

DIGITAL ACCESS AND ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION SUCCESS OF TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS IN SOUTH-SOUTH REGION OF NIGERIA

Prof. Sam Otamiri and Wali, Joy Chinyere

¹Department of Office and Information Management, ²PhD Student, Department of Office and Information Management, ^{1&2}Faculty of Management Sciences
Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Rumuolumeni Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria

samotamiri@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

The study examined the relationship between digital access and organizational communication success of tertiary institutions in South-South Region, Nigeria. The objective of the study was to examine how digital access relate with measures of organizational communication success of tertiary institutions in South-South Region, Nigeria. The study adopted the explanatory cross-sectional survey research. The population of the study consisted of one hundred and three (103) tertiary institutions (Universities, Polytechnics, Colleges of Education, and Colleges of Health) across the six (6) states in the South-South Region of Nigeria. The entire population became the sample through census, as the researcher considered the population not too much to handle. Structured questionnaire was used as instrument for data collection after face-validation. Cronbach alpha was used to test the internal consistency of the instrument. Out of 412 copies of the questionnaire administered, a total of 350 were retrieved. Arithmetic mean was used for the univariate analysis while the test of hypotheses was done using Correlational Statistical tool such as Spearman Rank Order Correlation. The findings revealed that there is a significant relationship between digital access and organizational communication success in terms of message content quality, information timeliness and collaboration of tertiary institutions in South-South region, Nigeria. The study concluded that digital office practices in terms of digital access bring about improvement in organizational communication success made manifest in message content quality, information timeliness and collaboration, among others. Among other things, the study recommended that management should provide functional central database management system, intranet, and corporate website to enhance the quality and speed of information sharing in the administrative system, and as well as the meaningful collaboration and interaction among individuals and various units of tertiary institutions.

Keywords: Digital Access, Organizational Communication, Content Quality Information Timeliness

INTRODUCTION

One of the issues that necessitated this study is the fact that the communication processes in some of the tertiary institutions in Nigeria and South-South Region in particular seem to be fraught with a lot of issues ranging from poor data/information quality to late dissemination of information. As pointed out by Clement (2018), one of the greatest obstacles to the success of Nigerian tertiary institutions is poor organizational communication. Across all the administrative levels, the creation and dissemination of information, decisions, and policies seem to be very poor. The feedback mechanism is often neglected and this brings about job confusions and slow decision making (Bharadwaj, 2000). The researcher has also observed a seemingly low level of interaction and collaboration across our tertiary institutions. Poor organizational communication is a serious concern and capable of jeopardizing administrative efficiency and effectiveness. It could be caused by a lot of factors such as poor communication skills and carefree attitude (Ananiadou & Rizza, 2010); refusal to adopt trending smart communication practices (European Schoolnet, 2011); lack of awareness about the importance of effective communication (European Commission, 2011);

leadership orientation (Hui et al., 2013); organizational habit, etc. (Jenatabadi, 2013). However, we are yet to establish the very factor jeopardizing the effectiveness of communication processes in tertiary institutions in South-South Region, Nigeria.

Research has shown that several efforts to improve the quality of organizational communication in tertiary institutions in Nigeria have proved abortive (Jenatabadi, 2013). Such efforts includes staff training, orientation and reorientation programs, change of leadership, and the proliferation of information and communication gadgets (Hui et al 2013). Perhaps, these efforts have failed because the main factor(s) that could improve organizational communication have not been addressed and remains unknown. This is a puzzle and calls for rigorous effort if tertiary institutions within South-South Region, Nigeria must deliver on their mandate.

Another issue that necessitated this study is the dearth of empirical studies on the relationship between digital office practices and organizational communication success in tertiary institutions in South-South Region, Nigeria. For instance, Kariuki (2015); examined the relationship between ICT and organizational performance of Service firms in Kenya; effects of information technology on organizational performance in Nigerian Banking Industries (Balogun, 2016); impact of e-administration on service delivery in AdekunleAjasin University Akungba-Akoko, Ondo State, Nigeria (Kehine et al., 2017); IT usage and organizational performance of International College of Engineering and Management in India (Revenio & Nasra, 2017). European Commission (2011) examined the impact of ICT usage on internal communication of tertiary institutions in India; Tapscott (2011) examined the effectiveness of social media as a tool for organizational communication; ICT and educational management of development in Africa (Haythornthwaite et al., 1998); the challenges of digitization on the broadcasting media in Nigeria (Akinreti et al., 2013); office automation and organizational excellence(Green, 2003); office automation and organizational decision making in Tavan firms in India (Mohammad & Masoud, 2014); effective communication and organizational performance in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka (Hartley & Mackenzie, 2009);

These empirical studies generally revealed that Digital office practices has enhanced the performance and communication processes of banks, educational institutions, manufacturing, and service sector both within and outside Nigeria. However, none of these studies addressed the issue of organizational communication in tertiary institutions in South-South Region, Nigeria. This implies that the relationship between digital access and organizational communication in tertiary institutions in South-South Region, Nigeria has not received adequate research attention. This is the knowledge gap which this study sought to fill. Here lies essence of this study.

