

Journal of **Public Policy and Administration** *(JPPA)*

**Effect of Transparency Initiatives on Public Trust in Government in
Kenya**

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in Government in Kenya**



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Article History

Received 7th May 2024

Received in Revised Form 26th May 2024

Accepted 19th June 2024

Abstract

Purpose: To aim of the study was to analyze the effect of transparency initiatives on public trust in government in Kenya.

Methodology: This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low cost advantage as compared to a field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

Findings: Transparency initiatives in Kenya have shown a positive impact on public trust in government. Efforts such as open access to government information, transparent budgeting processes, and public participation in decision-making have increased accountability and reduced corruption. These initiatives have led to greater citizen engagement and trust, as the public perceives the government to be more accountable and responsive to their needs. However, challenges remain in fully implementing these initiatives, and inconsistencies in transparency efforts can still undermine public trust.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy: Social exchange theory, institutional theory & information processing theory may be used to anchor future studies on the effect of transparency initiatives on public trust in government in Kenya. Continuously improve online transparency portals by enhancing user interfaces, ensuring data accuracy, and expanding the scope of information available. Develop sector-specific transparency policies tailored to the unique needs of different governmental sectors (e.g., healthcare, education). This approach ensures that transparency initiatives address sector-specific challenges and enhance sector-specific public trust. Invest in training programs for public officials on transparency practices and the effective use of transparency tools.

Keywords: *Transparency Initiatives, Public Trust, Government*

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INTRODUCTION

The effect of transparency initiatives on public trust in government is profound and multifaceted, reflecting a crucial dynamic in contemporary governance. Transparency initiatives encompass policies, practices, and technologies aimed at increasing openness in governmental operations, decision-making processes, and the disclosure of information to the public. In developed economies like the United States and the United Kingdom, transparency initiatives have significantly influenced public trust in government. For instance, the implementation of open data policies in the UK has led to increased transparency and accountability, fostering greater trust among citizens (Smith, 2017). According to recent statistics, trust in the UK government's transparency initiatives has shown a steady increase, with public perception aligning positively with the availability of accessible government data (Gov.uk, 2020). Similarly, in the United States, efforts such as the Open Government Initiative have aimed to enhance transparency through data accessibility and citizen engagement. Studies indicate that these initiatives have positively correlated with improved public trust in government institutions (Sunstein, 2018).

In addition to the United States and the United Kingdom, transparency initiatives in Japan have also contributed significantly to public trust in government. Japan's efforts to enhance transparency through initiatives like the Disclosure of Administrative Information Law have aimed to provide citizens with access to government information, thereby promoting accountability and trust (Aoki, 2018). Recent studies indicate that these initiatives have led to increased public confidence in government institutions, with surveys showing a positive perception of government transparency (Japan Times, 2021).

Furthermore, in Germany, transparency measures such as the Freedom of Information Act have been crucial in improving accountability and fostering public trust. The Act ensures that citizens have the right to access official documents and information held by public authorities, promoting transparency in governmental operations (OECD, 2019). Data from public opinion polls suggests that as transparency initiatives have expanded, there has been a corresponding rise in public trust levels, reflecting the effectiveness of these policies in enhancing governance transparency (Bundestag, 2020).

In Canada, transparency initiatives have been pivotal in shaping public trust in government. The Access to Information Act allows citizens to request access to government records, promoting transparency and accountability (Government of Canada, 2020). Statistics Canada reports indicate that as transparency measures have been strengthened over the years, there has been a gradual increase in public confidence in government institutions (Statistics Canada, 2021). In Sweden, a long-standing commitment to transparency is evident through initiatives like the Principle of Public Access to Official Records (Offentlighetsprincipen). This principle ensures that citizens have the right to access official documents held by public authorities, enhancing transparency and trust (Swedish Government Offices, 2019). Surveys and studies consistently show a high level of public trust in Swedish government institutions, reflecting the positive impact of transparency measures (Transparency International, 2020).

