E-Governance Response in Tackling Covid-19 in Nigeria

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Abstract

The outlook of governance in today’s world is such that any lag in the efficiency, timeliness and responsiveness of public service delivery can result in monumental loss, especially the loss of lives. This was the case with the emergence of corona virus disease (COVID-19) which took world governments, including Nigeria, unawares and necessitated a rapid global effort towards containing the spread of the virus. The notion of ensuring speedy and timely public service delivery was a primary reason for the adoption of e-governance in Nigeria through the digitisation of government processes. Nevertheless, COVID-19 brought human activities to a grinding halt for the most part of the year 2020 as Nigeria, like other nations of the world, implemented a complete shutdown of public and private organisations and placed restrictions on gatherings. With immeasurable deaths and devastations followed by the era of the “new normal” where people were required to reduce possible human contacts, it was certain that e-governance would play a pivotal role in moving forward into the post-COVID-19 era. Adopting the expository research design, the study examines how e-governance could be effective, timely and responsive in addressing and managing the crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria. Analyzing the data from published sources, the study arrived at the realization that e-governance in Nigeria have not been efficient, timely and responsive in handling the pandemic. Some factors that were identified as hindrances to e-governance in tackling the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria include lack of public trust in government handling of private data, endemic corruption, high cost of internet services, poor data management system, and so on. Based on the result, the study concludes that e-governance implementation in Nigeria is far from efficient, timely and responsive in addressing pandemics such as COVID-19 and urgent steps must be taken to address the afore-mentioned problems especially as the pandemic continues to linger. It was, therefore, suggested that policymakers be deliberate in establishing a committee that would draft an action plan on COVID-19, set up an e-governance technology development hub, establish a unified national data management system, and develop the political will to combat the virus headlong and record successes in containing the spread of the pandemic.

Keywords: E-governance; public service delivery; pandemic; COVID-19; governance.


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INTRODUCTION

As far as human existence is concerned, pandemics and plagues date centuries back, even to the Stone Age era. Ali, Ahmad and Husain (2020: 40) opined that the European continent has had a long and well documented history of plagues notably the first and second pandemics, which occurred in the 6th to 8th centuries and the 14th to 19th centuries, respectively. The Black Death which lasted from 1346 to 1353 was one of the earliest devastating plagues that nearly wiped out the population of Europe. In the Middle East and Africa, there have been plagues of catastrophic magnitude. The Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS) epidemic of 2012 and the 2014 Ebola outbreak in Africa in 2014 were regional pandemics which claimed lives in the regions they emerged (Anjorin, 2020).

Undoubtedly, pandemics of regional and global scale have become a regular occurrence in the world as mankind has scaled through one devastating plague to another. Surico and Galeotti (2020) listed out a timeline of some of the deadliest plagues in history, as follows: The bubonic plague of the 14th century Europe (which affected 100 million and left 25 million dead); The Worldwide Influenza epidemics also known as the Spanish flu, spanning 1918-1920, with above 50 million deaths; The Human Immuno-Deficiency Virus/ Acquired Immuno-Deficiency Syndrome (HIV/AIDS) diseases, which was discovered in 1981 and has currently claimed 25 million lives with an additional 33 million living with HIV virus; The Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), from 2002 to 2004, recorded 8000 cases and resulted into 774 deaths; The Avian/ Bird flu of 2009, which led to around 151,000 to 575,000 deaths, and The Ebola disease, of 2014 to 16, which lead to 11,000 deaths.

The recent pandemic, COVID-19, emerged in late December 2019 from the city of Wuhan in the Hubei province of China (Brodeur, Gray, Islam and Bhuiyan, 2020:2). The virus spread rapidly into other parts of Asia, Europe and America in the early months of the year 2020. By March 11, 2020, the World Health Organisation (WHO), the international health watchdog, had declared COVID-19 as a pandemic (Global Economics Prospects, 2020).

