

ACCESS TO GOVERNMENT INFORMATION BY CITIZENS OF NIGERIA, AS AN EMPOWERMENT TOOL: A STUDY OF RESIDENTS OF IMO STATE, NIGERIA.

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ABSTRACT: Access to government information is very necessary for citizens of Nigeria in particular and other countries in general because it helps in making informed decisions as well as to participate actively in governance processes. In contemporary life, electoral and policy making process, the importance of political communication cannot be overemphasized because it is an ongoing conversation about social issues. It therefore necessitates an appraisal to determining the extent to which citizens of Nigeria are exposed to government information, the channel(s) through which they get exposed to those information, the extent to which they believe government information, as well as to determine if they are influenced by those messages. The study adopted survey research method for data collection. From 2006 census figure for Imo State (3,934,899), United Nations Projected Index was used to arrive at 5,111,433 as projected population of Imo State in 2019. Taro Yamani's formula was used to arrive at a sample size of 400. Multi stage sampling technique was applied in the selection of the respondents. The paper found that majority of Nigeria citizens access government information but do not believe in those communications because Nigeria Politicians/government use it for their selfish interests and those messages have either positive or negative effects or both. The researcher however recommends that Nigeria politicians/government should as a matter of urgency change their mindset on the belief that communication relationships should be positive and of benefit to them. They should be ready and willing from time to time to communicate with the citizens and stop thinking that messages they give would be swallowed hook, line and sinker by Nigeria citizens. Finally, Nigeria politicians should avoid imposing policies/programs on the citizens so as to avoid conflicts.

KEYWORDS: Access, Government, Information, Empowerment, Nigeria, Citizens.

I. INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

According to Laura (2002), knowledge is power, and transparency is the remedy to the darkness under which corruption and abuse thrive. Democracy depends on knowledgeable citizenry whose access to a broad range of information enables them to participate fully in public life, help to determine priorities for public spending, receive equal access to justice, and hold their public officials accountable. When the government and quasi-governmental agencies perform under a veil of secrecy, people are denied the right to know about public affairs, and the press is only able to speculate and subsist on rumors (Laura 2002, p.5). Legitimacy is earned by leaders who possess the ability to communicate a clear vision for the country as well as the policy choices and trade-offs they have made on the public's behalf. Integral to the goal of legitimacy is the capacity to carry out two-way communication with citizens in a meaningful and ongoing manner, (World Bank, n.d.).

United Nations Development Program (UNDP) believes that the underlying principles of an access to information approach are transparency, active participation, responsiveness and accountability and that the achievement of democratic governance goals requires that information be widely available. However, there must be special regard for the need of those who are poor, vulnerable and frequently excluded from mainstream governance processes and institutions as a result of poor access to information and communication support. Poor and vulnerable often lack information that is vital to their lives – information on basic rights and entitlements, public services, health, education, work opportunities, public expenditure budgets, etc. They also lack visibility and voice to enable them to define and influence policy priorities and access resources. Gender is also a critical consideration in access to information (UNDP Practical Note, 2003, pp. 1-2).

The right to access public information is the right of every person to know: to have access to the information he or she needs to make free choices and to live an autonomous life. The right to access information held by the state is regulated in several International Human Rights Treaties establishing the right of every person to freedom of opinion and expression, including the right to seek, receive and impart information and ideas, (ADC, 2007, P.5).

Poor public access to information feeds corruption. Secrecy allows back-room deals to determine public spending in the interest of the few rather than the many. Lack of information impedes citizens' ability to access the decisions of their leaders, and even to make informed choices about the individuals they elect to serve as their representatives, (Laura, 2002. P.5).

A right of access to information held within government institutions is usually justified as an instrument for promoting political participation. It has been argued that access is necessary for the realization of the basic rights to freedom of opinion and expression that are guaranteed in the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights, Subsequent human rights declarations, and many national constitutions. A related but stronger argument is that access is essential for persons to realize their basic right to participate in the governing of their country and live under a system built on informed consent of the citizenry, (Alasdair, 2002, p. 9).