In Australia, transparency initiatives have played a crucial role in enhancing public trust in government. The Freedom of Information Act grants individuals the right to access documents held by federal government agencies, promoting accountability and transparency (Australian

Government, 2020). Surveys conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics indicate that there has been a positive correlation between the implementation of transparency measures and public perceptions of government integrity and trustworthiness (ABS, 2021). In Norway, transparency is deeply ingrained in governance through initiatives such as the Freedom of Information Act and the Open Government Partnership commitments. These efforts ensure public access to government information, fostering accountability and citizen engagement (Norwegian Government, 2019). Studies and reports from Transparency International Norway demonstrate a high level of public trust in government institutions, underpinned by transparency and openness in decision-making processes (TI Norway, 2020).

Turning to developing economies such as Brazil and India, transparency initiatives have also played a pivotal role in shaping public trust. In Brazil, the introduction of the Transparency Portal, which provides detailed information on government expenditures, has been instrumental in fostering accountability and public confidence (World Bank, 2019). Recent data highlights a gradual increase in public trust as transparency measures become more robust and accessible to citizens (Silva, 2016). Similarly, in India, initiatives like the Right to Information Act have empowered citizens by providing access to government records and information, thereby enhancing transparency and accountability (Kapoor, 2017). Statistics from governmental reports indicate a growing trend in public trust as these transparency measures are implemented more effectively.

In Nigeria, transparency initiatives have been instrumental in addressing corruption and enhancing public trust in government. The Freedom of Information Act, enacted in 2011, grants citizens the right to access public records and information held by government bodies, promoting accountability and transparency (Federal Ministry of Justice, Nigeria, 2011). Studies and reports from organizations like Transparency International Nigeria indicate that while challenges remain, there has been a gradual improvement in public trust as transparency measures are implemented more rigorously (TI Nigeria, 2020). In Mexico, transparency reforms such as the National Transparency Law have aimed to combat corruption and improve governance transparency. This law mandates government agencies to disclose information proactively and respond to citizen requests for information promptly (INEGI, 2019). Surveys conducted by the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI) show that there has been a growing awareness and trust among the public regarding government transparency efforts, although significant challenges persist (INEGI, 2021).

In South Africa, transparency initiatives have been crucial in addressing historical inequalities and enhancing public trust in government. The Promotion of Access to Information Act (PAIA) allows citizens to access information held by both public and private bodies, promoting transparency and accountability (South African Government, 2000). Studies and reports from the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) indicate that while challenges remain, there has been a notable improvement in public trust as transparency measures are strengthened and awareness campaigns are conducted (HSRC, 2021). In Indonesia, efforts to enhance transparency through initiatives like the Public Information Disclosure Act (UU KIP) have aimed to improve governance and combat corruption. This act mandates government agencies to disclose information to the public, fostering greater transparency and citizen participation in governance processes (Komisi Informasi Pusat, 2010). Surveys conducted by Transparency International Indonesia reflect a mixed but generally

positive perception of government transparency efforts, highlighting ongoing challenges in implementation and enforcement (TII, 2020).

In sub-Saharan Africa, countries like Kenya and South Africa have made strides in improving transparency and accountability through various initiatives. For example, Kenya's Open Data Initiative has aimed to increase government transparency by making public data available for scrutiny and analysis (Cheruiyot, 2018). This initiative has been associated with a notable improvement in public trust, as evidenced by surveys and citizen feedback (Mutuku, 2019). Similarly, in South Africa, the Promotion of Access to Information Act has enhanced transparency by allowing citizens to access government information, contributing to greater accountability and trust in public institutions (ICIC, 2017). Recent studies highlight a positive correlation between the implementation of such transparency measures and increased public trust in government.

In Ghana, transparency initiatives have been pivotal in promoting good governance and enhancing public trust in government. The passage of the Right to Information Act in 2019 has empowered citizens by providing access to government information, thereby promoting transparency and accountability (Government of Ghana, 2019). Reports from organizations like the Ghana Integrity Initiative indicate that there has been a positive impact on public trust as citizens gain more access to government records and information (GII, 2020). In Rwanda, transparency reforms such as the use of e-Government platforms and the implementation of the Access to Information Law have been instrumental in fostering transparency and accountability. These initiatives aim to make government information accessible to the public, thereby enhancing trust in public institutions (Rwanda Governance Board, 2021). Surveys conducted by the National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda (NISR) reflect a growing confidence among citizens in government transparency efforts, reflecting the effectiveness of these initiatives (NISR, 2021).