The global deaths from the contagion rising at astronomically rates compelled nations of the world to institute widespread lockdowns. Organisations and businesses were shut down to restrict human movement so as to curtail the spread of the coronavirus, which was mainly through human contact. The regional and global infections and deaths recorded from the virus peaked in 2020, causing WHO to issue a warning that there could be a second, third and fourth wave, caused by the mutation of the virus. Below is a table of the total population of people who have died and are infected of the virus as at May, 2022.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Cases cumulative total</th>
<th>Cases reported in last 7 days</th>
<th>Deaths cumulative total</th>
<th>Deaths reported in last 7 days</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Global</td>
<td>515,748,861</td>
<td>3,620,513</td>
<td>6,255,835</td>
<td>11,040</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>217,040,543</td>
<td>1,486,463</td>
<td>1,997,388</td>
<td>4,654</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Americas</td>
<td>153,945,841</td>
<td>663,522</td>
<td>2,730,135</td>
<td>3,974</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South-East Asia</td>
<td>57,964,691</td>
<td>81,416</td>
<td>787,186</td>
<td>747</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Pacific</td>
<td>56,226,027</td>
<td>1,316,529</td>
<td>226,735</td>
<td>1,284</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Mediterranean</td>
<td>21,721,091</td>
<td>14,804</td>
<td>342,490</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>8,849,904</td>
<td>57,779</td>
<td>171,888</td>
<td>215</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


McKibbin and Fernando (2020) noted that the evolution of the coronavirus disease and its economic impact is very vague, thus, making it an onerous task for governments across the globe to formulate suitable macroeconomic policy responses in tackling the pandemic. Yet, the coming of the COVID-19 global pandemic and its effects which the world is still battling to put under control led to the shutdown of virtually all human social and economic activities through the year 2020. This became a pointer to how pandemics of such magnitude could affect today’s world and disrupt the day-to-day dealings and physical interactions of mankind. The COVID-19 pandemic took the world to the precipice and
brought it to its knees, leaving governments the burden of trying to manage the crisis.

The emphasis on the implementation of e-governance, all over the world, was occasioned by the adoption of New Public Management (NPM). As a concept, NPM stressed on the increasing need of the government to cut costs, downsize its workforce, reduce public spending, eliminate bureaucratic bottlenecks and improve on its daily relations with the citizens (Onuigbo and Ene, 2015:20 and Sampson, Bakh and Desta, 2019:1). National governments sought to replicate in the public sector, the success of ICT as adopted in the private sector, through the approach of e-governance services. Oni, Oni, Ibietan and Adediji (2020: 49) opined that the Information Age brought about the modernisation of organisational activities so that no organisation could remain active, relevant and dependable to its customers which adopting ICT into its activities. As a result, world governments could not afford not to fuse ICT into its activities through e-governance, especially if it intends to meet the demands of the citizens in an ever-changing world.

The prospects of e-governance in relation to the citizens is in that it ensures that the government interacts with the citizen on a personal level through the innovations in ICT thereby ensuring efficiency in the dissemination of information and the provision of public services. With e-governance, which is viewed as an outcome of the Third Industrial Revolution (TIR) (Blom and Uwizeyimana, 2020: 209), the world governments positioned themselves for the uncertainties of the world in the course of the provision of public goods and services by reforming the way government’s business is done.

However, no amount of preparedness by any nation would have fathomed the enormity of the disruption that the coronavirus disease COVID-19 would bring to the world. The event of a pandemic, such as COVID-19, made many nations see the need of implementing e-governance in public services delivery, especially as COVID-19 brought about the shutdown of public and private organisations and placed restrictions on gatherings. The gap that this study identifies is that there is no existing literature specifically enquiring into how world governments are tackling the pandemic through the e-governance approach.

Hence, this study adopts an expository, rather than an empirical, approach, in examining how e-governance was employed in the public administrative structure along with other COVID-19 prevention measures in managing the crisis caused by the pandemic. The objective of the study is to examine COVID-19 outbreak in Nigeria and the challenges of government preparedness and a critique of Nigeria’s e-governance approach in tackling COVID-19 as compared to some selected countries. The study relies on related published literature (expository and theory-based) of other researchers in drawing inferences and conclusions of the e-governance measures used by Nigeria’s handling of the COVID-19 pandemic. In the end, the study benefits the Nigerian citizen and government as its suggestions serve to contribute to the fight against the spread of pandemic in the country.