In terms of government, access to information allows people to scrutinize the access of their government and is the basis for informed debate of those actions. Weak companies and bad governments depend on secrecy to survive. Secrecy allows inefficiency, wastefulness and corruption to thrive, (Richard, 2002. P. 15).

Statement of Problem

In any state and particularly where the policy analysis capabilities of civil society are poorly developed, political participation rights cannot be exercised effectively without access to government information (Alasdair, 2002, p. 9). Information access and use can only flourish in a society that appreciates the need for it and where government recognizes that information is the key to national growth and prosperity, (Akobundu, 2007, p. 1).

For some reason, many governments appear to think that they can only govern effectively if they operate in total secrecy and their citizens do not know what they are doing, supposedly on behalf of the larger population. African governments are taking the lead in this approach to governance and in many countries in the region; secrecy in government has attained the status of state policy. Political leaders most often in the African region however, erroneously feel that only they know what is best for the people and that citizens cannot be trusted to make important decisions on issues that affect their lives or how they want to be governed, (Richard, 2002, p. 17).

In recent years, citizens of Nigeria have witnessed a new brand of administration, which many have described as maladministration, corrupt, tribalism, anti-people, clueless, etc. Nigerian economic growth has witnessed downward trend and almost every aspect of the country's life has been affected negatively. People have accused the government of insensitivity to the plight of the citizens as well as high-handedness and lack of respect for rule of law.

Citizens of Nigeria have different views about policies/programs of the current administration. Some said that some of these policies/programs are misplaced priorities, while others see them as right steps in the right direction. Some others say that those policies/programs are anti-people, yet others say that they are people oriented. There have been accusations here and there as well as counter accusations. There have also been cases where some of the citizens claim that there is wide communication gap between government and the citizens. All these and more have raised serious concerns to both citizens and none citizens of Nigeria and have adversely affected the confidence and trust citizens of Nigeria have on their government. With these opinions, one would ask: do citizens of Nigeria have enough access to; and/or believe government information?

It is against this backdrop that the study sought to find out the level of accessibility to government information by citizens of Nigeria, as an empowerment tool to make free choices and to live an autonomous life, with the assumption that access to government information will either have positive or negative influence on the opinions of citizens of Nigeria.

To address the research problem, this work sought to determine the extent to which citizens of Nigeria are exposed to information from government; to determine the channel or channel(s) through which they get exposed to those government information; to determine the extent to which citizens of Nigeria believe government information, and to find out if citizens of Nigeria are influenced by those information from government.

Significance of the Study

The findings from this study attempted to fill a remarkable gap of research in the field of government information, and communication science through a systematic analysis of government information. The

researcher believes that the study will provide empirically driven feedback to both the government and citizens of Nigeria in the area of information sharing and access.

This study is, therefore, significant because its findings will open the eyes of government officials (Politicians) to see how citizens of Nigeria perceive their messages. It will also contribute to the body of knowledge in the area of communication.

II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

In Nigeria's short span of existence as an independent nation, it has gone through some history, ranging from colonial subjugation, inter and intra-ethnic wrangling, bloody military coup d'état, civil war, then, long spell of military rule, return to democratic dispensation and an uneasy co-habitation among the various ethnic components of the Federation. These ugly experiences are as a result of bad administration, nepotism, corruption in high and low places and general discontentment. From 1914 to date, Nigerians have suffered lack, want and abject poverty in the midst of abundance. Morale has dipped and hopelessness has held sway, where prosperity and life abundant ought to reign. Youth unemployment is on the upward swing while the basic values of hard work, honesty and commitment, for which our founding fathers were reputed, have almost become alien to us. Indiscipline and base values have taken the pride of place and they have required enormous amount of resources to keep in check (Idowu, 2013).

