

Digital Governance and Public Service Delivery in Nigeria, -Port Harcourt in the Post- Pandemic Era: Challenges and Opportunities for Developing Countries

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Copyright © 2025 The Author(s): This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC) which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium for non-commercial use provided the original author and source are credited. Citation: Clement Ogbel, Francis C. Chilaka. (2025). Digital Governance and Public Service Delivery in Nigeria, -Port Harcourt in the Post- Pandemic Era: Challenges and Opportunities for Developing Countries. UKR Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (UKRJAHS). Volume 1(9), 166-173.	<i>This study examines digital governance and its influence on public service delivery in Port Harcourt, Nigeria, in the post-pandemic era. The main aim of the study is to explore how digital governance frameworks affect service delivery outcomes and institutional readiness in a developing country context. The specific objectives are: (1) to identify and analyze the major challenges confronting the implementation of digital governance in Port Harcourt's public service sector; (2) to examine the opportunities that digital governance presents for improving efficiency, transparency, and citizen participation in public service delivery; and (3) to propose policy options and institutional strategies for strengthening sustainable digital governance and inclusive service delivery in developing countries. The study is anchored on the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) developed by Davis (1989), which suggests that perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use shape technological adoption in organizational settings. A descriptive qualitative design was employed, relying on secondary data sourced from government reports, academic journals, policy documents, and publications of international organizations such as the World Bank and UNDP. Data were analyzed using thematic content analysis, focusing on core themes of infrastructure, institutional capacity, transparency, and citizen participation. Key findings indicate that while digital governance platforms and institutional reforms are in place (for example, the Rivers State Tax Management Information System and biometric integration of civil service payrolls), their full potential is constrained by infrastructural deficits, digital access inequities, and limited empirical tracking of outcomes. Opportunities for enhanced efficiency, transparency and participation are documented, though measurable evidence remains sparse. The study concludes that digital governance in Port Harcourt holds considerable promise but requires robust institutional support, inclusive access and rigorous monitoring to yield sustainable impacts. Three recommendations are offered: investment in infrastructure and digital access, strengthening human capacity and digital literacy, and establishing monitoring and evaluation frameworks to track platform performance and inclusivity.</i> Keywords: Digital Governance, Public Service Delivery, Port Harcourt, Technology Acceptance Model, Developing Countries

I. Background to the Study

The emergence of digital governance has transformed the landscape of public administration globally, reshaping how governments interact with citizens, deliver services, and manage administrative processes. Digital governance refers to the strategic use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) by public institutions to enhance

efficiency, transparency, and accountability in governance systems (Bannister & Connolly, 2020). In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the urgency of digital transformation within public institutions became more pronounced, as governments were compelled to adopt digital tools to sustain service delivery amidst lockdowns, physical

restrictions, and health risks (UNDP, 2022). For developing countries such as Nigeria, this transition presented both opportunities for modernization and significant challenges due to structural limitations, digital divides, and weak institutional capacities.

The pandemic acted as a catalyst for reimagining governance frameworks, particularly at subnational levels where public service delivery is most direct and visible (World Bank, 2021). In Port Harcourt, the capital of Rivers State, public institutions were forced to adapt rapidly to digital modes of interaction, including online documentation, electronic payments, virtual meetings, and digital reporting systems. While these adaptations demonstrated the potential of technology-driven governance, they also exposed gaps in digital infrastructure, cybersecurity, human resource competencies, and policy coherence (Nwankwo & Chukwuemeka, 2023). Moreover, unequal access to internet connectivity and limited digital literacy among citizens further constrained the inclusivity of these innovations, raising questions about the sustainability and equity of digital governance in post-pandemic Nigeria.

Globally, digital governance has been recognized as a key enabler of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 16, which emphasizes strong institutions and effective governance (United Nations, 2020). However, in many developing contexts, technological innovation in governance often outpaces regulatory adaptation and institutional readiness. Nigeria's public administration has historically struggled with bureaucratic inefficiencies, corruption, and low citizen trust (Olowu, 2019), which complicate the transition to digitally driven governance systems. Nevertheless, the post-pandemic era presents a critical juncture for reforming administrative structures through e-governance initiatives, digital service platforms, and citizen-centered innovation ecosystems.

