E-governance as a new public administration paradigm: a rhetoric or reality?

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Received 05 October 2023
Received in rev. form 12 Nov. 2023
Accepted 18 November 2023

Keywords:
Public Administration; public administration, NPM, post-NPM, ICTs, e-Government, e-Governance

JEL Classification:
H10, H19

ABSTRACT

This study was motivated by the need to shift from the illusory perception of longing for e-Governance to be declared a new paradigm of Public Administration. Public Administration is said to be static, but yet dynamic. Implying that the dynamics of Public Administration can incorporate electronic governance (e-Governance) to improve matters of governance, public service delivery, accountability and transparency in public affairs. However, even with an incongruous adoption and implementation of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) within the South African government, this study sheds light on the empirical and systematic evidence and analytical distinction between e-Governance and public administration. The analysis suggests that the complexity and implication of e-Governance via the use of ICTs may enhance government efficacy. Still, it cannot be entirely trusted in maintaining administration and government-businesses-citizens interaction partly due to its rapid technological changes and the various conditions of its implementation within different nations including South Africa. With the aid of qualitative research methods, which heavily relied on secondary data gathered from scholarly journals, academic books, trusted databases and websites, this study reveal that there is scant evidence to support research in incorporating e-Governance as a new paradigm of Public Administration due to the imbalance, network failures, inadequate ICTs infrastructure to govern in a democratic manner which include all citizens. This study concludes that e-Governance is already analysed from a public administration dynamic and complementary perspective implying that it is an analytically and structurally incomplete reform to take its full form as a new Public Administration paradigm due to its rapid technological changes.

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Introduction

Over the past years governments across the globe have heightened appreciation and understanding of the various facets of electronic government also known as e-Government (Department for Effective Public Management, 2023). Despite the potential benefits of e-Government, it is also considered and utilised as a resource to fight and alleviate poverty, political instability, widespread social unrest, geopolitical confrontation, trade wars, crime, corruption, and many other attacks for governments within the international milieu (World Economic Forum, 2023, p.6). Although, e-Government and e-Governance carries the potential towards efficiency in the delivery of public goods and services, it can also be used to the advantage of cyber-wars to allow terrorism and trade wars to abound e.g. the Russia-Ukraine war and Israel-Palestine wars (World Economic Forum, 2023, p.7). This could contribute to cyber intrusions onto government databases, websites and could cause serious damage and destruction of both public and private ICT infrastructures (Silaškova, 2022). Inasmuch as e-Government is attractive and efficient in providing data and information, the same data and information may be manipulated, distributed and used to identify governments’ weakness in their planning, administration and execution of policies (Silaškova, 2022).

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Scholars in the field and practice of public administration, information technology, business administration, and governments have emphasized on the efficacy of e-Governance in reducing costs and enhancing public service delivery (Heginbotham, 2006; Mukonza, 2014; Blom & Uwizeyimana, 2020; Begum, 2023; Molobela, 2023). Multiple benefits have been noticeable including but not limited to the transformative nature of e-Governance in fostering transparency, accountability, public participation, and its ability to enhance democracy (Molobela, 2023). However, one of the major concerns of e-Governance is the issue of privacy and security not only of the citizenry, but of the government and private businesses (Munyoko & Maharaj, 2019, p.1). In contrast to this, African countries including South Africa still experience unequal access to e-Government services, issues of privacy and security, and the incompatibility of government computer systems hinders e-Governance to become a complete success (Munyoko & Maharaj, 2019, p.1).

The extreme contestation and politicisation of adopting e-Governance as a new paradigm in Public Administration is not new (Mukonza, 2014, p.499). It is worth noting that e-Governance is not original with Public Administration as it was inherited from electronic commerce also known as e-commerce (Bannister & Connolly, 2012). As such, the private sector continues to be far ahead of governments in terms of business efficiency, and by the time governments attempted to engage in debates, parliamentary discussions, public lectures and research to create policy to regulate e-Government, governments already became vulnerable towards possible political and hackers attacks (Bannister & Connolly, 2012). Although, e-Governance can link the national, provincial and local governments through the facilitation of information sharing, it not entirely possible to adopt e-Governance as new paradigm as this study contend that both the New Public Management and Governance are primary paradigms of e-Governance. From this perspective, e-Governance remain a dynamic apparatus meaning it can offer governments, businesses and the citizenry with future preparedness of events, and government personnel can capitalise on the usage of ICTs for executing public policy, reduce human resource and financial costs of proving government services (Department for Effective Public Management, 2023). Some scholars argues that e-Governance is just a fever for the Post-New Public Management paradigm without actual empirical and systematic evidence to support its emergence as a new Public Administration paradigm (Dalingwater, 2014). From this point of view, this study sought to answer the following research questions:

i. What is e-Governance in the context of Public Administration?

ii. Which Public Administration paradigm is suited for e-Governance?

iii. What is the effect of e-Governance on Politics-Administration?

iv. What are major arguments, findings and discussions of e-Governance as a new Public Administration?