Fatule (2012) and Yakubu (2019) noted that the concept of e-governance arose firstly from some Western countries at the onset of the 21st Century as NPM drive, with public policy makers trying to adapt the model of e-commerce into the public sector. Linking public services to the internet and computerisation of public documents were some of the motivation behind the implementation of e-governance. Therefore, it could be argued that the conceptualisation of e-governance was so as to make governance and public service delivery operates on the same pace and timeliness of businesses in the private sector.

Without a doubt, e-governance, like most social science concepts, has been defined from varying viewpoints by different authors and scholars based on “their worldviews and personal idiosyncrasies as well as their individual social milieu” (Abah and Nwokwu, 2019). Moreover, it would be noteworthy to refer to a few definitions of e-governance from notable authors.

Ullah, Pinglu, Ullah, Abbas and Khan (2021) define e-governance as “an interconnected system in which the government interacts with citizens and provides augmented services to them through electronic applications”.

Abah and Nwokwu (2019) refers to e-governance as “a paradigm shift from the traditional model of discharge of government activities which is always hierarchical, linear, and one-way to the use of information and
communication technology which has prospects of improving public service delivery and encourages citizens’ involvement in the governance process even in the comfort of their homes”.

Being that e-governance involves information and communication, it therefore hints that there would exist different modes by which e-governance is carried out. According to Bhuvana and Vasantha (2020) and Yadav and Singh (2012), there are essentially four different ways through which interactions under the e-governance model namely: Government to citizens (G2C): This type of e-governance involves the interactions between the government and the citizens; Government to government (G2G): This approach of e-governance involves the interactions and sharing of information between governments at all levels, as well as their agencies, department and organizations; Government to business (G2B): This type of e-governance as the name applies focuses on the interactions between the government and the private sector; Government to employees (G2E): This e-governance typology centres on the interaction that exists between the government and its employees.

From the foregoing, it has been stressed how e-governance modernises governance and public service delivery through the adoption of ICT. Wadhwa (2020: 9) presents the following as some of the benefits that comes with the implementation of e-governance: Greater accountability and transparency in government; Increased revenue and reduction in overheads; Ease of doing business with the citizens and the private sector; Inclusiveness of governance; Reduction of bureaucratic bottle necks; Improvement in the coordination of government agencies and activities at all levels; Greater efficiency in public service delivery; Increased satisfaction level in the use of public facilities and services; Citizen empowerment through easy access to information; Improved communication with business organisations; Improvement in the value of citizen services; Enhanced enforcement of law; Increase in equal access to information and reduction in the digital divide; Adoption of modern leadership styles; Promotion of socio-economic development by ensuring an enabling environment

RESEARCH METHODS

Abdulkareem (2015) pointed out that "the concept of e-government began in the early 1990s which is the use of information technology to improve governance, promote efficiency and effectiveness in the delivery of public service". Developing nations like Nigeria did not hesitate to seize the opportunity of adopting ICT in its governance and administrative processes through e-governance. Consequently, the global drive in the adoption of e-governance was more or less an unstoppable movement which found its way into Nigeria.

In the year 2000, the government demonstrated its willingness to pursue e-governance implementation through the enactment of the Nigerian National Information Technology (NNIT) policy by the Obasanjo regime (1999 – 2007) (Abaslim and Edet, 2015). The following year (2001), the Nigerian government doubled down on its commitment towards making ICT a national priority when the Obasanjo administration ushered in the National Policy on Information Technology (Abah and Nwokwu, 2019 and Oni, Okunoye and Mbariaka, 2016). In further pursuance of e-governance implementation in Nigeria, Fatile (2012) noted that the Nigerian government "established the National Information Technology Development Agency, (NITDA) under the Ministry of Science and Technology (MoST). The agency was expected to champion the development of Information Technology (IT) in Nigeria and midwife implementation of the national IT policy" (Omeire and Omeire, 2014).

