



Digital Transformation and the Fight against Corruption in Nigeria's Public Sector

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Abstract

Digital transformation is an increasingly strategic theme in public sector governance throughout the world. The advancement in information communication and technology (ICT), especially its expansion to every area of life, has elicited great interests due to its capacity to contribute to efficient service delivery generally. Across the world governments have embraced the digitalization of their operations, and have therefore achieved greater efficiency in government business. In this paper content, digital transformation of the public sector of Nigeria entails the application of modern information technology to its operational processes with a view to enhancing its capacity for efficiency, and thus deal with leakages that conduce to corrupt practices. Digital transformation offers the opportunity for an intelligent use of the ICT for organizational efficiency. Corruption has remained one of the most complex problems impeding Nigeria's development. The overarching objective of this paper is to assess the nature of digital transformation in the Nigerian public sector, mechanisms and challenges of fighting corruption. Using primary data generated through key informant interviews and complemented with secondary data, this paper specifically interrogates the factors that conduce to, or inhibit the digitalization of Nigeria's public sector as well its overall implication in the fight against corruption. This paper finds that the digitalization of public sector will likely improve transparency in the operating activities of the public sector and thus lead to the elimination of corruption. This paper recommends, among others, the digitalization of public sector operations and the strengthening of institutions having direct and indirect mandate to fight corruption.

Keywords: Anti-corruption; Corruption; Digital transformation; Governance; Public sector; Nigeria.

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INTRODUCTION

Digital transformation has profoundly had an impact on various aspects of organizing human life while many aspects of contemporary governmental activities, as well as the way national economies and societies function, are being transformed by digitalization (Asogwa, 2012). As a result of these changes, the nature of public policy governance has evolved. A new range of tools are emerging and thus required to be deployed to support in the formulation and implementation of public policies. (Adewoye and Olaoye, 2014). As a result of the ubiquity of digital devices, and smart technology, public policies and people's lives are being impacted by digital revolution globally. Initially, the digital revolution impacted only the industrialized countries, but there has been an accelerated expansion of digitalization globally in the last ten years. Globally, 50% of the population uses the internet, International Telecommunication Union (ITU) estimates that at the end of 2019, a bit more than 51 per cent of the global population, or 4 billion people, will be using the Internet (International Telecommunication Union, 2019).

The digitalization processes have the potential not only to transform people's daily lives, but also to revolutionize societal relations and the delivery of public services. Thus digitalization offers opportunities as well as challenges for development cooperation. In recent years, technology has emerged as one of the most powerful tools in the fight against corruption (Neupane, 2012). Digitalization and digital transformations have greatly advanced and transformed the public sector, with enormous potential and far-reaching benefits. The accruable benefits from digitalization include improved efficiency and effectiveness in public administration and service delivery, as well as increased transparency, accountability, accessibility, and citizen participation. (Kuldosheva, 2021)

The ICT and digitalization of governance have been identified as a promising tool for eliminating corruption. The digitalization of governance would enhance openness which is necessary to enthrone the tenants of accountability. The digitalization of governance promotes the fight against corruption in diverse ways such as tracking digital footprints, promoting e-transactions which reduce face-to-

face interactions and instituting e-payments, which eliminate physical payments of statutory fees (Kim, 2005). These impersonal spectrums of transactions have the potential to expand the horizons of transparency and accountability in government business. Smart phones as one of the ICT targets possess capability to effectively empower citizens to collaboratively gather and share evidence of corrupt practices. In other words, ICT can effectively assist citizens willing to expose and track corruption practices to do so in discreet and timely manners. (Kuldosheva, 2021)

The digitalization of government services, upward and downward transparency, and mobilization are all terms that come to mind when thinking about public services. Nigeria formulated its National Information Technology Policy in March 2001, with the subsequent establishment of the National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA) in April 2001 to implement it. (Adeyeye & Iweha, 2005). The policy signaled the commencement of e-governance in Nigeria. The primary goals of the national policy included leveraging ICT in public administration improving accessibility to government services for all citizens, ensuring transparency in government processes, and bringing government to people's doorsteps by creating virtual forums and facilities (Adeyeye & Iweha, 2015; Yahaya, Ejigbo & Oladokun, 2019). The utilization of ICT tools contributes to the restructuring of government, and affords the citizens and businesses the opportunity to interface with governmental institutions for better governance, and administrative effectiveness (Nigerian National Policy for Information Technology, 2001).