Nigeria became Federal Republic in 1963 with Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe as its first President; this was shortly after the nation got her independence from British colonial government in 1960. The democratic rule was short lived and was truncated by the Nigeria soldiers in 1966. This subsequently made the military to remain in power till 1979 when General Olusegun Obasanjo returned power to the civilians. This second republic was very brief (1979-1983). In 1983, the military took over power from civilian rule again. This led to prolonged military rule which came to an end in 1999 with Obasanjo elected as President of the country. President Umaru Musa Yaradua came to power in 2007 after President Obasanjo's 8 years rule. Later, President Yaradua died in power in 2010 after a protracted illness which brought almost the machinery of Government to a halt. Dr Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, the then Vice-President was immediately sworn in as President (Gbadeyan, 2011). Dr Goodluck Jonathan served as President for about six (6) years and conceded defeat to General Muhammadu Buhari, after a keenly contested election in 2015.

Nigeria politicians lack credibility because they prefer to engage in persuasion, coercion, misinformation and sometimes, disinformation, to the contest that takes place in the marketplace of ideas. Because of their hidden agenda, they do not engage the citizenry in communication. Often times, as the people have discovered, what most politicians do once they get into office is at variance with what they promised they would do during electioneering. Many are rather more interested in lining their pockets than pursuing what the people need. They cannot successfully serve their people unless and until they know what the people really need and not what they think the people need (Idowu, 2013).

Politics demonstrate the ubiquity of governmental communication in contemporary life and in non-electoral periods and encompasses a broad scope of governmental communication because it is an ongoing conversation about social issues. Internal and external governmental communication channels are the nerves of government. Therefore, political system cannot function without effective networks of such channels capable of transmitting governmental messages. (Lee, 2004 quoted in Clio, 2005).

News content pattern has changed positively since the last 30 years. Some of the changes that have occurred between news and politics range from media logic and entertainment formats, meaning the packaging of events for media attention that will appeal to audiences. The format and logic of newsworthy information shape the nature of discourse itself and has consequences for the content of governmental communication, (Altheide, 2004).

Public political communication

In contemporary society public opinion is generally mediated by the mass media, which has come to encompass the Habermasian 'public sphere'. This arena is now characterized by conflict between market and democratic principles, by competing interests of politicians and the media. The presentation of information for debate becomes distorted. The opinion of the 'public' is no longer created through deliberation, but is constructed through systems of communication, in conflict with political actors, who seek to retain control of the dissemination of information (Savigny, 2002).

Although politicians and statesmen have sought to promote themselves and their ideas throughout the history and evolution of democratic systems of government, political advertising is often considered a relatively modern form of political promotion. Differences in political systems, media systems and cultural constraints have accounted for many differences in the speed and extent to which other democracies have adopted political advertising as a central component of the communication of their politics in both electoral and non-electoral settings (Swanson & Mancini, 1996).

The use of strategic communication and political public relations by governments has also increased in the last decades. Governments are changing the face of politics by attempting to directly “sell” their message to the public, rather than having complex policy matters debated in Parliament or disseminated by more traditional media (television, radio, newspapers). The rise of this trend is symptomatic of the decline of the public dialogue (Rose, 2000).

Information overload and information poverty

Hoq (2014) defines information overload as an abundance of information. He urges that one of the strategies to fight is information literacy which is defined as, “a set of abilities requiring individuals to recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate and use effectively the needed information” (Hoq 2014:59-60).

According to Hoq (2014), an information literate person should be able to;

- Determine the extent of information needed.
- Access the needed information effectively and efficiently.
- Evaluate information and its sources critically.
- Incorporate selected information into one’s knowledge base.
- Use information effectively to accomplish a specific purpose.
- Understand economical, legal and social issues surrounding the use of information, and access and use information ethically and legally.

Additionally, information overload could be solved by ensuring that information being made accessible is of high quality and can be delivered in convenient formats. It should be visualized, compressed and aggregated (Hoq 2014). He highlights that in organizations, information overload is caused by poor processing of information and data that is created and received.