NITDA which was the foremost agency in charge of overseeing the nationwide e-governance implementation in Nigeria listed out the specific goals which the e-governance national policy aimed at: Creating a technology-driven, conducive business environment for local and foreign investors; Responding promptly without delays to citizens’ needs in the course of service delivery; Strengthening good governance by involving the public in decision-making; Improving the overall value of life for the citizenry; Ensuring consistency in job creation, wealth generation and poverty eradication; Boosting productivity and efficiency of MDAs; Increasing transparency and accountability in governance; Reducing the cost and size of governance;

In furtherance of the implementation of a national e-governance strategy, the government also established the National E-Government Strategies Limited (NeGST). As noted by Adeyemo (2011), the NeGST was a more or less private-public partnership (PPP) tripartite arrangement comprising of government having a 5% stake in it while the private sector in the form of a consortium of banks and a strategic partner, had 15% and 80% respectively. The NeGST PPP arrangement had the mandate “to create a practical strategy and a single architecture to guide the evolution of digital government solutions with consistent standards, operating platforms and applications across agencies and government systems” (Adeyemo, 2011). The idea behind the PPP-driven approach to e-governance in the form of NeGST, as pointed out by, Abdulkaarem and Ishola (2016) was so as to use the private sector as “the driving force for infrastructural development and investment creation” in enhancing e-governance implementation in Nigeria.

E-governance implementation in Nigeria received additional boost when the Jonathan administration in 2011, created a new ministry called the Ministry of Communications Technology at the Federal level which was saddled with the responsibility of “co-ordinating ICT development, and drive the nation’s e-government agenda” (Omeire and Omerie, 2012, 484). The following year, 2012, the ministerial committee on the harmonisation of the ICT policy presented a National ICT draft policy to the National Assembly of Nigeria which contained several policy recommendations and reports.

It is without a doubt that concerted and deliberate efforts were put in place to ensure the sustained implementation of e-governance in Nigeria. The prospects and benefits are glaring in the very concept of e-governance for any nation in the modern world to ignore. This notion became more apparent with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic which caught the whole world unprepared and ultimately forced mankind to limit physical gatherings and interactions for virtually the whole year of 2020, so as to curtail the spread of the virus. Thus, there could not have been a much better opportunity for the world in general and Nigeria in particular to maximally utilize e-governance to combat the spread and control of the COVID-19 pandemic.

RESULT & DISCUSSION

Before the first Nigeria COVID-19 case was recorded in Lagos on the 27th February 2020, the federal government, through the NCDC, had already set up a “Coronavirus preparedness group” to carry out screening for Nigerians and non-Nigerians entering into the country through the airports as well as other transportation channels. Ajisegiri, Odusanya and Josh (2020) asserted that the Federal Ministry of Health was the frontline ministry that took the lead in the combating the pandemic through “the formulation and implementation of policies related to COVID-19 in Nigeria with collaboration with relevant ministries and agencies”.

Like every nation, Nigeria adopted the general measures ascribed by the WHO in preventing and reducing the spread of the coronavirus pandemic, such as lockdown and movement restrictions, distribution of palliatives. Specific fiscal measures were also employed to aid in cushioning the effect that COVID-19 had on the economy. Additionally, the citizens were constantly informed and educated on preventive measures against contracting the virus such as wearing of nose masks, regular use of hand sanitisers and washing of hands with soap, and social distancing (Awofeso and Irabor, 2020: 682 – 683 and Ilesanmi and Afolabi (2020).

However, there leaves much to be desired of Nigeria’s preparedness in tackling the COVID-19 pandemic as Anyanwu, Festus, Nwobi Jaja and Oguttu (2020) pointed out that Nigeria does not have a strategy on COVID-19 preparedness at the moment. Also, Nigeria does not currently have adequate facilities for testing its huge population for COVID-19.
Anyanwu, Festus, Nwobi Jaja and Ogutu (2020) noted that it was worrisome that many countries in Sub-Saharan Africa have tested more people than Nigeria. Marbot (2020, in Amzata, Aminu, Kolo, Akinyele, Ogundairo and Danjibo, 2020) stated that Nigeria was designated by the WHO "as one of the 13 high-risk African countries with respect to the spread of COVID-19". Nigeria is also among the vulnerable African nations, given the weak state of the healthcare system. Awofeso and Irabor (2020) pointed out the factors that negatively affected the government’s preparedness in handling the COVID-19 pandemic which includes: human right abuse, poor coordination of palliative, inadequate fiscal policy and poor implementation and coordination of COVID-19 lockdown across the state. These problems were compounded by the pre-existing socio-economic challenges that have bedevilled Nigeria for ages such as: insufficient social welfare, unemployment, poor health care facilities which continued to have adverse effects on public trust (Awofeso and Irabor, 2020)