The Nigerian government has taken various measures and strategies to address the incidence of corruption in the country especially the public sector. These measures include public service reform (monetization to reduce waste and reduction or over-bloated personnel, reform of public procurement); establishment of anti-craft agencies (such as the Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC), Independent Corruption and other Practices Commission (ICPC), etc.) Despite the successes attained by these institutions, the situation remains palatable as corruption continues to permeate and pervade every facet in our society and national life in Nigeria (Fatile,

2013). Against this backdrop, this study is to examine the extent to which digital transformation is likely to aid the effective fight against corruption in Nigeria's public sector. The questions asked were nature of digitalization in Nigeria public sectors, mechanisms of digital transformation and how it has contribute to the fight against corruption in the public sector and the challenges that digitalization is likely to facing in curbing corruption.

For the purpose of conceptual clarification and to limit the level of ambiguity, which as a rule is hallmark of academic research, it is important to examine some of the concepts and terms that are used in this study i.e. Digital transformation and Corruption. Corruption was not invented by, nor is it peculiar to Nigerians. On the contrary, it is a global phenomenon with deep historical roots, although it manifests itself with similarities direction in different societies, depending on the peculiar systems of power distribution and the legal and moral norms operating therein (Osoba, 1996).

To understand digital transformation, we need to look at a period in the technologization of society when a major change occurred in our current world. The focus on the Internet and other technologies as change enablers signaled the start of a transition process that included redefining of commercial sector business models, governance mechanism reform, and ICTs becoming more and more integrated in our society (Heeks 2005). Thus, the commercialization of the Internet since the 1990s marked the beginning of the digital transformation of our society. Stolterman & Fors (2004) looks at digital transformation from both a device paradigm and aesthetics perspective. They describe digital transformation as the changes brought about by the use of digital technology in all parts of life. The focus is on the fact that digital technology has become an integral aspect of human existence, and that people are increasingly experiencing the world through, with, and through information technology (Stolterman & Fors, 2004).

United Nations (2012) defined corruption as it as "abuse of power for private gain". The Transparency International has chosen a clear and focused definition of the term as "the abuse of entrusted power for

private gain". It can also be defined as a pervasion or change from the general accepted rules or laws for selfish gain (Farida, 2010). Corruption is defined as obtaining unethical or unlawful benefits as a result of holding a government post. The famous former chairman of the ICPC, Justice Mustapha Akanbi (Iyanda (2012), divided corruption in Nigeria into three categories: the street level, the business corruption and the high level corruption. The term "street level corruption" refers to corruption in government as manifested in citizens' day-to-day encounters with officials. The second one is Corruption in small and medium-sized businesses that occurs with or without the active participation of an analogous public sector official; and Corruption at the highest level, involving large sums of money in high-powered positions in finance, government, and administration (Ndou, 2004). Corruption, according to the World Bank's 2011 handbook, is "one of the single largest barriers to economic and social growth." It goes on to say that "corruption diverts resources away from those who need them most through bribery, fraud, and the abuse of economic advantages. Also, the World Bank defines corruption as the abuse of office for private gains. Public office is abused for private gain when an official accepts, solicits or extorts a bribe. It is also abused when private agents actively offer bribes to circumvent public offices and processes for competitive advantages or profit (Osakede, 2015).

According to United Nations Convention against Corruption, Corruption continues to be a top priority for the Nigerian government and its people. Corruption impacts all elements of public life, continues to damage the country's social, economic, and political progress, and is a key impediment to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. (Anazodo, 2015). Nigeria is a signatory to the United Nations Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC), which leads UNODC's work in this field, and is thus a participant in the Implementation Review Mechanism, a peer review mechanism that helps States Parties implement the Convention successfully. UNCAC offers a wide range of anti-corruption measures, including asset recovery, criminalization, and enforcement of many types of crimes, as well as prevention and international collaboration on corruption

concerns amongst member states. (Molnar, 2007).

