonina, Koskinen, Eaton &Gawer, 2021).

In other words, the primary focus of the government is on the managerial process of an organization using e-GIP. Amuche (2019) asserted that the basic focus of e-government is the internal utilization of information and internet technologies in the management of certain resources such as capital, human, material, and machines, which are deployed to aid administrative processes in a public organization. Chinedu and Hussaini (2018) submitted that e-governance analyses the whole component of the inter-relationship and networks which exists between the government and other institutions present in the state with regards to the use and application of ICT. As such, e-government is an approach which studies the processes involved in the administrative relations existing in a public organization.

ICT and its application in recent times have paved the way for many opportunities for human and economic development within various nations in the global community. The Reports of the Economic Commission for Africa (2012) observed that within the framework of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), national governments, together with the stakeholders at the national, regional, and international levels are engaged in conceptualizing and deploying ICT in governance to support development. It is on this note that scholars have agreed that a global comparison of E-GIP indicators can assist individuals to understand the status and nature of e-governance in nation-states. Since the establishment of the United Nations e-government survey, the programme has taken up a comprehensive method of analysing e-government initiative status based on the extent to which online service delivery is made available in a nation, the level of telecommunication infrastructure and the state of the human capital index of a nation (Fasheyitan, 2020).

Role of Electronic Government Information Platforms in the Public Service

Chohan and Hu (2020) asserted that ICT has been described as a tool for changing society electronically. The global community projected e-government as a more reliable means of operating government businesses through the utilization of information and communication technology in improving transparency, ensure the provision of adequate information to citizens, improve efficiency in administrative processes and ensure the availability of public services (Malodia, Dhir, Mishra & Bhatti, 2020). Instructive was the assertion by Gberevbie, Ayo, Iyoha, Duruji and Abasilim (2015) that the primary focus of e-government in administrations is to ensure that the citizens have stress-free access to government information services. Thus, the cumbersome process of following bureaucratic processes is avoided at all costs. Grigalashvili (2022) opined that e-government is a concept that involves the deployment of ICT by various government agencies and Public society in promoting the frequent participation of citizens in the governing and administrative process of political institutions.

No doubt, transformation in government services has been driven drastically through the avenue of ICT, which is increasingly recognized as a key facilitator for transforming public governance. The result of the adoption of ICT in the public service is to create a more robust and satisfying picture of government activities (Ncamphalal, 2019). Some of its benefits include enhancing flexibility, mobility, dynamism, transparency and increasing efficiency. E-GIP is essential for increasing revenue, promoting competitiveness, and enhancing marketing in the public sector (Dyussenov & Almeida, 2021). The concept of e-GIP is increasingly accepted by various information

practitioners, academicians, governmental organisations and non-governmental organisations. Governments around the world are embracing e-GIP ranges from local, state, and federal levels, which explain its importance and fast-spreading nature (Omar, 2020). In this regard, e-GIP is fundamentally considered a governmental innovation and evolutionary phenomenon for transforming government organisations into more citizen-centric and efficient public services. It also ensures that the people have access to the activities of the government around the clock as an integrated and single entity (Oyewole, Omotayo & Nwobu, 2018).

However, this platform encompasses a broad vision of the utilization of ICT in government businesses with the primary aim of encouraging greater participation in the state, as well as enhancing the relationship between the government and citizens using various electronic mediums. According to Roblek, Bach, Meško and Bertoncel (2020), e-government is of recent origin and emerged at the beginning of the 21st century. In the early days of its development, its system initiative was part of e-commerce in the public sector, which followed the evolutionary e-business evolving model were the focal point of e-services was an easy representation of graphic-user interface with no mutual or reciprocal action. Maddah (2015) observed that the acknowledgement that e-government gained, prompted scholars to turn their focus to a skillful and effective assessment of the roles in which such services could aid in enhancing the provision of government services.