Hypotheses

In line with the research questions, the following hypotheses stated in the null form were formulated:

- HO₁: Digital access does not have any significant correlation with message content quality in tertiary institutions in South-South Region, Nigeria.
- HO₂: Digital access does not have any significant correlation with information timeousness in tertiary institutions in South-South Region, Nigeria.
- HO₃: Digital access does not have any significant correlation with collaboration in tertiary institutions in South-South Region, Nigeria.

Digital Access and Organizational Communication Success

Tertiary Institutions as citadels of learning and research hubs in Nigeria are fast embracing Digital office practices. All the tertiary institutions in South-South Region today at least have an Information and Communication Technology Centre in addition to local office information systems

in various administrative offices. The ability of administrative staff to perform their communication functions efficiently and effectively depends reasonably on their level of digital access. Having functional and reliable internet connection services makes it easier for the sending and accessing of official letters, memorandum, circulars, and other administrative contents much easier via email (Iksan et al., 2012). Senate decisions, faculty board decisions, departmental information and committee information are better and easier disseminated using official e-mail and social media platforms. The beauty of adopting online communities like Facebook, WhatsApp, wikis, etc is that such information are quickly circulated and the recipients have the opportunity of sending their feedback in real time. The comments of closed online group chats are visible to all. Thus, communication contents are more express and understood. From the comments of other participants, those who post information in administrative group chat rooms can understand how other feel about the information they have shared (Mascio, 2012). Thus, digital access enriches the quality of message contents shared in the administrative system.

Another striking benefit of digital access in bringing about organizational communication success is that it enhances information timeousness. Provided target recipients are online or have their functional data connection turned on, administrative information are shared and received via e-mail and WhatsApp in real time (Kotler et al., 2009). Unlike paper-based administrative communication systems, the use of the internet makes it possible for administrators and workers in tertiary institutions to share ideas, voice messages, text messages, and even live video clips of events in real time. Real time communication also enables participants to give real time feedback) which makes communication very successful (Otamiri, 2003). Provided the internet connection is functional, publication of reports and results across workgroups or units is also made easier. Infact, when it comes to the publication of students' academic results and institutional events and programmes, the internet has made it very easy and smart.

The accuracy and speed of internet usage also promotes administrative collaboration. Before now, administrative heads and their colleagues must meet in a geographical location for discussion and decision making. Workers needed to come together physically to address issues and collaborate. However, with the proliferation of digital communication tools today, administrative heads and various committees can hold meetings and work together successfully online (Pavan, 2014). It is more time saving and effective when it comes to collaboration and service in institutions. However, one of the major challenges in our workplace the seeming low level of digital access among workers in this part of the world. Almost every worker has a cell phone; many do have smart phones too. Nevertheless, one few workers really know how to use e-mail and social media platforms in discussing occupational issues. The use of e-mail as major communication channel seems to be still very low in our workplace. Paper-based communication is still very prominent. Administrative workgroups in our institutions have stated using group chats especially on WhatsApp but when it comes to sharing of documents and files, paper-based work is still prevalent (Charles, 2014). It is perhaps due to the fact that free wifi is still very limited in most of our institutions. Thus, employees do not have access to free wifi at work. This makes it difficult for them to use e-mail and online communities to communicate and work collaboratively.

Socio-Technical Theory

The socio-technical theory was popularized by [Eric Trist](#), Ken Bamforth and [Fred Emery](#), during the World War II era, based on their work with workers in English coal mines at the [Tavistock Institute](#) in 1951). The theory is made up of two main constructs joined together: socio has to do with people and society while 'technical' has to do with machines and technology. The term "socio-technical" refers to the interrelatedness of social and technical aspects of an [organization](#).

The socio-technicaleory holds that business organizations are made up of human beings working together in social groups using equipment, tools, methodologies and knowledge to achieve desirable changes in the system and to bring about the achievement of corporate goals as well as outperforming competitors (Walker et al., 2016). This theory holds that changes in organizations

and the capacity of organizations to compete favourably in the market are influenced by demands from the external environment which impacts information systems changes in an organization. The socio-technical theory describes how societal changes provoke or necessitates changes in the techniques, procedures, infrastructure and technologies used in organizations (Norris & Moon, 2005). Tertiary institutions more than ever before are facing serious competition from sister institutions especially in the developed countries and as a way of coping and outperforming their competitors, individual tertiary institution has to adopt Digital office practices systems such as digital access, digital infrastructural usage and digital office innovation to harness and maximize the organizational communication (message content quality, information timeousness, collaboration).