RESEARCH METHODS

This paper adopts qualitative research design to gain an insight into digital transformation in Nigeria employed both primary and secondary data to address the research questions. Secondary data for this research work were obtained from online sources, articles, journals, and textbooks. For primary data, this research work adopted the purposive research technique and engaged open-ended, semi-structured interviews of selected Key Informants (Mealer & Jones, 2014; Gelling, 2015). Key informant interviews are qualitative open-ended interviews with persons who the researcher knows are not just relevant to the research subject matter but are also professionals with first-hand knowledge on the research or work in areas that are directly related to the research being carried out. As a data collection tool, the researcher created an innovative semi-structured interview guide with open-ended questions. Semi-structured open-ended questions were used in the interviews. Participants' viewpoints, ideas, and understanding of the subject under investigation were all elicited through interviews (Turner, 2010). A total of fifteen (15) interviews were conducted across

Academics, Ministries, Agencies and Institutions selected for the study. Sequel to the completion of the open-ended interviews of the eight (15) key informants, transcription was done to convert the audio and analysis. This was used to identify and describe inherent ideas within the data which were denoted as themes and sub themes. (Pope, Ziebland & Mays, 2000)

RESULT & DISCUSSION

The key informant were interviewed broadly on the nature, mechanisms and challenges of digital transformation which can help in the fight against corruption in Nigeria's public sector. Semi-structure set of interview questions constituted the data-gathering instrument. Semi-structured interview format was employed to provide room for the key informants to have a wide latitude for the expatiation of their views where necessary.

Thematic analysis identified and validated two major themes that captured all the data from the interviews. The two themes included the nature of digital transformation, and mechanism of digital transformation (Figures 1). Table 2 and 3 contain the sample questions and the overview of findings respectively.

Table 1. Characteristics of participants in key informant interviews

Theme	Lead Questions
The nature of digital transformation	What has been the nature of digital transformation noticeable in the Nigeria public sector?
Mechanisms of digital transformation	What has been the contributions of Treasury Single Account (TSA), Cashless Policy, BVN and Integrated Payroll and Personnel Information system (IPPIIS) in curbing corruption in Nigeria public sector? What has been the role of e-governance as a potential weapon for anti-corruption war in Nigeria?

Table 2. Interview questions with room for elaboration

Key Informant ID	Sex	Occupational/professional affiliation
KI-1	M	Senior Academic
KI-2	M	Senior Academic
KI-3	F	Senior Academic
KI-4	M	Director of ICT in a university
KI-5	M	Level 10, Federal Ministry, Abuja
KI-6	M	Director, Federal Inland Revenue Service, Abuja
KI-7	F	Senior Officer, Economic & Financial Crimes Comm.
KI-8	M	Public Affairs Analyst

Nature of Digital Transformation in Nigeria's Public Sector

From the table above, we postulate that digital transformation has profoundly had an impact on various aspects of organizing human life. The first anchor relates to how underlying governance mechanisms have been transformed due to digital technology becoming embedded in our society. The institutional structures, rules, and conventions that control decision-making and behavior by governments, businesses, and individuals, as well as interactions among these stakeholders and across policy areas, are referred to as governance. (Souter & Maclean, 2012). Governance, is seen broadly in this contribution as a structuring device for social coordination as well as a linguistic device for understanding the changing nature of the public administration, non – profit institutions and the commercial sector (Bevir, 2008). The argument is that governance has now found a 'voice' with the emergence of the Internet. Homburg (2004), According to his cryptic analysis of the 'marriage' of governance reforms and e-Government, "the use of modern information technologies, like new public management techniques, affects the chief characteristics of the classic public administration paradigm, and thus they reshape the production, coordination, control, and direction of processes that take place within the public sector". Thus governance is now intricately related to metaphors linked to these ICTs such as e-Government, Digital Government, e-Governance, etc.

The key informant noted that the nature of digital transformation is like e-governance when you're talking about digitalization in the

public sector is like governance. This is strategically leveraging on new technological means to improve policies, decision making, and public service systems. Even if you take a new wave of reforms, you find out that the previous reforms were not too effective. But, for the time being, the government's focus is on the digitalization of things, which was supposed to take effect from 2020 to 2030. The introduction of e-governance among others has been one of the noticeable contributions of the government to curbing corruption in the public sector (Waziri, 2010).