Potential Benefits of e-Government Information Platform in Public Service

This era is the age of knowledge, where information has become a key resource in life and becomes very important in all public and private sectors. Lack of awareness about the potential of e-GIP and its benefits is an important criterion linked to the process of adoption and use by the people to realize its value. E-GIPs have been created by the information community to access and share information in an easy way to make our life much better. Information holds a prominent role in most sectors like education, medical services, banking applications, and agriculture, down to the small details concerning the citizen's life, which is the backbone of economic life (Javed, Shahzad, Rehman, Zikria, Razzak, Jalil & Xu, 2022). Governments in developed countries around the world have created and raised public awareness of e-services in several ways. They have conducted several community outreach activities to raise awareness and adoption of e-GIP initiatives such as road shows, competitions, promotions, online marketing, marketing with government departments, market awareness surveys and rewarding the users of these platforms (Al-hashmi, 2013).

Recently, the advancements in ICT played a crucial role in harmonizing people and services in the digital world. It has become one of the components of managerial reforms around the globe (Al-hashmi & Suresha, 2013). E-GIPs are a relatively new area that is concerned with the use of ICT by government agencies to deliver their services electronically to the public (World Bank, 2012). However, the success of such initiatives is dependent not only on government support but also on people's willingness to accept and adopt (Kurfalı, Arifoğlu, Tokdemir & Paçin, 2017). Governments around the world are ensuring their possible best to maximise the potential benefits of E-GIP to their citizens but it is still facing greater challenges. In Nigeria, the challenges are mostly related to a lack of awareness, acceptance and contribution from the government. As a result, little attention has been given to the government's perspectives. It is not known whether the public is aware of E-GIPs and their services

and whether the government is going to accept and adopt the newly proposed services.

Alahakoon and Jehan (2020), e-GIPs are concerned with the use of ICT by the various government agencies to enhance accountability, flexibility, mobility, and ensure transparency in the management of government businesses. It is also a political strategy through which the activities of the government are made public through the adoption of modern communication technologies (websites, blogs and web portals). Wrobel and Taschek (2020) asserted that e-government is a broad concept that analysis and accesses the effects of technologies on the administration of governments, and the inter-relations which exist between the public servants and the larger society. It also aims at achieving certain objectives such as enhancing government operations, particularly in the public sector, improving the delivery of public services and encouraging effective participation of citizens in the decision-making processes of the nation.

According to Mensah, Vera and Mi (2018), the e-GIP service delivery index can be analysed using a five-stage framework. They are; the emerging stage, the enhanced stage, the interactive stage, the transactional stage, and the Internet stage. Mogale (2021), further elaborate on these stages. According to them, the emerging stage is a stage where the presence of basic government information is small in scope and pertains to only specific issues. In this stage, the e-government online presence consists of official links to ministries, departments, parastatals, and regional/local governments. Some important documents such as the constitution and certain policy statements are also uploaded online in this stage. Under the enhanced presence stage, the government ensures that certain selected public policy documents such as 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. The interactive stage ensures that the government's Internet services are capable of influencing and acting on each other while providing online services that will be suitable for each citizen. Such downloadable documents as forms for payment of taxes, license renewal, and bills payment are found on this website.

These web platforms are expected to be updated regularly to ensure the presence of more recent information and statistics. The transaction stage allows a dual interaction between government and citizens. This stage creates an avenue for the citizens to pay for important government services online, while those who are responsible for providing goods and services are allowed to bid their goods online through links that are adequately secured. The final stage of online service delivery is the stage of network presence which represents the most sophisticated level in e-government. Under this stage, the government and its agencies provide citizens, businesses and other Public organizations the opportunity to participate, deliberate and make important decisions, and at the same time, the government is ready to involve every sector of the society in a dual discussion to promote unity among members of the society. Through the process of interactions, the government persistently request citizens' views on certain governmental procedures such as the policy-making process, law-making process, democratic process and finally, the decision-making process of government.

Mogale (2021) asserted that assessing the level of a nation's e-GIPs structure is identifying the capability of a nation to possess the six primary measures of a country's ICT infrastructural components. These components include; personal computers,

Internet users, telephone lines, online population, mobile phones and televisions. They finally explained that the information used to analyse the human capital index of a country relies on the data provided by United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The index is based on the level of adult illiteracy rate and the gross enrolment ratio of primary, secondary, and tertiary institutions with two third weight given to the literacy rate of adults and one-third according to the gross enrolment ratio. According to the United Nations Global E-government Readiness Report (2005), the assessment of the status of e-government in member countries of the United Nations has been taking various dimensions. On this basis, the level of e-GIP readiness is a product of the country's economic, technological, and human resource development.