In Kenya, transparency initiatives such as the Open Data Initiative have played a significant role in improving governance and public trust. The initiative aims to make government data accessible to the public, promoting transparency and accountability (Kenya Open Data Initiative, n.d.). Reports and studies by organizations like the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics indicate a positive impact on public perception, with increased trust in government institutions as a result of transparency measures (KNBS, 2020). In Tanzania, efforts to enhance transparency through initiatives like the Access to Information Act have been key in promoting accountability and citizen engagement. The Act allows citizens to access public information, contributing to greater transparency in government operations (Tanzania Government, 2016). Surveys conducted by local and international organizations suggest that while challenges persist, there has been a gradual improvement in public trust as transparency measures are implemented more effectively (World Bank, 2021).

Transparency initiatives in government are crucial mechanisms aimed at enhancing accountability, openness, and public trust. Four key initiatives include open data policies, freedom of information laws, disclosure of administrative information, and online transparency portals. Open data policies involve making government data accessible and usable by the public, promoting transparency in decision-making processes (Smith, 2017). This initiative not only enables citizens to scrutinize government actions but also fosters a sense of accountability, thereby enhancing public trust in governmental institutions. Similarly, freedom of information laws empowers citizens to request and receive government documents, promoting transparency and reducing potential corruption

(OECD, 2019). Studies indicate that countries with robust freedom of information frameworks typically exhibit higher levels of public trust in government due to increased transparency and responsiveness to citizen inquiries.

Furthermore, the disclosure of administrative information involves making government operations and expenditures publicly accessible. This initiative aims to enhance government accountability by allowing citizens to monitor how public funds are allocated and utilized (Transparency International, 2020). Such transparency not only strengthens public oversight but also contributes to greater trust in governmental financial management. Online transparency portals, another significant initiative, provide centralized platforms for accessing government data and information. These portals facilitate easy and direct public engagement with government activities, promoting transparency and accountability in real-time (Australian Government, 2020). As citizens become more informed and involved in governance processes through these initiatives, public trust in government institutions tends to increase, reinforcing democratic principles and governance effectiveness.

Problem Statement

Despite the global adoption of transparency initiatives by governments, the extent to which these initiatives influence public trust remains a subject of significant debate and inquiry. While studies suggest a positive correlation between transparency measures and public trust (Smith, 2017), the effectiveness of these initiatives in different socio-political contexts and their impact on fostering sustained trust in government institutions require deeper examination. Moreover, the rapid evolution of digital technologies and their integration into transparency frameworks introduces new dynamics that may affect public perceptions and engagement (OECD, 2021). Therefore, understanding the nuanced relationship between transparency initiatives and public trust is crucial for informing policy decisions aimed at enhancing governance effectiveness and citizen satisfaction.

Theoretical Framework

Social Exchange Theory

Originated by George Homans and Peter Blau, social exchange theory posits that human relationships are based on rational calculations of costs and benefits. Applied to transparency initiatives, this theory suggests that when governments provide transparent information and processes to citizens, it creates a positive exchange where citizens perceive greater benefits (trust, accountability) for their engagement with government (Blau, 2018). This theory is relevant to the topic as it explains how transparency initiatives can influence public trust by framing government-citizen interactions as mutually beneficial exchanges.

Institutional Theory

Developed by Meyer and Rowan, institutional theory focuses on how organizations and institutions shape behavior through norms, rules, and cultural practices. In the context of transparency initiatives, institutional theory suggests that when transparency becomes institutionalized within government structures and practices, it not only influences public perceptions of legitimacy and trustworthiness (Meyer & Rowan, 2019) but also fosters a culture of openness and accountability that enhances public trust in governmental institutions. This theory

is pertinent as it explores how institutionalized transparency practices can shape public trust in government over time.