Containing and controlling the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria is largely hinged on the effective information collection and dissemination to the public on everything related to the spread, control and treatment on the disease. However, beliefs based on conspiracy theories have seemed to overtake the perception of the situation by the vast majority of the public, thus leading to some beliefs that are counterproductive to combating COVID-19. One of such belief, according to Awofeso and Irabor (2020) is that COVID-19 is a global fraud that was meant to achieve control over human beings. In the case of Nigeria, it was viewed as a plot hatched by government officials and politicians to loot and pillage public resources. This view further added to the public mistrust that already existed with the populace. Another belief is that Covid-19 is a disease that affected only the rich and powerful. This position seems believable due to the fact that political office holders, big business owners and popular personalities who tested positive for the virus or died from COVID-19 and related illnesses (Campbell, 2020, in Awofeso and Irabor, 2020). Despite the public alertness on preventive measures of COVID-19 by the government, the grassroot viewed government regulations as a smokescreen, thereby flouting lockdown rules and social distancing protocols which results into further spread of the disease.

A study showed that most individuals still live in denial of the existence of the virus and its effects (Ilesanmi and Afolabi, 2020). Many perceive the disease as an opportunity for politicians to loot public funds and thus, enrich themselves. As a result, conspiracy theories, denials, ignorance regarding COVID-19, have build so much distrust in the Nigerian government that many avoid going for vaccination against the spread of COVID-19 in Nigeria (Chukwuorji and Iorfa, 2020, in Ilesanmi and Afolabi, 2020).

In a world where information is always transmitted rapidly and actions are carried out based on the content of the information, it is pertinent that the government of Nigeria be more invested in the successful implementation of e-governance, as it could be the strategic in tackling COVID-19 by controlling how information on the pandemic is spread. Some authors opine that e-governance has the potentials in controlling the narratives in the distribution of facts and figures about COVID-19 pandemic so as to earn public trust. Ceesay and Bojang (2020: 33) pointed out that the acceptance and application of e-governance initiatives during pandemics such as COVID-19 "allows countries to provide relevant health and safety related information and emergency contacts using various e-Service platforms including the national administrative portals, mobile apps and social media platforms".

As of the present, (September, 2021), the NCDC website https://covid19.ncdc.gov.ng reports that Nigeria has about 200,356 cases of people that have been infected with COVID-19 since the first person tested positive to the disease in February, 2020. From the confirmed cases on the NCDC website, 188,917 persons have been discharged, 8,799 are still having the disease, while 2,640 deaths have been recorded so far.

**Nigeria’s E-Governance Approach in Tackling Covid-19 as Compared to Some Selected Countries: a Critique**

The misinformation and misconceptions that surrounded the pandemic as well as the efforts by world governments made towards discovering the most effective COVID-19 vaccines led to new type of pandemic which
WHO referred to as an “infodemic”. There were overwhelming volumes of unverified and false claims on the virus and the vaccines which flooded the internet in general, and the social media in particular. In the end, the world was combating the pandemic, on the one hand, and combating infodemic, a mass spread of misleading information, on the other hand, thus, making it more of a herculean task in attaining success over the spread of the virus.

Nigeria aggressively utilised the e-governance model to contain and control the pandemic as well as the debilitating narrative surrounding the virus (infodemic). Ata-Agboni and Ifatimehin (2021: 56) opined that e-governance has significantly aided the government of Nigeria in the COVID-19 era especially in the urgency required to tackle the spread of the virus as well as the information around the pandemic. Even with the nationwide lockdown, e-governance ensured that large volumes of information were speedily and freely transmitted to the public without any hindrances.

The federal government through the NCDC partnered with the private telecommunication companies with the aim to reach out to the Nigerian populace with informative messages on the pandemic. Regular text messages were adopted to constantly keep Nigerians up-to-date and alert with the latest happenings on the virus (Oyeranti and Sokeye, 2020: 10 and Abayomi et al, 2021: 4). The social media (WhatsApp, Twitter, and Facebook) as a tool for information dissemination on the spread of the virus was heavily utilized by the Nigerian government and their agencies. And specialised website portals such as https://nitp.ncdc.gov.ng and https://covid19.ncdc.gov.ng/nitpfaq/ among others were designed to monitor the spread of the virus and keep the Nigerian citizenry cognisant and informed about the virus and measures taken to curtail its spread across the nation.