The socio-technical theory is founded on two cardinal assumptions:

- i) "The interaction of social and technical factors create the conditions for successful (or unsuccessful) system performance" (Walker, et al., 2016). These interactions are comprised partly of linear 'cause and effect' relationships, the relationships that are normally 'designed', and partly from 'non-linear', complex, even unpredictable relationships, which are those that are often unexpected.
- ii) The second major principle of socio-technical theory is that "optimization of either socio, or far more commonly the technical, tends to increase not only the quantity of unpredictable, 'un-designed', non-linear relationships, but those relationships that are actually injuriou to the system's performance" (Walker, et al., 2016). Thus, second principle of socotechnical theory hinges on joint optimisation. This second principle holds that improving only one aspect of the organization (e.g. workforce) and abandoning t other element (technical computer systems, and other knowledge managemeninfrastructure) will be detrimental to the system. Both the human and technological resources of an organization must be optimized simultaneously for expected results to be achieved. The implication of the joint optimization principle of socio-technical theory in the education sector is that continuous capacity building to increase workers' awareness of how to use Digital office practices tools may not lead to effective communication in the workforce except it is matched with an upgrade of knowledge management systems such as groupware, intranet and decision support systems. In this jet age, where knowledge is the life blood of any organization; a tertiary institution may not be able to outperform its competitors if its digitalized equipped resources are not properly harnessed and shared within the school.

The justification of the socio-technical theory as the theoretical foundation of this study is based on the fact that the theory talks about how the interaction between people and Digital office practices affects organizational communication. It is therefore reasonable to adopt a theory such as this since the work is aimed at getting empirical evidence on how Digital office practices interacts with organizational communication.

METHODOLOGY

The cross-sectional explanatory research design was adopted for the study. The population of the study consisted of one hundred and three (103) tertiary institutions (Universities, Polytechnics, Colleges of Education, and Colleges of Health) across the six (6) states in the South-South Region of Nigeria. The institutions constituted the population of the study since the criterion variable (organizational communication success) is macro and manifests at the organizational level. The entire population of 103 tertiary institutions were used as the study sample. Thus, the study was a census research which involved using the entire population rather than drawing a sample from it. Arithmetic mean and standard deviation were used for univariate analysis, Spearman rank order correlation was applied for the bivariate analysis.

Digital Access and Message Content Quality

Ho₁: Digital access does not have any significant correlation with message content quality in tertiary institutions in South-South Region, Nigeria.

Table 1: Correlations of Digital Access and Message Content Quality

		Digital Access	Message Content Quality
Spearman's rho	Digital Access	Correlation Coefficient	.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
		N	350
	Message Content Quality	Correlation Coefficient	.898**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
		N	350

****.** Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Source: SPSS Output, 2022

Table 1 above reveals r value of 0.898 at a $P=0.00 < 0.05$ for the hypothesis relating digital access and message content quality. Since the significance value 0.00 is less than the alpha level of 0.05, the null hypothesis (Ho₁) which states that digital access does not have any significant correlation with message content quality in tertiary institutions in South-South Region, Nigeria is rejected and the alternate accepted. With a correlation coefficient of 0.898, the result in relation to our decision rule implies that digital access has a very strong positive correlation with message content quality in tertiary institutions in South-South Region, Nigeria.

Ho₂: Digital access does not have any significant correlation with information timeousness in tertiary institutions in South-South Region, Nigeria.

Table 2: Correlations of Digital Access and Information Timeousness

		Digital Access	Information Timeousness
Spearman's rho	Digital Access	Correlation Coefficient	0.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
		N	350
	Information Timeousness	Correlation Coefficient	.987**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
		N	350

****.** Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Source: SPSS Output, 2022

The table 2 above reveals r value of 0.987 at a $P=0.00 < 0.05$ for the hypothesis relating digital access and information timeousness. Since the significance value 0.00 is less than the alpha level of 0.05, the null hypothesis (Ho₂) which states that dgital access does not have any significant correlation with information timeousness in tertiary institutions in South-South Region, Nigeria is rejected and the alternate accepted. With a correlation coefficient of 0.987, the result implies that digital access has a very strong positive correlation with information timeousness in tertiary institutions in South-South Region, Nigeria.

Ho₃: Digital access does not have any significant correlation with collaboration in tertiary institutions in South-South Region, Nigeria.

Table 3: Correlations of Digital Access and Collaboration

		Digital Access	Collaboration
Spearman's rho	Digital Access		
		Correlation Coefficient	.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.776**
		N	.000
		N	350
		N	350
Collaboration			
		Correlation Coefficient	.776**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
		N	.000
		N	350
		N	350

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Source: SPSS Output, 2022

Table 3 above reveals r value of 0.776 at a $P=0.00 < 0.05$ for the hypothesis relating digital access and collaboration. Since the significance value 0.00 is less than the alpha level of 0.05, the null hypothesis (H_{03}) which states that digital access does not have any significant correlation with collaboration in tertiary institutions in South-South Region, Nigeria is rejected and the alternate accepted. Nevertheless, considering our decision rule with a calculated correlation coefficient of 0.776, the result implies that digital access has a high/strong positive correlation with collaboration in tertiary institutions in South-South Region, Nigeria.