The key informant described the nature of digitalization by citing ways that it has been institutionalize in Nigeria public sector as a concept is very critical and looks into how public processes can be enhanced using technological means. Microsoft as a company has a joint agreement with the Ministry of communication and digital economy. In which the white paper was established on how to generally transform how business is done in Nigeria. Looking at the transformation in terms of SME transformation in terms of government operations, and in terms of the private sector's current activities, we would have noticed that the Nigerian system, in a way, has adopted and is still trying to adapt to the present happenings (Mohammed, 2013). As a matter of fact, Nigeria is not really doing too well when compared to other African countries. As a result, the nature of digital change and its influence on humans must be viewed through the lens of the information and knowledge society narrative, which asserts that all known societies draw their power, riches, and significance from their ownership of information and knowledge (Mazlish, 2006; Castells, 2011).

Table 3. Overview of findings

Theme	Summary of key informants' view
Nature of digital transformation	Digital transformation as a concept is very critical and looks into how public processes can be enhanced using technological means. Microsoft as a company has a joint agreement with the Ministry of communication and digital economy. In which the white paper was established on how to generally transform how business is done in Nigeria. Looking at the transformation in terms of SME transformation in terms of government operations, looking at the public sector's looking at digital transformation, and in terms of the private sector's current activities, we would have noticed that the Nigerian system, in a way, has adopted and is still trying to adapt to the present happenings.
Mechanism of digital transformation	The introduction of Treasury Single Account (TSA), Integrated Payroll and Personnel Information system (IPPIS), BVN, NIN. It has increased transparency. Since it has increased transparency in the public sector, all right, it has also improved trust. People now trust governments. And the moment people trust the government, this will reduce corruption to some degree.

Mechanisms of digital transformation in Nigeria's public sector

The results of digital transformation efforts are seen in its mechanism and ways to effectively carry out a good delivery in mode of services. This can be seen in the emergence of platform and initiatives that was provided by government in carrying out this mechanism such as; Governance mechanisms which have been transformed due to digital technology becoming embedded in our society. Governance is considered as the institutional mechanisms, rules and norms that encompass decision-making and behaviour by governments, businesses and citizens, the interactions among these stakeholders and among different policy domains (Souter & Maclean, 2012). Governance, is seen broadly in this contribution as a structuring device for social coordination as well as a linguistic device for understanding the changing nature of the public administration, non – profit institutions and the commercial sector (Bevir, 2008). We also have some initiatives that introduced in Nigeria government public sector; Treasury Account, BVN, IPPIS, Cashless policy among others.

The key informant noted that the Treasury single account, as initially pronounced, was done in order to block financial leakages in MDAs, ministries, departments, and agencies of the government, the movements would prevent financial leakage, reduce corruption, or, at the very least, the avenues through which corrupt government officials will be exposed. Also, this TSA has introduced or promoted transparency. The moment you put all the cards on the table, people know what you're dealing with. Companies are asked to send their quotations. This brings government transparency. Now that you have transparency, everybody can fall in line, and everybody knows what is happening. By so doing, it has increased transparency. Since it has increased transparency in the public sector, it has also improved trust. People now trust governments. And the moment people trust the government, the shows will reduce corruption. I thought about working for the government for 35 years. You've seen other people that have worked for governments for that period of time, and when they leave the workplace, they will be declared into poverty. So basically, the people don't want

to go back by looking at the people in front of them. But now e-government has made everything transparent in nature.

The key informant describe the mechanism in another way that if you look at the single accounts, the cashless policy, and the integrity peer personal information system, they are more or less aiming at the same thing. Both were put in place to curb corruption, as you stated, if not all of them are making an impact strictly in the areas of cooperation. For example, the IPPIS is one that is peculiar to the public sector. The idea of IPPIS was conceived in 2006. The goal is to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of government personnel data storage. And all of this had to be handled in conjunction with their monthly salary. And this was to be administered and went on with their monthly payroll. And their aim is to enhance accountability and liability instead of monument costs and budgeting. You will find out on December 1st, 2020. In the public sector, there are a lot of impacts that have been fixed, because the government has drastically reduced the salaries of public servants, because in 2020 it was a noticeable fact that ghost workers were detected in the public sector. The essence of curbing fraud in some of these ministries was not covered because during that period between 2007 and 2019, we found out that the IPPIS was able to save the government about six hundred million naira, which was detected from payments to workers and about 220,000 ghost workers were detected during this period. I know this one definitely will help to reduce the cost of governments, and even though the report is not to say there are no challenges, there really are challenges in the implementation of these to the core.

