A Discourse on Information Policy Enhancement in Nigeria, Issues, Problems, And Strategies

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Abstract

Information policy faces a range of challenges, especially in a resource constrained country like Nigeria. Given the contexts in which policies are developed, including the policy's content, the nature of the policy formulation process, and the actors involved in the formulation and implementation processes, this paper examines a discourse on information policy enhancement in Nigeria: issues, problem and strategies. The paper identifies issues and challenges within the wider policy literature and explains why it is critical to tackle each challenge for effective policy implementation. The paper reported a lack of a clear definition of responsibility and coordination, a lack of participation of stakeholders and beneficiaries, a lack of continuity and commitment to policy, compromise and conflict during implementation, over ambition in policy formulation, and corruption as major factors hindering effective information policy implementation. The paper concludes by arguing that a supportive policy environment, the involvement of major stakeholders and beneficiaries, clearly defined roles and responsibilities, and a good plan of action at the implementation stage can be regarded as necessary ingredients for effective policy implementation. The study concluded that enhancing information policy in Nigeria requires a multifaceted approach that addresses both structural and legal deficiencies. It was recommended that more attention should be given to clear guidelines and implementation plans, strong leadership, multispectral stakeholder involvement, adequate and accessible resources, and effective feedback and monitoring systems, which will enhance policy implementation.

Keywords: information Policy, Policy, Implementation, Strategies and Issues

Introduction

Over the past several decades, political leaders and governments worldwide have assigned an increasingly central role to policy. Lennon (2019) define policy as a plan or course of action by a government, political party or business entity designed to influence and determine decisions, actions and other matters. Virtually all aspects of the social enterprise are now the object of policy, a dynamic and value-laden process through which a political system handles a public problem (Plank, Sykes, &Schneider, 2019).

Information policy emerged as a result of the unprecedented access to information as a result of the knowledge explosion that the Internet afforded. It encompasses the laws, regulations, doctrinal positions, and other societal decisions related to the creation, processing, flows, access, and use of information. It can include many issues, such as ICTs; information access, retrieval, and use; data protection; privacy; secrecy, security, veracity, and transparency of government records; freedom of information legislation; information management; copyright; intellectual property; and e-government. Because it evolved from issues encountered by many different sectors, it is complex and multi-dimensional, involving the fields of technology, communications, law, government, medicine, education, business, and economics.

Donald (2018) highlighted that recognizing the ever-increasing importance of information man conceptual/operational endeavours (global villages, information superhighway, National information Infrastructure in the United States, Nigerian Information Policy) are examples of evidence that leaders in government, information industries, and libraries are genuinely interested in improving the access, retrieval, use and transfer of information from one human being to another. Technology is certainly a means to an end. However, the success of all these crucial initiatives lies in the proper formulation and successful implementation of policies. Without such a policy, the global information environment will become more like a ship without a rudder. In the broadest terms, the global policy should at least give general direction to the development of universal information/library service, the free flow of information, a compatible interconnection among telecommunication systems, and international asymmetry (Donald, 2018).

Public policy implementation has been described as the major problem confronting Nigeria in its effort to achieve national development. Implementation often turns out to be the graveyard of many policies. From experience, little attention is paid to the subject of policy implementation by policymakers. It is often taken for granted that once a policy is adopted by the government, it must be implemented and the desired goals achieved (Ahmed & Dantata 2016). The development, implementation, and long-term success of effective and sustainable solutions to global problems optimally occur in collaboration in successful policy implementation involving stakeholders, communities and societies (Love, 2014; Munyua, Adera & Jensen, 2019; James, 2015).

Dick (2013), argues that policy implantation is the most critical dimension in the policy process given the fact that the success or failure of any given policy is, to a high degree, a function of implementation. It is, perhaps in the context of the need for effective policy implementation and

the likely factors that may constitute an obstacle to it (Ikelegbe, 2016). Different factors influence policy development and implementation, such as the content of the policy, the nature of the policy process, the actors involved in the process, and the context in which the policy is designed and implemented (Mthethwa, 2012).

Conceptual clarity on Information Policy

The term policy is central to the operation and activities of both private organizations and public institutions. A policy option made by an individual or private institution is known as a private policy while the one made by the government or its institutions is called public policy (Ozor, 2014). Over the years there has been an ongoing attempt to define information policy. In 1990, Overman and Cahill, drawing on Terry Weingarten's publication from 1989, defined information policy as "the set of all public laws, regulations and policies that encourage, discourage or regulate the creation, use, storage and communication of information." (Overman & Cahill, 2010).

While policy implementation can be defined as "the stage where organizations in general executes an adopted policy as specified by the legislation or policy action. At this stage, various government agencies and departments, responsible for the respective area of policy, are formally made responsible for implementation" (Theodoulou & Kofinis, 2014). Many scholars regard policy implementation as a separate activity that takes place after the policy has been formulated. Although this view is held because there is little appreciation of the fact that building support for policies is an integral part of designing them. This widely held view on the separation of policy design from implementation has been attacked by scholars like (Pressenca & Wildavsky, 2023) as fatal from any sense of direction.