Goswami, De and Datta (2009) investigated whether linguistic diversity posed challenges to information access to the populace of South Asia (SA) and sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). Their research established linkages between linguistic diversity, economic backwardness and levels of internet penetration. By the time of this research, the two regions had the lowest access to information and communication technologies. They confirmed that the digital divide reinforces existing inequality and poverty patterns. They argued that though the internet and information communication technologies have offered many leapfrogging opportunities to the developing world and that there is a lot of information being produced in the world today; people need the requisite skills to navigate the current sea of information. Information can only be relevant and useful if it is used effectively by many people. Effective access to online information requires proficiency in a foreign language that is rich in online content. However, they were optimistic that the internet has the potential to resolve some of the linguistic and information access issues since the number of people that have access to it is growing fast. Additionally, more content producers are promoting open access policies. There are increasing amounts of information on local and global issues. The issue is whether the enormous amounts of information that are globally available can be meaningfully exploited to promote socio-economic and education developments.

Guizhen, Shuanjun, Yaqing, & Huijun, (2010) did research on information poverty in the Chinese Hebei Province. They argued that information poverty, which is a new form of poverty around the world, is a global problem. It is enhanced by the growing information bridge between urban and rural areas. In China, it is restricting the harmonious development of villages and towns. To solve the challenge posed by the imbalance of access to information, the Chinese government adopted several policies to promote rural informatization.

Additionally, Dander (2013) asserts that before non-experts and the broader community can start exploring open data, governments need to address a couple of issues that include:

- Internet access sufficient to support making the data available; barrier free.
- Computers and software sufficiently powerful, having sufficient time.
- Computer/software skills to use the soft and hardware.
- Content and formatting– having the data available in a format such as to allow for effective use at a variety of levels of linguistic and computer literacy.
- Interpretation/Sense-making sufficient knowledge and skill to see which data uses make sense (and which do not) and to add local value.
- Advocacy– having supportive individual or community resources sufficient for translating data into activities for local benefit.
- Governance– the required financing, legal, regulatory or policy regime, required to enable the use to which the data would be put.

Empirical Review

In 2014, Edison conducted a study on E-Transparency and information sharing in the Public sector. The study aimed to determine the degree of information sharing in government institutions through e-transparent tools. First the basis for the study was set through the background, problem statement and objectives. The discussion then proceeded by focusing on ICT tools for information sharing.

An information sharing model was proposed and the extent of information sharing in the public sector of Tanzania through online media was discussed; furthermore, the correlation that exists between the extent of information sharing and factors such as accessibility, understandability, usability and reliability was established.

The paper concluded by providing recommendations on information sharing and how it can be enhanced through e-transparency systems for public service delivery in an open society.

Miriam & Andrew, (2013) in a paper, entitled Credibility and Trust of Information in

Online environment, discussed how and why digital networked communication environments alter traditional notions of trust, and presents research that examines how information consumers make judgments about the credibility and accuracy of information they encounter online.

The paper concluded with an agenda for future research that is needed to better understand the role and influence of cognitive heuristics in credibility evaluation in computer-mediated communication context.

In 2009, Shannon in a paper, entitled Information Access, reviewed the current state of literature. The two predominant conceptualizations of information access were examined and synthesized. The place of information access in LIS both as a priori research focus and as a foundation of other research areas—is demonstrated.

Reviewing the state of the methodology in this area, the study revealed that information access has not been studied with a great deal of empirical rigor; normative and advocative writings dominate the literature. Theoretically, information access is frequently linked to jurisprudential theories of freedom of speech.

The paper illuminated this linkage, and also explained how the three predominant Jurisprudential theories of free speech: the marketplace of ideas/ search for truth, democracy, and individual empowerment relate to information access. In addition, the theory of normative behavior, originating from LIS was applied to information access. Finally, the review concluded with a critical assessment of the conceptual, methodological, and theoretical state of affairs and suggested some future directions for additional research.

Sergio & Nancy (2013), explored the role that the right of access to information may have played in the development of accountability and responsiveness within the democratization process in Brazil. The authors focused on: freedom of information in general, as represented by the lifting of censorship laws that prevailed during the military dictatorship (1964-1985), freedom of access to official documents/information, (known as FOI), regulated by specific legislation and potential links between the two preceding types of information.

