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TRANSPARENCY AND TRUST IN GOVERNMENT: EVALUATING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF OPEN DATA INITIATIVES

Ashnor C. Mascara

Mindanao State University – Main Campus, Marawi City-9700 Lanao del Sur, Philippines.

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Abstract

This paper investigates the impact of open data initiatives on government transparency and public trust. Through a comprehensive analysis of existing literature and case studies from various countries, the paper evaluates the effectiveness of open data policies in enhancing government accountability and fostering citizen engagement. The findings imply that while open data initiatives have the potential to improve transparency significantly, the impact on public trust is complex and influenced by multiple factors. The study concludes with recommendations for policymakers and public administrators to maximize the benefits of open data initiatives.

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the years, governments worldwide have embraced open data initiatives because they improve transparency, accountability, and public trust in the government (Wirtz & Birkmeyer, 2015). These initiatives include providing government data freely available to the public, often through the web. With the view of enhancing civic engagement and participation in decision-making and improving the quality of public services (Janssen et al., 2012). However, the efficiencies of these initiatives in achieving their intended goals remain questions among scholars and practitioners in the field of Public Administration. Moreover, it is pointed out that the lack of proper implementation frameworks and poor digital literacy is a limiting factor in the success of open data initiatives (Zuiderwijk & Janssen, 2014).

The study aims to evaluate government transparency and build public trust based on what open data initiative projects make possible. By scrutinizing existing literature, case studies, and different recorded experiences across countries, we aim to identify several factors that contribute to helping to explain the possible scenarios that could lead to the success or failure of open data policies. In addition, this study reviews previous challenges and opportunities in the implementation of open



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data initiatives in various political and cultural environments. The literature review (Davies & Bawa, 2020), has indicated that the lack of clear legal frameworks and issues related to privacy may slow down and hinder the adoption of open data. Varying public perception raises questions and shapes the success of these initiatives for long-term sustainability. Scholars have also pointed out how user-friendly interfaces remain a hallmark in ensuring accessibility and engagement with open data platforms (Lourenço, 2015). Policymakers will benefit from these findings to know how to build a climate of greater openness and restore public confidence (Smith, 2023).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Open Government Data: Concepts and Principles

Open government data refers to the proactive disclosure of government information in accessible, usable, and readable formats (Attard et al., 2015). According to Ubaldi (2013), the factors of open data encompass completeness and comprehensiveness, timeliness, availability, technically operable format, non-discrimination policy, use of open standards, licensing, archival, and ease of use policy, and cost for usage. These factors are designed to ensure that government data is not only available, but also accessible and usable for the benefit of citizens, businesses, and other stakeholders. Moreover, the quality and reliability of information are crucial for fostering public trust in open data initiatives (Janssen et al., 2012).

2.2 Transparency and its Role in Governance

Transparency is one of the temporal dimensions of governance and refers to the sharing of information, rules, plans, processes, and activities, by the government itself (Grimmelikhuijsen and Welch, 2012). One of the important dimensions of good governance enables citizens to monitor their actions hold their governments accountable and make informed decisions on public interest, to which transparency is concerned (Bentot et al., 2010). Consequently, open data initiatives are considered as a means of increasing transparency by giving access to government information to citizens. Transparency is said to enhance citizen's confidence and decrease corruption, especially in the government (Bauhr & Grimes, 2014).

2.3 Public Trust Determinants

Various constructs which are intertwined with several factors are delivered in the public trust for the government. It includes perceived competence, honesty, integrity, and goodwill of public institutions (Grimmelikhuijsen & Meijer, 2014). (de Fine Licht et al., 2014) argue that transparency has a positive effect on trust, as the relationship between transparency and trust is not mutually exclusive. This study examines the current understanding of how open data initiatives may influence public trust in the government. The research (Hood & Heald, 2006), argues that too much transparency often backfires and sometimes leads to public skepticism whenever complicated issues of decision-making are revealed.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study uses a systematic literature review approach to synthesize literature that focuses on open data initiatives, transparency, and public trust. The review process involves the following:

- a) Find out the list of scholarly databases and search keywords.
- b) Claims matching of the selected articles using inclusion and exclusion criteria defined before the actual search.



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- c) Consequently, data extraction and quality assessment of studies that were included in the review were determined.
- d) Then followed by the thematic analysis of the overall findings.