Policy Implementation Assessment

According to Bhuyan et al. (2010), assessing policy implementation is critical for three reasons. Firstly, it promotes accountability by holding policymakers and implementers accountable for meeting stated goals and reinvigorating commitment. Second, it improves effectiveness because understanding and addressing policy implementation barriers can improve program delivery. Finally, it promotes equity and quality by establishing minimum quality standards, promoting access, reducing inconsistencies among service providers and regions, and thus improving quality (Mthethwa, 2012).

Issues and Problems in Nigeria's Information Policy

Information is an essential resource for both individuals and organizations, constituting a fundamental aspect of all communication processes. Various forms of data – bytes, numerical figures, text, visuals, audio fragments – serve as building blocks for diverse content, including texts, speeches, videos, animations, and more. Yet, the impact of this content hinges upon whether communicators and recipients interpret it as information, which allows them to create meaning and change their knowledge, attitudes, intentions, and behavior. This process is inherently subjective and demands effort from everybody involved.

Information enhancement is a global transformation which is reflected in the way we generate, receive, process, store and manage information. The wave of information enhancement as well as the globalization of the world economy has resulted to a transition where information and communication technology is gradually replacing the traditional analogous means of information generation, processing and transmission. The digitalization of information management system has greatly enhanced information all over the world. In recognition of the wave of information enhancement, Muhammad et al. (2023), noted the world today is experiencing many transformations in various economic, social, political, and legal fields as a result of the revolutions that the world economy has undergone, especially the information and communication technology revolution in which information has become the main element which includes:

Weak Data Protection Frameworks: One of the major challenges is the lack of robust data protection laws. The existing Nigeria Data Protection Regulation (NDPR), while a significant step forward, lacks the enforcement power needed to ensure compliance. Many public and private organizations still mishandle personal data, exposing citizens to identity theft, fraud, and privacy violations. Stronger legislation is required to protect the rights of individuals and enhance the trust in digital services.

Cybersecurity Vulnerabilities: Nigeria is vulnerable to cyberattacks, with instances of hacking, ransomware, and financial fraud becoming more common. Inadequate cybersecurity measures have left many sectors exposed to threats. The lack of a comprehensive cybersecurity framework makes it difficult to safeguard critical infrastructure such as banking, telecommunications, and energy systems. The Cybercrime Act of 2015 addresses some of these concerns but lacks the continuous updates needed to tackle the evolving threat landscape.

Information Access and Digital Divide: Access to information remains unequal in Nigeria. Urban areas have better internet penetration and digital literacy, while rural areas struggle with poor infrastructure and limited access to technology. This digital divide hinders equitable access to information, which is necessary for socio-economic development. The rural population, which forms a significant part of Nigeria's demographics, is particularly disadvantaged.

Ineffective Governance and Corruption: Corruption is a major issue in the public sector, and weak governance affects the implementation of policies, including those related to information. There is often a lack of transparency in government transactions, with information being withheld or manipulated. The Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), which aims to promote transparency, is often underutilized due to bureaucratic hurdles and lack of political will.

Lack of Inter-agency Collaboration: Information policy enforcement requires collaboration between multiple agencies, including the Ministry of Communications and Digital Economy, the National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA), and security agencies. However, poor inter-agency coordination and overlapping mandates often lead to inefficiencies. This fragmentation undermines the effective implementation of a unified information policy.

Slow Adoption of International Standards: Nigeria has been slow to adopt international best practices and standards for data governance, cybersecurity, and information management. Compliance with global standards such as the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and ISO/IEC 27001 is limited, which affects Nigeria's global standing in the digital economy. The gap between local practices and international standards reduces the attractiveness of Nigeria as a destination for digital investments.

Strategies for Enhancing Information Policy in Nigeria

There has become an increasing interest in providing information to all decision makers in a timely manner to make rational decisions, and this means that traditional information systems have become less suitable in providing information to decision makers, as the information has lost its most important qualitative characteristics, which is relevance "timeliness", and from this point emerged the need for a new information system that fits with the incubating environment of information and communication technology to be able to provide high quality information in a timely manner that contributes to rationalizing decisions, especially investment decisions that depend on high quality information due to the huge amounts invested in mega projects, with the aim of achieving economic development, which reflect on economic and social life positively.

Basri and Yusof (20018), Rabina and Johnston (2010) among others have identified a certain strategies for information policy that are directly linked to the success or otherwise in information policy implementation. These strategies includes:

Strengthening Legislative Frameworks: The NDPR should be upgraded into a comprehensive Data Protection Act to provide stronger legal backing for data privacy and security. This act should clearly define data handling responsibilities for both public and private entities, with strict penalties for breaches. Additionally, amendments to the Cybercrime Act should be made to ensure that it evolves in response to emerging threats. Regular updates, informed by global cybersecurity trends, will strengthen the resilience of critical systems.