The study was based on the authors' experience of conducting research on archival and/or secondary data from various government institutions and on findings from a national cross-sectional study carried out in Brazil, which reveals only weak support for freedom of information. The study drew upon this source material to explore potential connections between the continuing lack of strong support from the public for freedom of information and institutional failures to respond and account to society.

The study however recommended that, to fulfill the criteria of accountability and responsiveness, civil society must be able to monitor what is being done by agents of the state. One key element in monitoring is to follow how the protections and guarantees which secure human rights are being enforced. This demands access to information: people must be informed about what state agents are doing, and how well they are exercising the power they received from voters.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study anchored on the democratic participant theory. This theory is a reaction against the exclusion of the majority of the members of mass media audience in such democracies from active participation in the media, as well as from access as communicators rather than mere receivers of information. This exclusion has resulted from two main factors.

Firstly, although the mass media in these societies have become free and predominantly privately-owned, according to the principles of the Libertarian Theory, extreme commercialization has resulted in 'monopoly journalism' in which private media have become increasingly concentrated in the hands of few individual owners or ownership syndicates.

The second factor is that it has limited audience access and participation, and contributed to the emergence of the Democratic-Participant Media Theory in liberal democracies, arises from public ownership/control of the mass media. Thus, the fundamental principle of the Democratic-Participant Media Theory derives from the needs, interests and aspirations of the active 'receiver' in a political society and has to do with the right to relevant information, the right to answer back, the right to use the means of communication for interaction (Okunna and Omenugha, 2012). This theory therefore confirms citizens of Nigeria as both producers and consumers of media content.

In line with this, we can begin to see how messages communicated by government through various means and forms are perceived by citizens of Nigeria and why they are able to distinguish truth from falsehood. Some of the citizens might believe in those messages communicated while some might not. This is so because majority of Nigeria citizens are active audience and not passive.

Research Methodology

This study employed survey research method because the needed data for this work was obtained through the use of survey research design.

This study was limited to Imo State, in the South East Zone of Nigeria. It was designed to measure access to government information by citizens of Nigeria, as an empowerment tool to make free choices and to live an autonomous life. Residents of Imo State was chosen because of the strength of Imo State population which comprises citizens and non citizens of Imo State and because of her strategic location as the heart of the South East geopolitical zone of Nigeria.

It is also made up of three (3) senatorial zones, namely; Orlu zone, Owerri zone and Okigwe zone and has twenty seven (27) Local Government Areas.

Study Population

The populations for this study are males and females between the age bracket 16 years and above. The population was taken from Imo State, Nigeria (Orlu zone, Owerri Zone and Okigwe zone) which is 3,934,899, according to the 2006 census result as obtained from the National Population Commission Official website (accessed on 06/06/2019).

Bearing in mind that the population has grown since the last census exercise, in such situation, the researcher is expected to use the United Nations Projected index of 2.28% to extrapolate and predict the new population from the last known figure. According to Owuamalam (2012), the population of a given area where there is no recent census figure can be determined by the formula below:

$$P_p = G_p \times P_i \times T$$

Where P_p = Projected Population

G_p = Given population (as at last census)

P_i = Population increase index

T = Period between the given population and year of study

Computation

$$G_p = 3,934,899$$

$$P_i = 2.28\% = 0.0228 = 0.023$$

$$T = 2019 - 2006 = 13$$

$$\text{Therefore, } P_p = 3,934,899 \times 0.023 \times 13 = 1,176,534.$$

This implies that an addition of 1,176,534 persons was added to the given population (3,934,899) to obtain projected population of 5,111,433; which is an estimated population. It is from this population that the sample size can be drawn and calculated.

Sample Size

A sample of 400 was drawn from the study population of 5,111,433. This sample was arrived at using Taro Yamane's formula which reads thus:

$$n = \frac{N}{(1+N[e]^2)} \text{ for determining sample size.}$$

Computation

$$n = \frac{5,111,433}{(1+5,111,433 [0.05]^2)}$$

$$= \frac{5,111,433}{1+5,111,433 (0.0025)}$$

$$\begin{aligned}
 &= 1 + (5,111,433 \times 0.0025) \\
 &= 1 + 12,778.5825 \\
 &= 12,779.5825 \\
 &= \frac{5,111,433}{12,779.5825} \\
 &= 399.96 = 400.
 \end{aligned}$$

Based on the computation using Taro Yamane's formula, a sample of 400 was adjudged adequate for the purpose of this study.