Discussion of Findings

Digital Access and Organizational Communication Success

The test of hypotheses one to three revealed that there is a significant positive relation between digital access and organizational communication success of tertiary institutions in South-South Region, Nigeria. These findings imply that access to emailing, participation in online communities and access to internet surfing improves the quality of message content, information timeousness and as well as collaboration among administrative staffs of an organizations. These findings go in line with the assertion of Iksan et al. (2012) that having functional and reliable internet connection services makes it easier for the sending and accessing of official letters, memorandum, circulars, and other administrative contents much easier via email. Organizations such as tertiary institutions can utilize email to send memos, letters, notices, and other official documents, thereby enhancing speed of information dissemination and access. This also enhances the accuracy, comprehensibility and integrity of information shared among administrative heads and other staff. Decisions emanating from senate and faculty board meetings, departmental information, and committee information are better and easier disseminated using official e-mail and social media platforms. The use of online communities such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Wiki, Skype, etc. have proved speed and ease of use, as they improve early notification, timely feedback and access to administrative information. The beauty of adopting online communities like Facebook, WhatsApp, Wikis, etc. is that such information are quickly circulated and the recipients have the opportunity of sending their feedback in real time. The comments of closed online group chats are visible to all. Thus, communication contents are more express and understood. From the comments of other participants, those who post information in administrative group chat rooms can understand how others feel about the information they have shared (Mascio, 2012). Digital access in terms of internet surfing access also promotes access to bulk of information that are useful to administrative. Consequently, digital access enriches the quality of message contents shared in the administrative system.

Organizational communication success also brings about information timeousness. Provided target recipients are online or have their functional data connection turned on, administrative information are shared and received via e-mail and WhatsApp in real time (Kotler et al., 2009). Unlike paper-based administrative communication systems, the use of the internet makes it possible for administrators and workers in tertiary institutions to share ideas, voice messages, text messages, and even live video clips of events in real time. Real time communication also enables participants

to give real time feedback) which makes communication very successful (Otamiri, 2003). Provided the internet connection is functional, publication of reports and results across workgroups or units is also made easier. In fact, when it comes to the publication of students' academic results and institutional events and programmes, the internet has made it very easy and smart.

The speed and accurateness of internet usage also promotes administrative collaboration. Before now, administrative heads and their colleagues must meet in a geographical location for discussion and decision making. Workers needed to come together physically to address issues and collaborate. However, with the proliferation of digital communication tools (WhatsApp, Facebook, Wiki, Skype, etc.) today, administrative heads and various committees can hold meetings and work together successfully online (Pavan, 2014). It is more time saving and effective when it comes to collaboration and service in institutions. However, one of the major challenges in our workplace the seeming low level of digital access among workers in this part of the world. Almost every worker has a cell phone; many do have smart phones too. Nonetheless, one few workers really know how to use e-mail and social media platforms in discussing occupational issues. The use of e-mail as major communication channel seems to be still very low in our workplace. Paper-based communication is still very prominent. Administrative workgroups in our institutions have stated using group chats especially on WhatsApp but when it comes to sharing of documents and files, paper-based work is still prevalent (Charles, 2014). It is perhaps due to the fact that free wifi is still very limited in most of our institutions. Thus, employees do not have access to free wifi at work. This makes it difficult for them to use e-mail and online communities to communicate and work collaboratively.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings of the study have shown that there is a significant relationship between digital access and organizational communication success in terms of message content quality, information timeousness and collaboration. The study has also revealed that the activation of staff computer literacy through internet literacy and data processing literacy moderates the relationship between digital office practices and organizational communication success. Drawn from the results and discussion of findings, the study therefore concluded that digital access brings about improvement in organizational communication success made manifest in message content quality, information timeousness and collaboration, among others.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the conclusions of this study, the following are recommended:

1. All administrative offices should be equipped with functional state-of-the-art desktop/laptop computer system and other digital office resources to enhance the quality and speed of data processing across administrative offices.
2. Management should provide functional central database management system, intranet, and corporate website to enhance the quality and speed of information sharing in the administrative system, and as well as the meaningful collaboration and interaction among individuals and various units of tertiary institutions.
3. Management should adopt cloud computing services that will enhance the processing and security of access to special purpose data/information across the institutions.
4. Management should provide mifis and routers across administrative offices to enhance access to internet resources such as e-mail, internet browsers, and social networking platforms.

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