Based on the above-mentioned research questions, e-Governance has over the recent years gained much momentum and the significant interest from both practitioners and academics and have altered the way government organisations govern, interact, share information and collaborate with both businesses and citizens (Department for Effective Public Management, 2023). Today, e-Governance forms a critical resource for government to facilitate public tasks and interaction with various stakeholders including the international community (Molobela, 2023). Despite the existing research on e-Governance trends, there is still a tremendous need to initiate and conduct an empirical and comprehensive review to scrutinize various findings to define, analyse, and conclude on surrounding issues of whether or not e-Governance should be declared a new Public Administration paradigm (Islam & Ehsan, 2023). This study shed a light on defining e-Governance within the context of Public Administration, framing a suitable framework for e-Governance, the effect of e-Governance on politics and administration spheres, pros and cons of e-Governance and recent arguments and findings on whether or not e-Governance may be declared a new paradigm of Public Administration.

**Literature Review**

Within the context of Public Administration paradigm, e-Governance has gained much momentum to an extent that it is impossible for today’s government to function properly without the use of the internet and technological applications (ICTs). Due to the paradigm shift caused by the rapid development of e-Government, various scholars have been attempting to advocate for e-Governance to be added as a new paradigm of Public Administration. Although, e-Governance has influenced government to transition from traditional public administration to the modern and currently postmodern public administration, the following sections begins with a theoretical and conceptual background and seeks to argue, clarify, define, and position e-Governance within Public Administration and whether or not e-Governance can be permanently adopted as a new paradigm considering its benefits and challenges.

**Theoretical and Conceptual Background**

According to Chadwick (2023) the use of ICTs in government was first suggest between 1950s and 1960s as the scientific ideas of administration. However, today e-Government is understood as the New Public Management and the Post-New Management reforms of the early 1990 up to date, the explosion of the internet usage gave rise to the ideas of implementing e-Government systems first in the United State of America and European countries and then followed by both Asian and African countries (Dalingwater, 2014; Chadwick, 2023). For instance, the Labour Party of 1997 in the United Kingdom requested that government put electronic service delivery at the forefront program of digitalising government services (Chadwick, 2023). Another case was delivered by the former Deputy President of the Republic of South Africa Mr. Thako Mbeki in 1995 at the G7 summit in Brussels when he illustrated that "we must strive to ensure that each individual whatsoever his or her station in life play a meaningful role in decision making and in
governance. One of the ways that this can be done is to ensure that citizens have access to information” (Jaarsveldt & Naidoo, 2003, p.138). It can be attested that not all South Africans today have access to valuable information to make meaningful decisions, otherwise, the whole country would be in a better governance conditions, particularly within local communities.

E-Governance differs quite substantially from the Public Administration as Governance and New Public Management paradigms. Although, e-Governance carries some aspects of the New Public Management and Governance namely efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery it is crucial to note how they all differs. Certain public administration scholars like Mukonza (2014) seem to suggest that since e-Governance comprises some aspects of the New Public Management and therefore it means it a new paradigm, hence, it is clear that Public Administration is static, yet still dynamic aspect (Henry, 1975; Thornhill, 2006; Louw, 2012). This infer that e-Governance is one the Public Administration complementary and transformative mechanism. Mukonza (2014, p.499) has made positive and insightful contributions on how e-Governance via the use of ICTs brought about massive changes in structures, functions, governance, public participation and public service delivery. Therefore, the following school of thoughts are presented to argue and add to the theoretical analysis as whether or not e-Governance present a new paradigm.

In support of the New Public Management and Governance paradigms, e-Governance comprises two schools of thought. First, it uses digital network technologies to allow the government to establish and maintain government-businesses-citizens’ interaction and involvement (Chadwick, 2023). E-Governance further offers both the state and the public to enhance political engagements, and allow the government to reshape its traditional structures into an open, responsive, and interactive network platform to transform bureaucratic institutions to adapt into the digital world while avoiding service delivery disruptions because of scheduled working timeframes (Jaarsveldt & Naidoo, 2003). This suggests that government had to transition from the traditional to the electronic ways of sharing information so that it can respond faster to the needs of the citizens who in turns have the influence to aggressively provide comments and request feedback mechanisms namely government emails, online discussion platforms and for government websites to remain interactive (Jaarsveldt & Naidoo, 2003).