Sampling Techniques

The multi-stage sampling technique was applied in this study. By the application of multi-stage sampling techniques, Imo State was divided into three (3) zones that make up the state (Orlu zone, Owerri zone and Okigwe zone). It is from these zones that the researcher purposively selected two (2) Local Government Areas each from the three (3) senatorial zones.

The rationale behind the selection of those two (2) Local Government Areas from each of the three (3) senatorial zones was based on their population strength, level of development, categories of people living in those areas and their ability to respond to the research questionnaire.

Instrument for Data Collection

The questionnaire was used to collect data for the survey research method. The questions were structured to generate responses in respect to their demographic characteristics as expected from the first phase of the questionnaire followed by other questions that relate to the research questions.

The items contained in the questionnaire provided answer options which made response time shorter for respondents and improve the rate of return for completed copies of the questionnaire.

Data Collection

Data for the study were collected by administering the questionnaire which contained a total of 33 items to some residents in the six (6) selected Local Government Areas in the three (3) senatorial zones of Imo State as the representative of the entire residents. The questionnaire was administered by the researcher and three trained research assistants. The research assistants were used during the pre-test exercise to assess their efficiency and reliability for the work. The researcher and research assistants administered the questionnaire to those residents and gave them a space of three (3) days to complete the survey questions. After which, the completed copies of the questionnaire were collected from Traditional Ruler's palace in the communities through the palace Secretary who retrieved copies of the questionnaire from the respondents.

Discussion of Findings

The data analyzed in this study was obtained from 381 respondents spread across three senatorial zones of Imo State, (Orlu zone, Owerri zone and Okigwe zone). Out of the 400 copies of the questionnaire distributed to these three (3) senatorial zones, 381 were returned and found useable, whereas 11 copies were not returned, 8 copies out of those returned were unusable due to different reasons that were regarded as unusual by the researcher. This means that nineteen copies of the questionnaire were not used. The overall results were generalized and from them, conclusion was drawn.

The demographic data of respondents shows that, 40.0% of the respondents were male, while 60.0% were female. It also showed that 14.0% of the respondents were between the age of 18 years to 20 years, 16.2% were 21 – 23 years while, 69.8% were 24 years and above. Further analysis revealed that 37.0% of the respondents were single, 55.8% were married, 2.2% were divorced and 5.0% were either widows or widowers. It was also revealed that 4.9% had primary school certificate, 12.2% had WAEC or its Equivalent, 12.9% had NCE or Diploma, and 70.0% had B.Sc or above. Analysis also showed that 24.6% of the respondents were students, 50.0% were workers, 10.6% were traders, 4.0% were farmers and 10.8% were unemployed. It was also revealed that 29.4% of the respondents reside in Orlu zone, 46.7% in Owerri zone and 23.9% reside in Okigwe zone.

On the extent to which citizens of Nigeria are exposed to government information, Findings from the study led to the conclusion that citizens of Nigeria are exposed to government information to a very large extent, as they get this information through one medium or another at 92.9%.

Findings in this study agree with the study conducted by Sergio & Nancy (2013), entitled "Importance of access to information, past and present: Human rights in contemporary Brazil" which was based on the authors' experience of conducting research on archival and/or secondary data from various government institutions and

on findings on a national cross-sectional study carried out in Brazil, which reveals only weak support for freedom of information. The study recommended that, to fulfill the criteria of accountability and responsiveness, civil society must be able to monitor what is being done by agents of the state. This demands access to information: people must be informed about what state agents are doing and how well they are exercising the power they received from voters.

By implication, it is evident that most residents of Imo State are exposed to government information. This is so because; they deserve to know what their government is doing.