Capacity Building and Awareness Campaigns: Awareness and capacity-building initiatives are essential for improving digital literacy and information security across the country. The government and private sector should collaborate to conduct nationwide campaigns on the importance of data protection, responsible digital practices, and the consequences of cybercrime. In parallel, training programs for IT personnel, security forces, and civil servants are necessary to ensure that they are equipped with the skills to enforce policies.

Investment in Cybersecurity Infrastructure: Investment in cybersecurity infrastructure is critical. This includes the development of state-of-the-art security operation centers, incident response teams, and forensic labs. Public-private partnerships can be leveraged to pool resources for developing robust systems to detect and respond to cyber threats. Cyber resilience frameworks that protect critical national infrastructure should also be prioritized.

Bridging the Digital Divide: To address the unequal access to information, the government must invest in expanding broadband infrastructure, especially in rural areas. Incentivizing private sector participation in expanding internet access will help bridge the digital divide. Also, policies that promote affordable internet access and digital skills training for rural populations will ensure inclusive participation in the digital economy.

Promoting Transparency and Accountability: Full implementation of the Freedom of Information Act is essential for promoting transparency in government operations. Government agencies should be held accountable for providing timely and accurate information to the public. Establishing independent bodies to oversee FOIA compliance will help ensure that the law is not undermined by corruption or bureaucracy.

Enhancing Inter-Agency Collaboration: Establishing a National Information Coordination Task Force could help in improving coordination between relevant agencies. This task force should focus on harmonizing the roles of various institutions to prevent duplication of efforts and ensure efficient enforcement of information policies. Such a task force would be instrumental in implementing cybersecurity protocols and responding to information security incidents.

Adoption of International Standards: Nigeria should actively seek alignment with global standards in data governance, information security, and digital rights. Aligning with standards such as GDPR or ISO/IEC will enhance Nigeria's reputation and foster international cooperation in data handling. It would also increase the confidence of international investors and partners in Nigeria's ability to secure digital transactions.

The Phenomenon of Information Overload

Given the unprecedented and exponential growth in data and content, the potential information available exceeds the processing capacity of individuals. In academic circles, this phenomenon is discussed across many disciplines as information overload (Eppler & Mengis, 2004). Cognitive load theory posits that the human working memory has a finite capacity (Atkinson & Shiffrin, 1968). Information overload occurs when the volume of information surpasses the recipient's working memory capacity (Graf & Antoni, 2021). While not a new phenomenon, information overload has become more pervasive than ever, and its relevance is twofold: it impairs decision-making and can lead to information burden.

Impaired decision-making is a critical consequence of information overload. Studies have shown that decision quality is intimately linked to both the quality and quantity of information available (Phillips-Wren & Adya, 2020). Generally, decision effectiveness initially improves with more information, but starts to decline as the volume becomes excessive. This decline is a direct outcome of information overload, as the cognitive strain can confuse decision-makers, impede their ability to prioritize, and hinder the recall of prior information. This phenomenon can significantly impair job performance, particularly among employees who must sift through an abundance of data to make informed decisions (Klein et al., 2023).

Moreover, empirical evidence underscores the adverse effects of information overload, such as stress, burnout, and various other health complaints (Klausegger et al., 2007; Junghanns & Kersten, 2020). Its impact spans to diverse aspects of life, including news consumption, workplace challenges, data management, and digital work environments.

Notably, information overload has been found to be negatively correlated with job satisfaction (Hunter & Goebel, 2008; Rachfall et al., 2015) and can lead to disengagement, reduced productivity, and a lower intent to stay with an organization. The consequences stem not just from the sheer volume of information, but also from the nature of the information itself, often referred to as information burden. This encompasses information that is redundant, irrelevant, labor-intensive, and inconsistent (Klein et al., 2023).

Conclusion

Enhancing information policy in Nigeria requires a multifaceted approach that addresses both structural and legal deficiencies. Strengthening data protection laws, investing in cyber security, bridging the digital divide, and fostering greater transparency and accountability are crucial steps. By implementing these strategies, Nigeria can ensure that it remains competitive in the global digital economy while protecting its citizens and critical infrastructure from evolving threats. Implementing any policy presents a number of challenges, particularly for those attempting to benefit the poorest social groups. However, policies are influenced by the contexts in which they are developed, such as the policy's content, the nature of the policy process, and the actors involved in the formulation and implementation processes. Leadership, stakeholder engagement, context, resources, and operational issues, on the other hand, shape decisions and actions at various levels and are critical elements along the policy-to action continuum.

Recommendation

1. More attention should be given to clear guidelines and implementation plans, strong leadership, multispectral stakeholder involvement, adequate and accessible resources, and effective feedback and monitoring systems, which will enhance policy implementation
2. Information policy must address the need to ensure that there is sufficient supply of appropriately skilled information specialists to maximize the value of information for individual users and organizations through processes of collection, organization and dissemination.
3. Information Policy should, in addition, establish a framework to promote information strategies for organizations.
4. Government departments should develop a comprehensive set of information policies to maximize the impact that information can have on consumers and service managers. Similar approaches are needed by other publicly funded bodies.
5. In this regard, publishers and other dealers in the information industry will be able to know and understand how to package their products to meet local conditions and sensibilities.

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