Status of e-Government Information Platform in Nigeria Public Service

United Nations e-government survey (2014) pointed out that the methods employed in using e-governance status have remained the same in other survey periods; however, certain components have been updated to reflect new government strategies. This is the only global report that assesses and analyses concretely the status of e-governance among 193 member states of the United Nations (UN). Adah (2015) pointed out that the income level of a nation to a large extent aids in promoting the usage of e-GIPs. Thus, the income level is an analysis of economic capacity and progress, access to ICT infrastructure, and provision of electronic education. The report however presents the fact that the financial status of a nation does not make certain the establishment of e-governance in any society. Some countries in the world have, to a large extent improved their level of e-government status despite relatively low financial base, just as there are countries which are backward in e-governance despite their relatively high-income level.

Osunji (2020) also pointed out that joint service delivery is now spreading throughout the global community, creating an avenue for government agencies, citizens, Public society and the private sector to partner together in creating new technologies that will foster the growth of e-governance. This transformation towards E-GIPs is experienced in both developed and developing countries like Nigeria, as both strive to reach the prescribed e-government development index of the United Nations. The highlights of the United Nations e-government 2014 reports showed that Nigeria is among the 74 countries ranked as those with middle e-government development index. The report further revealed that those middle-ranked countries, of which Nigeria is inclusive, specifically deliver information services through mobile devices. The middle-ranked countries are also characterized by low adult literacy rates and little education which in turn poses a challenge to e-governance advancement. The United Nations e-government Report (2014) stated that the progress in Africa is relatively slow and uneven. Nigeria is ranked as number 19th among the top 20 countries in Africa in the e-government development index ranking.

Nigeria is regarded as the giant of Africa in the International System; this attribute is a reflection of its enormous population and not necessarily because of its growth in information technology. Adeyemo (2013) pointed out that there have been contradictory views of Nigeria's level of development and economic potential in the International community. This contradiction usually manifests itself in the low level of rankings it always receives from various surveys made by international organizations. Nigeria, like every other nation in the global community, is striving to achieve a standard where e-GIP becomes the order of the day. However, it has set for itself the goal of developing

its ICT structure to a level, where e-GIP becomes an avenue for sending and receiving information from one sector of society to the other. Aneke (2019) observed that Nigeria has employed various methods to boost its ICT sector, thereby making Nigeria's e-GIP and ICT sector one of the fastest-growing markets in the African continent. He further opined that the country needs to introduce e-GIPs in all spheres of society to ensure the efficiency of public services and the free flow of information from one sector to another.

Challenges of the Implementation of e-Government Information Platform

The UN e-government survey, (2012) confirms that Nigeria started the computerization of government services in the 90s and recently jumped into the world of E-GIP with the creation and maintenance of organizational information platforms by several federal ministries, and state governments and other public agencies. Despite over 51% teledensity and more than 72 million active GSM subscribers in 2009 and a heavy lift to over 82% of teledensity in 2013 (Chohan & Hu, 2022), Nigeria remains one of the most backward nations in the area of e-GIP. This is large because Nigeria like most other less developed nations is in the world of ICT as a consumer of finished products and not a producer or even modifier. In recent years, however, the country is jumping into the circle of e-GIP with marked successes and heavy challenges to overcome. As observed during the literature review, most government agencies all over the world are in different phases of development to drift their conventional methods architectures to more horizontally and vertically integrated architectures.

Nigeria is now dealing with a variety of difficulties with the implementation of e-GIP. It is commonly known that Nigeria's efforts to build an e-government information platform face difficulties. One is the socioeconomic shortcomings that are present in Sub-Saharan African nations. Other issues include weak organisational abilities, insufficient infrastructure support, and poor or insufficient human capital resources (Cheshmehzangi, 2020). Initiatives for a local e-government information platform have also been studied, but from a macro perspective where policies and initiatives have been identified and their effects have been assessed using surveys (Udofia & Echor, 2019). Some leaders still need to comprehend the connection between efficient governance and e-GIP. To encourage changes in political thinking and culture, advocacy and awareness raising are necessary. Developing and maintaining government capacity to manage the relationship with the private partner in projects as well as the changes related to the switch from traditional to digital systems is a significant problem. In addition to lacking the necessary expertise and funding, there have been issues with government institutions not treating e-government contracts with enough respect.