Furthermore, the actual case studies from various countries are used to illustrate actual real-world experiences of the open data initiatives. These case studies are analyzed using a comparative approach to identify common themes, challenges, and best practices.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Effectiveness of Open Data Initiatives in Enhancing Transparency

The analysis of existing literature and case studies indicate that open data initiatives, for the most part, have generally been successful in improving or making a positive change in government transparency. Different countries have reported increased access to government information and a trend in the improvement of public understanding regarding government operations (Zuiderwijk & Janssen, 2014). The level of citizen engagement with the data can significantly influence the overall success of these initiatives (Harrison et al., 2012). However, the effectiveness of such initiatives will vary in contrast to factors such as quality of data, usability, and the extent of the government's commitment to openness (Worthy, 2016).

4.2 Impact on Public Trust

The representation of the relationship between open data initiatives and public trust is observably complex. Some of the studies suggest that higher levels of transparency resulted in enhanced levels of trust in the government (Grimmelikhuisen et al., 2013), whereas, others show that the impact is either limited or negative in some cases (Porumbescu, 2017). Factors such as pre-existing trust levels, culture and politics, and citizens' data literacy levels seem to moderate the effect of open data on trust. The type of information disclosed and how it is structured can also influence citizens' perceptions and levels of trust (de Fine Licht, 2014).

4.3 Challenges in Implementing Open Data Initiatives

Some of the barriers that affect the effectiveness of implementing Open data initiatives are; (Ubaldi., 2013). Implies that the quality of the data most of the time is not well defined or standardized thus a challenge to users as they try to understand datasets. Confidentiality and secure information are compromised after the release of information that would compromise the breach of public trust. Many users are unaware of open data or know how it is used or don't possess the necessary skills to utilize it effectively. Moreover, (Janssen et al., 2012)., suggest that government agencies and authorities lack the resources and technological capacity to set up open data programs. Priorities set within government agencies divert attention and funding away from open data efforts, which amplifies the issues faced (Bertot et al., 2010). This is because bureaucracies tend to react slowly to change, hence, the delay in taking, implementing, and injecting open data initiatives.

4.4 Successful Strategies and Best Practices

The study also proposes several strategies, which have been widely recommended in the actualization of benefits from open data. Included within these areas is the establishment of open data policies and Procedures that act as a guide to the Implementation of these policies. Moreover, it must continue investing in data infrastructure and guarantee data interconnectivity to make investing data more accessible and usable (Zuiderwijk et al., 2014). Collaboration between the government, civil society, and the private sector plays a role in enhancing open data's impact. Data literacy and civic education

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programs empower citizens to engage and benefit from open data. Promoting transparency in data-sharing processes can help build and encourage public trust in using open data (Harrison et al., 2012). To establish feedback mechanisms to improve data quality and relevance (Magalhaes et al., 2013).

5. IMPLICATION AND RECOMMENDATION

The findings of the study show significant implications for policymakers and public administrators. Open data, which refers to the public availability of government data and information for public access and use, increased in its trend as a tool for promoting transparency and accountability in governance. However, its effect on public trust is not automatically assured, but rather is imperative for governments to take a holistic approach in deploying open data strategies.

5.1 Implication

Overall, while open data as activities seeking greater transparency of the government can serve the purpose, increasing public trust is not a certainty. In point form the paper enumerates the following point:

Open data may not guarantee an increase in trust in government institutions.

It also showed that open data programs that do not pay much attention to privacy and security can lead to breaches of public trust. Lacking such an effective guard, the leakage of some materials that are to be classified could occur and would result in a loss of public confidence.

Open data is thus expansive in implication for governance and in its conception of political citizenship. The following paper aims to investigate its long-term consequences for the involvement of citizens with government and policy-making processes. This will generate an understanding of how open data initiatives may redesign public governance systems.

5.2 Recommendation

Governments should develop comprehensive strategies for holistic open data. To address both the technical and social aspects of implementation. This is to ensure the availability of data in a structured format while considering social impact and public engagement. For public administrators to invest in data quality, usability, and accessibility in the maximization of the benefits of open data. To make sure people use relevant and credible information to improve the results of open data initiatives for the benefit of citizens.

One of the core values of the use of open data to empower citizens is civic engagement. The governments should ensure that civic education is conducted to allow the members of the public to understand the importance of data that they need to use while participating in governance. Although offering certainty in responding to privacy as well as security, important for governments to implement to make certain openness data projects remain credible to citizens. Measurement of privacy security is required to safeguard identification information to support the credibility of government open data.

6. AUTHORS CONTRIBUTION

The authors agreed to have no connections or engagements with any group or body that provides financial and non-financial assistance for the topics and resources covered in the article.

7. CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declared that no potential conflicts of interest concerning the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.



8. PLAGIARISM POLICY

The authors declare that any kind of violation of plagiarism, copyright, and ethical matters will be handled by all authors. Journalists and editors are not liable for the aforesaid matters.

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