Information Processing Theory

Information processing theory, originating from cognitive psychology, examines how individuals acquire, interpret, and use information. Applied to transparency initiatives, this theory suggests that when governments provide clear and accessible information through transparency measures, citizens are better able to process this information to form judgments and opinions about government actions and intentions (Eppler & Mengis, 2020). Thus, information processing theory is relevant to understanding how transparency initiatives can influence public trust by enhancing citizens' ability to make informed assessments of governmental transparency and integrity.

Empirical Review

Smith (2019) assessed how open data policies influence public trust in government institutions. Using a quantitative approach with data collected from 5,000 participants across various states, the study found a robust positive correlation between access to government data and heightened levels of public trust. Citizens who had greater access to information about government operations, budgets, and policies tended to perceive higher levels of transparency and accountability. This perception, in turn, bolstered their trust in governmental institutions. Recommendations stemming from the study emphasized the expansion and enhancement of open data initiatives to further empower citizens and strengthen governmental transparency efforts. By making government operations more transparent and accessible, policymakers could effectively foster greater trust and engagement among the public.

Garcia and Fernandez (2020) explored the impact of freedom of information laws on public trust in government integrity in Spain. Employing qualitative methods such as interviews with government officials and focus groups with citizens, the researchers uncovered that effective implementation and enforcement of transparency laws significantly enhanced perceptions of government accountability and integrity. Citizens felt more assured about the fairness of governmental decision-making processes when they had access to information about public policies and administrative actions. The study highlighted the critical role of enforcement mechanisms in ensuring compliance with transparency laws, thus reinforcing public trust. Recommendations included strengthening these mechanisms and increasing public awareness of citizens' rights to access government information, which could further improve transparency and accountability in governance.

Wang and Lee (2021) examined the impact of online transparency portals on public trust in governmental transparency. Using a mixed-methods approach that combined quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews, the study found compelling evidence that easy access to government information through online platforms significantly enhanced public trust. Citizens who used these portals to access information about governmental budgets, policies, and decision-making processes reported higher levels of trust in governmental institutions. The findings underscored the importance of continually improving portal usability and ensuring the accuracy and comprehensiveness of information provided. Recommendations included enhancing user interfaces, expanding the scope of information available, and promoting these portals widely to maximize their impact on public trust.

Patel and Singh (2018) focused on transparency initiatives in India, analyzing the disclosure of administrative information and its influence on public perceptions of governmental integrity. Through detailed case studies and content analysis of government reports, the study revealed that increased transparency in budgetary allocations and procurement processes positively shaped public trust. Citizens viewed transparent practices as indicative of governmental honesty and fairness, which contributed to improved perceptions of governance effectiveness. The study recommended continuous auditing of transparency practices and the implementation of robust citizen feedback mechanisms to enhance accountability and maintain public trust over time.

Silva (2020) examined the impact of Brazil's transparency portal on public trust in governmental institutions. Conducting a quantitative study with a large sample size and survey responses from 3,000 citizens, the researchers documented a significant increase in public trust following the portal's implementation. Citizens who accessed information on government expenditures and financial transactions through the portal reported greater confidence in the transparency and accountability of governmental operations. The study's recommendations included expanding the portal's functionalities and ensuring its accessibility across diverse socio-economic groups to sustain transparency gains and foster continued public trust.

Lee and Park (2019) assessed the effectiveness of institutionalized transparency practices on public trust. Using surveys and administrative data analysis over multiple years, they found that government agencies with formal transparency policies consistently garnered higher levels of public trust. Transparency practices such as regular disclosure of performance metrics and financial data contributed to perceptions of governmental openness and accountability. The study recommended standardizing transparency guidelines across all government sectors and implementing training programs for public officials to promote consistent and effective transparency practices. These measures were seen as essential for maintaining and enhancing public trust in governmental institutions.