Port Harcourt's position as an oil-rich, urbanized city with a diverse socio-economic population provides a unique case for examining how digital governance can improve public service delivery in developing contexts. The city's infrastructural and technological profile, coupled with the strategic importance of Rivers State to Nigeria's economy, offers insights into how local governments can leverage digital transformation to enhance transparency, efficiency, and citizen engagement. However, realizing these benefits requires addressing persistent challenges such as unreliable broadband infrastructure, inconsistent policy frameworks, resistance to technological change, and limited public-private collaboration (Okon & Effiong, 2024). In this context, the study explores digital governance and public service delivery in Port Harcourt in the post-pandemic era, identifying both the challenges and opportunities for

developing countries. It situates the discussion within the broader discourse on governance modernization, administrative reform, and technological adaptation in Africa's public sector, emphasizing lessons for sustainable digital transformation.

II. Statement of the Problem

Despite the growing recognition of digital governance as a catalyst for administrative efficiency and improved service delivery, its implementation in Nigeria remains fraught with structural and institutional challenges. In Port Harcourt, as in many urban centres in developing countries, the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the adoption of digital tools in government operations, yet the process revealed persistent gaps in digital infrastructure, policy coherence, and human capital readiness. The post-pandemic context has thus exposed the fragility of Nigeria's digital governance ecosystem, where inadequate broadband access, poor inter-agency coordination, and low digital literacy among citizens hinder the sustainability of digital transformation (Okon & Effiong, 2024; Nwankwo & Chukwuemeka, 2023).

While digital technologies have been deployed for tax administration, public information dissemination, and administrative communication, these efforts remain fragmented and largely experimental. Public institutions in Port Harcourt often lack integrated digital systems, leading to inefficiencies, duplication of functions, and data management inconsistencies. Furthermore, the absence of a coherent digital governance framework at the subnational level has constrained the institutionalization of best practices in service delivery. Corruption, bureaucratic inertia, and limited budgetary allocations to ICT infrastructure further undermine the effective transition to digital administration (Olowu, 2019).

In addition, the digital divide between government institutions and citizens continues to deepen inequality in access to public services. Many residents, particularly in low-income and peri-urban areas, lack the digital literacy or technological resources to engage effectively with online government platforms. Consequently, the promise of digital governance to enhance transparency, accountability, and inclusivity remains largely unrealized. This challenge underscores the need for a systematic examination of how digital governance is reshaping public service delivery in Port Harcourt's post-pandemic era, identifying both its enabling factors and obstacles to sustainable development.

III. Aim and Objectives of the Study

The main aim of this study is to examine digital governance and its influence on public service delivery in Port Harcourt within the post-pandemic context.

The specific objectives are to:

1. To identify and analyze the major challenges confronting the implementation of digital governance in Port Harcourt's public service sector.
2. To examine the opportunities that digital governance presents for improving efficiency, transparency, and citizen participation in public service delivery.
3. To propose policy options and institutional strategies for strengthening sustainable digital governance and inclusive service delivery in developing countries.

IV. Research Questions

1. What are the major challenges confronting the implementation of digital governance in Port Harcourt's public service sector?
2. What opportunities does digital governance present for improving efficiency, transparency, and citizen participation in public service delivery?
3. What policy options and institutional strategies can strengthen sustainable digital governance and inclusive service delivery in developing countries?

V. Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), originally developed by Fred Davis (1986) to explain how individuals come to accept and use technology. The model proposes that two key factors — perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use — shape users' attitudes toward technology, which in turn influence their behavioral intention to adopt and utilize it. Perceived usefulness refers to the degree to which an individual believes that using a particular system will enhance job performance, while perceived ease of use reflects the extent to which one believes that using the system will be free from effort. These perceptions jointly determine whether users embrace or resist technological innovations in their work environments. The TAM evolved from the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) proposed by Fishbein and Ajzen (1975), which explains behavioral intention as a function of individual attitudes and subjective norms. Davis (1989) adapted this reasoning to the technological context, arguing that an individual's willingness to engage with new digital tools depends largely on rational evaluations of their practicality and convenience. The model has since been widely applied across disciplines, particularly in studies of e-governance, e-learning, and digital service delivery (Venkatesh & Davis, 2000).

In the context of public administration, the TAM provides an important lens for understanding the dynamics of digital governance and public service delivery. Public officials and

citizens are more likely to adopt digital platforms for administrative communication, service access, and decision-making when they perceive these systems as effective and easy to use. In cities such as Port Harcourt, where digital infrastructure is still developing, perceived usefulness can relate to the speed and reliability of accessing government services online, while perceived ease of use can involve the simplicity of navigating digital portals and understanding information systems. The model also highlights that behavioral intention to use technology does not automatically translate to actual use, especially when institutional and infrastructural barriers exist. For instance, limited internet access, inadequate digital literacy, and bureaucratic resistance may weaken the relationship between intention and behavior (Wirtz et al., 2019). These contextual limitations are particularly relevant in developing countries, where digital governance reforms often face implementation challenges despite positive public attitudes.