Additionally, a toll-free helpline was launched by government which was to operate round the clock. The call centres were operated by qualified counsellors and psychologists whose focal points were on mental health concerns. USAID May (2021: 14) pointed out that this was a combined initiative between the Nigerian government and private sector counsellors to tackle growing mental health issues in the country, especially as it relates to the fears and alterations of normal life as caused by the virus.

Ajisegiri, Odusanya and Joshi (2020: 2) noted that the Nigerian government adapted the country’s Polio eradication structure into its COVID-19 preparedness strategy. The programme which was originally designed to eradicate of the poliomyelitis virus saw the government adapting its human resources, technical know-how, administrative facility, disease inspection models as well as community system. Hence, the emergency operation centres (EOCs) that coordinated the health and technical response to the virus outbreak in each state were designed after the Polio EOC structure. It is noteworthy to point out that the text messaging system adopted by the NCDC was based on the Polio SMS-based application and auto-visual AFP detection and reporting (AVADAR) (Ajisegiri, Odusanya and Joshi, 2020: 2). This system aided the government in the fight against the pandemic through a disease surveillance system that involved a complex set up of community volunteers and healthcare employees.

As far as e-governance-related COVID-19 preventive measures go in Nigeria, the main thrust of the government were mainly aimed at controlling information on the pandemic as well as primary detection and report on cases of infections from the virus. It is critical at this point to examine the e-governance strategies adopted by other countries in tackling the pandemic.

Ullah, Pinglu, Ullah, Abbas and Khan (2021) examined how some countries of the world are adopting e-governance in combating COVID-19 pandemic. They are as follows:

The e-governance initiative of Pakistan included a helpline on the WhatsApp platform to keep people informed on the COVID-19 pandemic; a website designated for COVID-19 updates; a text messaging service were frequent SMS messages were sent to the public to keep the people alert; a system of e-consultancy services to ordinary patients who were uninfected; and the adoption of a Geo-Tracking software by the government to enable seamless communication and consultation with telecommunication companies on information dissemination.

In Singapore, the e-governance steps taken by the government include the
development of a mobile app called the “Trace Together” which traces contacts infected with the virus and also adopts the Bluetooth technology to determine whether anyone has come into close contact with any patient diagnosed with COVID-19. The Singaporean government also developed the “Silver Infocomm Initiative” (SII) to bridge the digital divide for persons aged 50 years and above by equipping them with internet skills and education. Hence, Singapore acknowledges the fact that the use of e-governance in combating the virus requires the promotion of awareness and literacy among senior citizens by ensuring their digital readiness in a digital world.

In South Korea government the government set up prompt COVID-19 diagnostic and screening centres where citizens could drive through while staying in their cars to maintain social distancing to get tested. This innovative approach greatly diminished the rate of person-to-person transmissions and reduced fatalities while enabling thousands of people to be tested on a daily basis.

In the case of China, some e-governance measures that were taken on COVID-19 include the establishment of the National Telemedicine Centre of China and the Emergency Telemedicine Consultation System to rapidly respond to the pandemic and deliver alerts on further viral outbreak. There was also the adoption of artificial intelligence software by the Fudan University to conduct special medical screening and scanning which would be supported by speedy decision-making. The novel 5G technology was brought into extensively use by the Chinese government mainly with regard to the surveillance, detection and transmission of the bio-data and other identifications of Chinese residents. In addition, drones, robotics and gadgets that conducted thermal scans were used to scan for virus and sent to the appropriate agencies through the 5G network.

As noted, the e-governance approach of Nigeria towards tackling the virus involved were mainly about ensuring that the right information were disseminated to the masses on the spread of the pandemic. This informed the use of text messaging, social media and the internet services. However, that is how far it goes with the use of e-governance measures in tackling COVID-19 in Nigeria. There is little or no data to establish a link between the utilisation of information dissemination techniques in curtailing the spread of the virus.