The second school of thought of e-Governance suggests both e-Government and e-Governance requires less public participation and involvement in designing and shaping online services offered to citizens and businesses at large (Chadwick, 2023). Although, e-Governance saves costs by the reduction of internal organisational staff through the ability of the government to automate some routine tasks into a computer systems and databases (Jaarsveldt & Naidoo, 2003). The problem that emanates from the concept of e-Governance is the use of both intranet and internet to access, join and coordinate certain activities and deliver services that the government used to deliver in a physical form. This suggests that when the government encounters network issues, then online services may not be delivered until the issue is attended. Frankly speaking, e-Government and e-Governance was designed in such a manner that it came with pre-selected services such as healthcare information, tax returns, identity, driver’s license, permits and password applications and so forth (Jaarsveldt & Naidoo, 2003). From this context, the pre-selected services have been dominant since the introduction of e-Government reforms (Chadwick, 2023). Therefore, e-Governance still need to undergo a tremendous theoretical and empirical process in order to be established as a permanent paradigm.

E-Governance within the context of Public Administration

Today, e-Governance is regarded as the most fundamental subject in both Information Technology and Public Administration (Begum, 2023; Islam & Ehsan, 2023; Molobela, 2023). From a global perspective, e-Governance within the context of both public and private sectors are actively committed in adopting technological advancements to improve public services (Department for Effective Public Management, 2023). In the context of Public Administration, there is no e-Governance without e-Government. This implies that e-Governance emanate from the main field of e-Government. E-Governance is the sub-concept or subset of e-Government (Mukonza, 2014, p.501). One of the major concerns in defining both concepts is that they are mostly defined in the context of information technology, which affects how they are understood from public administration perspective. This study attempts to define e-Governance from a public administration context as follows:

From public administration perspective borrowing from the substantial works of Signh and Sharma (2009); Bannister and Connolly (2012); Mukonza (2014); Bloma and Uwizeyimana (2020); and Molobela (2023) e-Governance can refer to the adoption and application of ICTs for delivering public services online, sharing and exchanging of data and information to ensure interaction with multiple stakeholders through the integration of different standing-alone approaches amongst government-to-government (G2G), government-to-citizen (G2C), government-to-business (G2B), government-to-employees (G2E). In other words, e-Governance seeks to make public services to both citizens and businesses through ICTs (Bannister & Connolly, 2012). Government, businesses and citizens are the main target groups of e-Governance, hence it is necessary for e-Governance to be defined within the context of Public Administration.

In most cases, e-Government and e-Governance are used interchangeably, although the two terms are not entirely the same (Signh & Sharma, 2009). E-Government has to do with the application of the ICTs within public administration with the intent to incorporate organizational change, new skills, expertise and experience to enhance public services and transform democratic values and processes and also to strengthen accountability, transparency, and public participation (Signh & Sharma, 2009, p.2). In essence, e-Government in the context of Public Administration still lacks skills and expertise to maintain ICT governance (Molobela, 2023). This is because ICTs are typically under the umbrella of information technology, which requires additional expertise and experience that most public administration practitioners lack. From this point of view, it is worth noting that, e-Governance requires the utilization of ICTs to
help governments to govern in a manner that is satisfactorily and ensure that basic service needs are met while recognizing the significance of online democracy (e-democracy) through increased regulations and public policy-making processes.

E-Governance approaches are crucial in analysing whether or not e-Governance can be considered a new paradigm (Singh & Sharma, 2009; Sadashivam, 2010). Firstly, the G2C approach may offer citizens with various online services in an economical and efficient manner, and it can also strengthen the government-citizens’ relationship using technological advancements (Singh & Sharma, 2009, p.2). However, not every citizen has access to the internet, which could mean that the marginalised communities will be left out, and in times of electronic voting (e-voting which is still not yet implemented in South Africa). These citizens would fail to participate, and the government would be robbing such marginalised citizens of their democratic rights to vote and participate in government affairs (Molobela, 2023, p.110). Although, international statistics claims that the European Union, United States and Asia are ranked the top three regions, there is little evidence to prove that all of their communities including the marginalised groups are interconnected (Department for Effective Public Management, 2023). Secondly, the G2E approach may be one of the most successful models of e-Governance (Singh & Sharma, 2009, p.2). It has to do with interaction tools used to help the state to maintain government-employees’ relationship, to store information, and all kinds of government documents (Singh & Sharma, 2009, p.3). This means through e-Governance, public servants can use ICTs to compute and store data and information and disperse such information to colleagues with ease (Srivastava, Teo & Devaraj, 2016, p.511). Both employees and government can become paperless and enjoy the benefits of electronic payroll administration and electronic procurement (e-procurement) of goods and services (e.g. the PERSAL, LOGIS and BAS system used within South African departments). Because of G2E both employees and government can reap the electronic benefits such as e-training, and tech-learning for employees to be acquainted with the rapid technological changes of e-Governance (Srivastava et al., 2016).