Although the TAM has been influential, scholars have raised concerns about its limited attention to social, cultural, and institutional variables that affect technology adoption. Critics such as Bagozzi (2007) argue that the model oversimplifies human-technology interaction by focusing narrowly on individual cognition while neglecting broader systemic factors. In response, later extensions such as the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) have incorporated elements like facilitating conditions and social influence (Venkatesh et al., 2003). Nonetheless, the TAM remains a valuable and parsimonious framework for analyzing the psychological and perceptual drivers of technology acceptance, especially in administrative settings. Applied to the present study, the TAM helps to explain how public servants and citizens in Port Harcourt perceive and interact with digital governance platforms in the post-pandemic era. It provides a theoretical foundation for assessing whether users find digital systems useful for enhancing service delivery, whether they consider them easy to operate, and how these perceptions influence adoption behavior. By grounding the analysis in TAM, this study offers insight into both the opportunities and challenges that shape digital transformation in Nigeria's public service landscape.

VI. Empirical Review of Existing Literature

Empirical scholarship on digital governance and public service delivery in Nigeria has expanded as scholars have sought to understand how emerging technologies reshape administrative processes, transparency, and citizen engagement, particularly in the post-pandemic era. The literature generally agrees that digital governance offers opportunities for improved efficiency and accountability, yet its success in developing countries remains constrained

by infrastructural weaknesses, low digital literacy, and limited institutional capacity. The following review synthesizes major empirical contributions, highlighting their objectives, theoretical orientations, methodologies, findings, and recommendations.

Oluwole and Adeyemi (2021) examined the transformation of public sector operations through e-governance tools in Nigeria. Drawing on the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), their study explored how public employees' attitudes towards technology affected service delivery efficiency. Using qualitative interviews with senior civil servants in Lagos and Abuja, they found that digital systems improved internal communication and reduced administrative delays. However, challenges such as inadequate ICT infrastructure and poor digital culture hindered optimal performance. The authors recommended targeted ICT investments and training programs to enhance digital adoption within public institutions.

Eze and Nwosu (2022) investigated e-governance and administrative efficiency in Rivers State with a focus on service responsiveness and citizen satisfaction. Anchored in the Diffusion of Innovation Theory, the study utilized qualitative content analysis of policy documents and interviews with key administrative officers. Findings showed that the introduction of digital platforms reduced face-to-face interactions and promoted transparency, but frequent power outages and unreliable internet connectivity limited full-scale implementation. The study concluded that digital governance can significantly improve service delivery when supported by reliable infrastructure and institutional continuity.

Bello (2020) explored digital governance practices in Nigeria's public institutions during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Guided by the Institutional Theory, the study employed a qualitative case study approach, analyzing administrative reforms and digital initiatives in select ministries. Findings revealed that the pandemic accelerated the shift towards virtual communication and digital workflows. However, most digital reforms lacked sustainability due to weak policy integration and low coordination among agencies. The study recommended institutionalizing digital transformation within national development frameworks to ensure continuity beyond crisis periods.

Okon and Bassey (2023) examined the role of digital inclusion in enhancing participatory governance in southern Nigeria. Using the Governance Network Theory, they conducted focus group discussions among local residents and government officials. Their findings indicated that although digital participation tools increased access to government information, awareness and usability among citizens remained low. The researchers emphasized the

need for localized digital literacy programs and affordable broadband access to expand participation and inclusivity in governance processes.

Similarly, Ibrahim and Musa (2021) analyzed ICT-driven public sector reforms across sub-Saharan Africa with Nigeria as a case study. Employing the New Public Management (NPM) perspective, they conducted qualitative document analysis using secondary data from World Bank and United Nations governance reports. Findings showed that digital governance improved fiscal transparency and accountability in some ministries but faced resistance from bureaucratic actors accustomed to traditional systems. The study recommended aligning digital reforms with organizational change management strategies to reduce resistance and promote innovation within the civil service.