However, when it comes to the use of e-governance in tracing Nigerians affected by the virus, it is apparent that the country is found lacking in that area. Bassey (2020) argued that the infection tracing system of the country has been largely incompetent, recording very low success rate. While there is a strategy to ensure that the travel history of persons affected with the virus is documented for proper tracking of contacts affected with the virus, it has not been successfully carried out. This is due to the fact that there is no unified, extensive database that contains vital data about Nigerians.

An integrated database system of Nigerians would be crucial to ensuring the existence of a viable e-governance structure in Nigeria to combat the pandemic spread. Unfortunately, this is not the case and the emergence of the COVID-19 has exposed the Nigerian e-governance initiative over the years are largely inadequate. Then when compared to the other nations mentioned and their largely innovative ways of their government, applying ICT and even robotics in the fight against COVID-19, it is safe to say that Nigeria has not fully harnessed the potentials inherent in e-governance, in tackling the virus.

CONCLUSION

In this era of advanced technology, e-governance is, thus, to be considered as a necessary feature in the modernising of government and governance in the 21st century. The use of ICT in governance, which e-governance has come to represent, should go beyond just the use of websites and mobile communication, into more advanced technologies like robotics, development of apps, and so on. With the “new normal” that COVID-19 has brought upon the world where social distancing, wearing of masks outdoors, and other adherence to preventive protocols, Nigeria cannot afford to be barely scratching the surface on the application of e-governance in combating the pandemic.

The study, therefore, surmises that e-governance in Nigeria have not been fully utilised in tackling the pandemic. This is because the Nigerian government’s e-governance approach was merely reduced to information dissemination on the nature and spread of the virus. Yet, e-governance goes
beyond mere sending information through text messages or posting COVID-19 updates on websites and social media pages.

This study, therefore, suggested the government of Nigeria promptly set up a taskforce or committee on drafting a COVID-19 action plan and policy which would comprise of bureaucrats, policymakers, specialists and stakeholders in the health, and other related sectors. This committee would compile all the knowledge and data gotten over the three years since the pandemic struck, and utilise them in drafting a specific and unified policy on tackling the virus.

Also, it was stated earlier that e-governance goes beyond the transmission and dissemination of information about the spread of the virus. There is the need for government to explore other use of technologies that would boost the fight against the virus. The use of apps, drones, robotics, and the likes, as evident from other countries, shows that e-governance can apply sophisticated approaches towards detecting and halting the spread of COVID-19. The Nigerian government needs to establish e-governance technological development centres, which will have their specialised funding from government and international bodies. These centres would be manned with technological experts and specialists who are skilled in the development of computer software and phone applications as well as hardware gadgets that can contribute enormously in tracing and preventing the spread of the virus.

Furthermore, if the Nigerian policymakers did not see any urgent need to have a unified national database for Nigerians, the emergence of COVID-19 should make them have a rethink. This is because a national database would have contributed greatly in containing the spread of the virus, as it would aid in the identification of primary contacts of those infected with the virus. The government needs to make it a matter of national urgency and declare a state of emergency on the data management system of the country. The data of citizens of the country could be compiled from all the data that Nigerians have submitted over the years such as the voters’ exercise, the banking data, the national identification scheme, and so on.

The COVID-19 era has shown how useful data recording and keeping is in the modern world. Countries all over the world are shifting to the concept of “big data”, by working with “networks, applications, and software to collect and disseminate useful and relevant data” (Ullah, Pinglu, Ullah, Abbas and Khan (2021: 96). As a relatively new concept, big data focuses on overall data keeping, update and management especially in combating worldwide threats like the coronavirus pandemic. With the launch of the 5G network, which coincided with the outbreak of COVID-19, Nigeria cannot afford to be lagging behind in the use of big data to manage the pandemic.

Lastly, there is need for confidence-building in the fight against the spread of the coronavirus. The government must be up and doing in waging campaigns against the spread of fake news that become counterproductive to the gains made in controlling the pandemic and discouraging people from taking the vaccines. There should be seriousness in tackling the corrupt practices that have been observed with public officials in the course of providing government assistance to the public to cope with the change of lifestyle brought about by the pandemic. This is because utmost discipline and a complete lack of tolerance for corruption will go a long way in making sure that e-governance measures put in place to tackle the pandemic attain the needed success.

REFERENCES