If the public is unaware of the existence of e-GIP and does not find the gateway to be helpful, the government will not be able to use it to provide high-quality information. Ukwuoma, Cirman and Oye (2022) claim that several obstacles face emerging nations, slowing the spread of initiatives involving e-GIP. Some of the obstacles, such as poor organisational, political, economic, and social problems, have their roots in the cultural orientations of the area. We refer to supply-side obstacles as any impediment that discourages governments from creating new or improving existing e-government apps (Chohan, Hu, Si & Pasha, 2020). Another significant obstacle for e-government information platforms is the absence of coordination among governmental organisations. Although each ministry has its website, there is no connection between

them and a standardised system. Consequently, the system is not interactive. Additionally, the Internet ecosystem lacks information. On the websites of the public administration authorities, not all the information that should be accessible to the public is available. Although not all of the documents are available in the languages required.

Additionally, there is a lack of collaboration between public and private sector organisations. The ability, the technology, and the skilled employees are available in the private sector. However, this knowledge has not been effectively applied to the requirement for the deployment of an e-GIP in public administration. The bureaucracy is unwilling to use e-government resources (Sarker, Wu, Liu & Ma, 2018). Generally speaking, bureaucracy is resistant to change. The bureaucracy perceives the installation of an e-government information platform as a danger because it believes that widespread internet usage will lessen its position as the dominant force. Additionally, there is a dearth of formal education regarding internet and computer usage, which is typical in the public sector. The needs of this Information Age have not been taken into account when developing school curricula. As a result, there is a lack of instruction in schools about how to use computers and the internet. The field of E-GIP also lacks a legislative structure. Regulations that protect privacy and personal information, include provisions for offences involving information technology in the Penal Code, and protect intellectual property rights do not adequately address the needs resulting from advancements in telecommunication technologies.

The public servants in Nigeria, developed along with the modern state to assist the government in formulating policies as well as efficiently implementing them through various mediums. In this aspect, public servants are an institution tasked with creating, articulating, and carrying out a public policy as well as carrying out governmental duties and development programmes effectively and efficiently. Development initiatives and governmental policies are endangered in many African nations, particularly Nigeria, by the inadequacy of information communicated to the populace and the inefficiency and incompetence of the public service. Because of this, Nigeria's successive governments, from the time after independence to the present, have implemented articulated patterns and different information systems to reform the public service and increase its effectiveness and efficiency. The service is nevertheless ineffective and unable to transform itself (Adeyemo, 2011), and it is plagued by a lack of control, redundancy, weak accountability, low professional standards, waste and corruption, low productivity, and inadequate governance structures.

Conclusion

The main challenge in adopting e-GIP in any developing country is assessing whether the intended objective of reaching the population is met. The platform should be accessible to everyone who requires governmental services, irrespective of their location, age, status, language, or Internet access. E-GIP also have the potential to lessen or remove obstacles to coordination and cooperation within the Nigerian public sector. The government, both as authorities and as frequent Internet users, will play a far larger role in the growing involvement of the internet in our economy and society. The government will also have to cope with several modern, complicated issues that will put all parts of their higher cognitive function to the test. The interaction between the government and the nation as a whole will be more influenced by technology. Rapid technology innovations' impact on the market will inescapably require a thorough reevaluation of the existing legal and communication frameworks. The government's

fundamental advantage is its capacity to compile and maintain visibility over vast areas of knowledge about its people and, subsequently, the services they depend upon. The government may now codify this information and make it available to the public as repositories of such extraordinarily rich data sets for analysis, which may lead to improved services and outcomes for citizens. The push to replace manual processes with technology has increased administrative efficiency as well as government convenience and service. It has become imperative that the Nigerian government should make use of e-GIP to expand new concepts, improve oversight, provide an easy review, and increase the impact on businesses and citizens.

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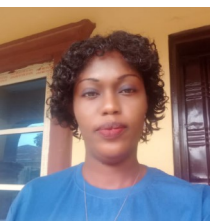
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