Another key objective sought **to find out the channel(s) through which citizens of Nigeria access government information.** The findings revealed that most citizens of Nigeria are exposed to government information through more than one channel. 92.9% of the respondents rely on more than one channel to access state government information, while only 7.1% of the respondents rely on one channel to access government information. There are several medium of communication and Technology has made it very easy for people to send and receive information almost instantly.

No wonder Miriam and Andrew (2013) concluded in their study entitled “Credibility and trust of information in online environment: The use of cognitive heuristics”, that there is the need to better understand the role and influence of cognitive heuristics in credibility evaluation in computer-mediated communication context.

The third research objective sought **to find out if citizens of Nigeria believe government information.** The research findings showed that some of the citizens believe government information, while majority do not believe them. Further analysis revealed that 35.4% believe and 64.6% do not believe government information. This goes a long way to show that there is serious distrust between the government and the governed. Corruption has eaten deep into the fabrics of most government officials, which leads to the alarming rate of diversion/misappropriation of public funds by those corrupt elements in government. These have made it difficult, if not impossible for most people to believe government information and such is not healthy for successful government.

The last research objective sought to find out **the extent to which government information influence citizens of Nigeria.** Research findings revealed that citizens of Nigeria are influenced by government information in one way or another. Further analysis revealed that to a very large extent, the citizens are influenced by government information where 64.8% of the citizens are influenced both negatively and positively by government information.

This is in line with major points raised in both Agenda-Setting Theory and Technological determinism Theory. The former says that “the media determines the issues considered important in the society” and the later says that “technology determines the way we live”. Access to information therefore, has either negative or positive influence or both, on those who receive them.

Summary

This study sought to establish the level of access to government information by citizens of Nigeria. In line with this, four research questions were posed for investigation as follows:

- 1) To what extent are citizens of Nigeria exposed to government information?
- 2) What is the channel(s) through which citizens of Nigeria access those government information?
- 3) Do citizens of Nigeria believe government information?
- 4) To what extent are they influenced by government information?

The study was designed as a survey. Out of a projected population of residents of Imo State, which amounted to 5,111,433, Taro Yamani’s formula was used to determine the sample size of 400 respondents. The multi-stage, proportionate and purposive sampling techniques were used to arrive at the selection of the 400 respondents. Survey data were collected from 381 copies of the questionnaire retrieved which was spread across the three senatorial zones of Imo State. Results from analyzed data showed that citizens of Nigeria are exposed to government information, majority of them do not believe in them and most of the residents are influenced by government messages both positively and negatively.

III. CONCLUSION

Considering the fact that citizens of Nigeria access government information from various channels, research findings revealed that 35.4% of those who access that government information believe them while 64.6% of those who access the information do not believe the information. Also, 28.1% of those who access the information are positively influenced by that information, 7.1% are negatively influenced and 64.8% are influenced both positively and negatively. It is therefore safe to conclude that majority of Nigeria citizens access government information but do not believe them and those messages have either positive or negative effects or both on them.

Recommendations

Since the study reveals that majority of the citizens are not satisfied with the way Nigeria government and politicians communicates which led to disbelieve, lack of confidence and mistrust, the following recommendations are made:

- 1) Nigerian politicians should, as a matter of urgency change their mind-sets on the belief that communication relationships should be positive and of benefit to them.
- 2) They should be ready and willing from time to time to communicate usefully with the citizens and stop thinking that messages from them will be swallowed hook, line and sinker by Nigeria citizens.
- 3) Finally, Nigerian politicians should avoid imposing some policies and/or programmes on the citizens. They should always consult the electorates so as to know what policy (ies)/programme(s) they are more interested in and how best to execute those policies/programmes in. this will help in no small measure in avoiding some conflict.

Contribution to knowledge

Firstly, the contribution of this study to knowledge is that among the literatures reviewed, none of them talked about “access to government information by citizens of Nigeria as an empowerment tool: A study of residents of Imo State, Nigeria”. Based on this, the research is relevant because it attempts to fill the gap. Another contribution of this study to the body of knowledge is that it has created empirical data, showing the level of exposure to government information by citizens of Nigeria, and revealing whether they believe those messages or not as well as the amount of influence those messages have on them.

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