Challenges of Digital Transformation

One would have thought that with the introduction and implementation of TSA, the level of corruption would have been drastically reduced. The key informant noted that, unfortunately, there seems to be a positive relationship between TSA and corruption because corruption is on the increase. There are several allegations of millions of naira that have gone down the drain and are unaccounted for. It has helped in the introduction of several technologies in the country to curb corruption and increase accountability through the use of BVN and NIN, among others. To some extent, it

has been effective, but a lot more needs to be done for a more effective and productive result of all these initiatives.

In every change that is cultural, you always find difficulty in transit, like your eyes help in our culture's way of doing things. So we want to just transit now to a digital way. You see, there are a few people who will always challenge it. Some people are not ready to move with the government. So you call them lonely wolves (Ogundiya, 2009). They just remain on their own; they don't do anything with the government; they don't want to adapt to the change. There are some that want to keep doing it the way it is. And there are, so if you look at it in any way, it will always challenge change. So, one of the basic problems is culture.

Number two is skill; most of the people who are supposed to carry out these responsibilities don't possess the necessary skills, such as digital skills. Some are not IT serving, which means some need to be trained. Okay, some people need to be trained to be able to adapt to the new trend, right? Leadership; everything about digital transformation is about leadership. Do you have people? Who has the intelligent know-how to help drive this transformation? Because the majority of the leaders, as well as the workers, do not possess the necessary leadership skills. Since they don't possess the leadership skills, there is sure to be a true problem, the world's problem of having enough intelligence to drive change. Because the leaders who are responsible for carrying out this transformation do not have the empathy to pull people along with them, to make them see the reason for this change (Oye, 2013).

The Key informant described that the number of challenges faced by the public sector, natural changes are inevitable. And at the same time, when it comes to changes in human beings, there are times when there is resistance, because an average civil servant in Nigeria today would want to maintain the status quo. However, these are the reasons why they are challenges, and these challenges range from the lack of a reliable and comprehensive database for public service; we don't have reliable information. Civil servants tend to manipulate information even related to themselves. You see, when you are talking about retirement age, you find a lot of them keep manipulating their years and birth age

continuously to suit themselves. That is one of the problems we have in the public sector.

The key informant noted that another challenge is the inability to forecast manpower needs. When we are talking about cutting the expenses of government, they say the government faces. You find that you cannot say exactly what those needs will be, because they change. So this is another problem. We cannot forecast our needs. Even if we do for this year, we can't predict what will happen next year; there may be some minor changes. That's another challenge. There is a lack of inability to synchronize our record with the current administration. You know, the pension reform was also put in place. This is another initiative to correct the heels of this pension scheme. Or you find out that synchronizing your records with your pension administrator is another issue that is being faced by governments

The key informant provided another challenges as politics, politics is another challenge we are facing. Until we can separate our politics from our policies, we can't achieve optimal results with digitalization. As we are trying to bring up initiatives, there are some government officials that don't want it to work successfully, and this is one of the limiting factors in digitalization. Government policies, we are digitizing without creating the necessary or properly polices to carry out these goals. Government needs to invest in the education of the populace, because if we are digitalizing and the populace are not digitally incline the system is bound to fail not only coming to the media to announce the people need to be technically incline to drive goals (Signore, 2005). Most of the people who are supposed to carry out these responsibilities don't possess the necessary skills, such as digital skills. Some are not IT serving, which means some need to be trained able to adapt to the new trend.

The key informant also mention leadership, everything about digital transformation is about leadership. Do you have people? Who has the intelligent know-how to help drive this transformation? Because the majority of the leaders, as well as the workers, do not possess the leadership skills. Since they don't possess the leadership skills, there is sure to be a true problem, the world's problem of having enough intelligence to drive change.

CONCLUSION

This research has been conducted to analysis the mechanism of digital transformation in curbing corruption in Nigeria's public sector. Looking at various anti-corruption initiatives that the Nigeria's government has introduced overtime. The research sought to ascertain the degree to which digitization of Nigeria's public sector might aid in the battle against corruption. Therefore digitalization removed some avenues for corruption, thereby it helps reduced corruption. Digitalization also improved population surveillance and civil registration processes and reduction in corruption such as BVN, NIN etc. ICTs specifically e-government facilitates transparency and accountability will limit corruption. Government should work more on their policies of fighting corruption by implementing and providing adequate measures for carrying it out in Nigeria.

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