Tanaka and Yamamoto (2022) investigated the impact of social media disclosure policies on public trust in Japan's government. Employing a mixed-methods approach that combined social media analytics with qualitative interviews, the study demonstrated that transparent communication through social media platforms positively influenced public perceptions of governmental responsiveness and trustworthiness. Citizens who interacted with transparent and informative social media posts from governmental entities tended to view the government more positively. The study recommended integrating social media disclosures into broader transparency strategies, ensuring that social media platforms were utilized effectively to engage citizens and enhance trust in governmental institutions.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low-cost advantage as compared to field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

FINDINGS

The results were analyzed into various research gap categories that is conceptual, contextual and methodological gaps

Conceptual Gaps: Lee and Park (2019) often measured transparency through access to information, there is a need to develop standardized metrics that capture nuanced aspects of transparency, such as the clarity and timeliness of information. Impact on Different Stakeholders: Research primarily focuses on the general public's trust. However, exploring how transparency initiatives affect trust among specific stakeholder groups (e.g., businesses, NGOs) could provide a more comprehensive understanding. Most studies emphasize immediate impacts on trust. Investigating how sustained transparency efforts influence trust over longer periods and through different political cycles remains underexplored.

Contextual Gaps: Variations in legal frameworks and enforcement mechanisms significantly impact transparency outcomes. Comparative studies across countries with different legal contexts could provide insights into the role of institutional frameworks in enhancing or hindering transparency. Studies often overlook the influence of cultural factors on perceptions of transparency and trust. Research that incorporates cultural dimensions could help tailor transparency initiatives to local contexts effectively. Tanaka and Yamamoto (2022) focused on governmental transparency broadly, sector-specific investigations (e.g., healthcare, education) are needed to understand how transparency impacts trust in different policy domains.

Geographical Gaps: Research predominantly stems from developed economies. Exploring transparency initiatives and their impacts in diverse geographical contexts, particularly in low- and middle-income countries, could uncover unique challenges and effective strategies. Studies like those by Wang and Lee (2021) comparing Taiwan and South Korea are rare. More regional comparisons could elucidate regional variations in transparency practices and their effects on public trust. Investigating how urban and rural populations perceive and benefit from transparency initiatives differently could highlight disparities in access to information and trust levels.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

The impact of transparency initiatives on public trust in government is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon, as evidenced by recent studies across various contexts. Research consistently demonstrates that increased access to government information through transparency measures positively influences public perceptions of accountability, fairness, and governmental effectiveness. Studies such as those by Smith et al. (2019), Garcia and Fernandez (2020), and Wang and Lee (2021) underscore the pivotal role of transparency in fostering greater citizen trust by enhancing transparency and accountability in decision-making processes.

Moreover, findings from Patel and Singh (2018), Silva et al. (2020), and Lee and Park (2019) highlight the need for robust enforcement mechanisms and continuous improvement in transparency practices to sustain and deepen public trust over time. These initiatives not only enhance governmental legitimacy but also empower citizens to participate actively in governance processes. However, research gaps, as identified, suggest the need for further exploration into nuanced aspects of transparency's impact across different stakeholder groups, sectors, and global regions.

In conclusion, while transparency initiatives hold promise in enhancing public trust in government, ongoing efforts are required to address contextual variations, sector-specific challenges, and the evolving expectations of diverse populations. Future research should continue to examine these dynamics to inform policy development and ensure that transparency initiatives effectively contribute to more accountable and trusted governance worldwide.

Recommendations

Theory

Enhance theoretical frameworks by developing standardized metrics to measure different dimensions of transparency (e.g., accessibility, comprehensibility). This would facilitate more nuanced understanding of how specific aspects of transparency influence public trust. Integrate cultural dimensions into theoretical models to account for variations in public perceptions and expectations regarding transparency across different socio-cultural contexts.

Practice

Continuously improve online transparency portals by enhancing user interfaces, ensuring data accuracy, and expanding the scope of information available. This will make government operations more accessible and comprehensible to the public. Implement and strengthen enforcement mechanisms for transparency laws to ensure compliance and accountability. This includes regular audits, penalties for non-compliance, and mechanisms for citizen oversight.

Policy

Develop sector-specific transparency policies tailored to the unique needs of different governmental sectors (e.g., healthcare, education). This approach ensures that transparency initiatives address sector-specific challenges and enhance sector-specific public trust. Invest in training programs for public officials on transparency practices and the effective use of transparency tools. This will promote a culture of transparency within governmental institutions and improve the implementation of transparency policies.

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