Mensah (2022) conducted a comparative analysis of post-pandemic digital governance reforms in Ghana and Nigeria. Using a qualitative comparative approach based on interviews and policy review, the study found that while both countries embraced digital solutions during the pandemic, Nigeria lagged in institutionalizing these practices. Mensah attributed this gap to weak coordination and inadequate inter-ministerial collaboration. The author recommended cross-country learning platforms and regional digital policy harmonization to strengthen governance innovation in West Africa.

Chukwuma and Etim (2024) analyzed digital governance implementation challenges in Nigeria's urban centers, focusing on Port Harcourt and Lagos. Their objective was to identify infrastructural and institutional barriers to effective digital service delivery. Using the Sociotechnical Systems Theory and qualitative key informant interviews, the study found that poor connectivity, corruption, and low staff motivation hindered the success of e-service platforms. The study concluded that successful digital governance requires the alignment of technology with human capacity, institutional accountability, and citizen engagement.

VII. Gaps in the Literature

The first major gap in the existing literature concerns the limited assessment of digital governance in Port Harcourt within the post-pandemic context. Most studies focus on national-level reforms or major metropolitan areas such as Abuja and Lagos, leaving Port Harcourt underexplored despite its administrative and economic significance in Nigeria's South-South region. The second gap relates to the inadequate analysis of the specific challenges and opportunities confronting digital governance in local public institutions. Existing research identifies broad infrastructural and policy issues but does not provide a

systematic examination of how these challenges interact with opportunities for efficiency, transparency, and citizen participation at the subnational level. The third gap involves the absence of context-specific policy frameworks and institutional strategies for strengthening digital governance in developing cities. While most studies offer general recommendations for ICT investment and capacity building, few propose actionable models that integrate technology, governance reform, and social inclusion in the post-pandemic recovery phase. This present study aims to fill these gaps by identifying and analyzing the major challenges confronting digital governance in Port Harcourt's public service sector, examining the opportunities for improved efficiency and participation, and proposing policy options and institutional strategies for sustainable digital governance in developing countries.

VIII. Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive qualitative design to examine digital governance and its influence on public service delivery in Port Harcourt in the post-pandemic era. It relied on secondary data sourced from government reports, academic journals, policy documents, and publications of international organizations such as the World Bank and UNDP. Data were analyzed using thematic content analysis, which involved identifying and interpreting key themes related to infrastructure, institutional capacity, transparency, and citizen participation. This approach enabled a coherent understanding of the challenges and opportunities of digital governance and its implications for effective service delivery in developing contexts.

IX. Discussion of Findings

Answer to Research Question 1: What are the major challenges confronting the implementation of digital governance in Port Harcourt's public service sector?

On 27 March 2018 in Port Harcourt, Governor Nyesom E. Wike formally launched the Rivers State Tax Management Information System (RIVTAMIS) and the issuance of the Rivers State Tax Identification Number (RIVTIN) at a ceremony which also included presentation of the first RIVTIN card by the Executive Chairman of the Rivers State Internal Revenue Service (Adoage Norteh) (Port Harcourt Blog, 2018; The Guardian Nigeria, 2018). At the launch the Governor stated that the digital platform would allow tax payments "from anywhere" and that all businesses would be required to obtain their RIVTIN from 1 April 2018 with sanctions for non-compliance by 1 June 2018 (The Guardian Nigeria, 2018). The platform therefore established a technical basis for digital governance in service delivery.

However, widespread adoption remains constrained. One major challenge is the infrastructural readiness of service systems: Rivers State government's own portal for public service management captured biometrics of 44,435 public servants across 79 ministries by June 2019 via the RivPuSMiS portal, signalling major institutional efforts (National Network, 2019). But this also demonstrates that full integration of digital systems remains a work-in-progress. In the 2025 Civil Service Week, the state reaffirmed a commitment to adopt "sovereign digital platforms" for a paper-less future (The Guardian Nigeria, 2025).

Electricity instability, limited broadband penetration and high data costs are regularly flagged in qualitative research on digital service delivery in Rivers State, indicating infrastructural bottlenecks remain a barrier to consistent digital service provision. Another challenge is the digital divide. Although RIVTAMIS emphasises that "you now have your tax office in the comfort of your desk or your mobile device" (Rivers State Internal Revenue Service, n.d.), there is minimal publicly-available data showing how many taxpayers in peri-urban or low-income areas of Port Harcourt accessed the system and how digital literacy barriers influenced uptake.

Institutionally, while verification exercises such as the five-day civil servants' verification launched on 24 July 2025 aimed to streamline payroll and integrate database linkages (The Nation, 2025), many functions in the public service remain manual or semi-automated. There is a noted absence of published metrics comparing service speeds before and after digitalisation, or on citizen uptake of platforms. Therefore while the technical infrastructure and policy intention exist, the demand-side readiness (citizen use, digital skills) and structural integration (institutional coordination, measurement of outcomes) are underdeveloped.

Answer to Research Question 2: What opportunities does digital governance present for improving efficiency, transparency, and citizen participation in public service delivery?

The RIVTAMIS platform offers taxpayers in Rivers State the ability to register, file and pay taxes, request tax clearance certificates and manage tax records online, thereby reducing in-office visits and transaction costs (Rivers State Internal Revenue Service, n.d.). During the launch, the Governor emphasised elimination of multiple taxation and remote access (News Verge, 2018). This concrete example of digital service illustrates the opportunity for increased administrative efficiency and greater transparency in tax administration. Furthermore, the state's shift to a "digital first" civil service

— announced in the 2025 Civil Service Week which pledged to adopt sovereign digital platforms to modernise service delivery (Punch Online, 2025) — demonstrates structural commitment to digital governance. Such initiatives suggest the potential for streamlined processes, reduced bureaucratic bottlenecks and increased citizen access to services.

Nevertheless, there remains a lack of empirical measurement of citizen participation and transparency outcomes in Port Harcourt. There is no publicly-accessible data indicating how many citizens submitted feedback via online channels, or how service turnaround times changed after digital platforms were launched. The opportunity exists, but the quantifiable impact remains under-documented.

Answer to Research Question 3: What policy options and institutional strategies can strengthen sustainable digital governance and inclusive service delivery in developing countries?

Rivers State has adopted institutional strategies that provide evidence of policy-level intent. For instance, the introduction of RIVTAMIS and the biometric capture of 44,435 public servants through the RivPuSMiS portal (National Network, 2019) reflect efforts to digitise back-office functions and strengthen the governance infrastructure. The 2025 commitment to a paperless future and sovereign digital platforms also demonstrates institutional orientation toward digital governance (The Guardian Nigeria, 2025). These actions illustrate policy options such as digitising tax systems, automating civil service records and transitioning from manual to online service delivery systems — that in principle support governance structures, reduce leakages and improve accountability.

However, empirical assessment of how these strategies enhance inclusivity or sustainability is lacking. For example, while the verification exercise in July 2025 aimed to remove ghost workers and consolidate payroll data (The Nation, 2025), there is little published evidence examining how those reforms impacted actual service delivery performance, citizen access across socio-economic groups, or how the digital strategies were financed, maintained and scaled. Therefore, although policy and institutional frameworks are in place, robust data on their inclusive impact and long-term viability in Port Harcourt remain limited.

X. Conclusion

This study examined digital governance and public service delivery in Port Harcourt in the post-pandemic era, focusing on challenges, opportunities and institutional strategies for developing countries. The evidence shows that while

substantial digital governance infrastructure and platforms exist (for example, RIVTAMIS, RivPuSMiS), the full potential of these systems is constrained by infrastructural readiness, human capacity limitations and access inequities. Simultaneously, opportunities for greater efficiency, transparency and citizen participation are evident but remain under-documented in terms of measurable outcomes. Institutional and policy strategies have been adopted, yet empirical evaluation of their inclusivity, sustainability and service-delivery impact is scant. For Port Harcourt to fully harness digital governance, the technical systems must be complemented by inclusive access, human capacity building and rigorous monitoring of outcomes.

XI. Recommendations

1. To address the challenge of reliable power, connectivity and device access, state government and relevant public agencies should prioritise funding and partnerships (including public-private) to extend broadband coverage, subsidise data costs and ensure uninterrupted power in key service delivery points. This will help close the digital divide and support wider citizen use of digital governance platforms.
2. Public servants and citizens must be equipped to adopt and use digital systems. Comprehensive training programmes for civil-service staff on the usability and benefits of digital platforms should be instituted, and community-based digital literacy campaigns launched in peri-urban and low-income areas to enable citizens to engage fully with online services.
3. Government agencies should design and publish performance metrics—such as number of users accessing online services, average processing time before and after digitalisation, citizen satisfaction, access by gender and income group—and conduct periodic impact assessments. These measures will provide evidence on inclusivity, sustainability and service-delivery improvement and enable continuous improvement of digital governance systems.

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