Since the early 1990s, e-commerce had already undergone a tremendous transformation to improve e-products to customers, which influenced governments to consider the integration of e-forms into government recruitment processes (Igue, Alinsato & Agadjihouédé, 2020). Due to e-commerce and e-business, the third G2G approach play a pivotal role in maintaining government-government’s interaction and communication between government departments, institutions and authorities in order to keep each other well-informed and up-to-date with matters concerning both internal and external government affairs (Igue et al., 2020). Lastly, the G2B approach helps reduce costs and transaction time for both the government and businesses (Igue et al., 2020). G2B seeks to eliminate tedious procedures for businesses and provide instant information to enable digital communication and interaction with multiple enterprises altogether (Igue et al., 2020). Most importantly G2B allows businesses to navigate through government laws and regulations through government’s website content. Companies can be registered online, permits may be applied online, tax filling system is made easier through e-filling (e.g. South African Revenue Service’s e-filling system) and many other online services (Fraser, 2023).

Although, e-Government and e-Governance may be defined in multiple ways, it is still yet another complex phenomena for Public Administration to label it as a new paradigm. This study contend it is because e-Governance encounters numerous problems and that e-Governance within the context of public administration both as field and practice is less sufficient due to its complexities and variety of application requirements and architectural elements from information technology, science and technology, algorithm, software engineering, commerce, business, and public administration to name but a few.

The effect of e-Governance on Politics-Administration structures

Politics and administration is directly connected with public administration and e-Governance. From the substantial works of Woodrow Wilson (1887) “Administrative Science” who argued that politics sets the tasks for administration; to McLuhan (1964) “Understanding Media” who argued that new technologies will never be neutral with regard to cultural and social context”. Today McLuhan (1964) would imply that, e-Governance has managed to become one of the most radical innovation for the homogenisation of cultural diversities. Postman (1993) further indicated that every new technology carries a specific political agenda and is tied to a hidden ideology. Postman (1993) claims that:

“To a man with a pencil everything looks like a list. While to a man with a camera, everything looks like an image. Also to a man with a computer, everything looks like data. And lastly to a man with grade sheet, everything looks like a number”.

Based on the claims made, the question remains is “what could be the hidden political ideology of e-Governance?” e-Governance ideology is connected to issue of governance through data and information collection, information processing and dissemination (Zouridis & Thaens, 2003, p.172). For e-Governance, data and information becomes the core of politics and public administration. When e-Governance was adopted and implemented, traditional governments transitioned into information institutions. Because of politics signifying that people are imperfect, so shall they be when attempting to process and disseminate information (Zouridis & Thaens, 2003, p.172). Therefore, to avoid this dilemma, it can be argued that citizens may be served properly only when computers are programmed to process and disseminate information beyond scheduled timeframes to ensure efficiency (Zouridis & Thaens, 2003, p.172). Frankly speaking, the politics of e-Governance is characterised by information as public administration has become a matter of information (Zouridis & Thaens, 2003:172, p.169).

Information may be distorted, misleading and manipulated to suit political standing orders, particularly in times of political contestation and elections in order for a certain political party to emerge victorious (Zouridis & Thaens, 2003:172, p.169). Therefore,
the question would be “how do the public verify misleading versus credible information, particularly in relation to public affairs?” The first approach, the government should have a regulated platform on which credible information is dispersed concerning its affairs and establish a permanent government trademark. Secondly, major government announcements, new legislation and any changes made should be shared only by registered, trusted and reliable media platforms partnering with the state. Lastly, there should be independent ethics structures that hold any platform owners to account for any misleading information that could affect the livelihood of the citizenry. In addition to the sharing of information, it should be noted that politics-administration structures could cause support or hamper the success of e-Governance. As such e-Governance should be clearly defined within the context of politics-administration structures in order for citizen-centered services, information, new skills and public-private partnerships to have an effect on transparency, accountability and management of government resources (Jacobs, Rivett & Chemistro, 2019). Moreover, bureaucratologies in public administration is being reduced because of e-Governance as Jacobs et al. (2019) highlight that e-Governance enables government to achieve socio-economic development.

In a nutshell, e-Governance requires that politics-administration structures adopt and implement e-voting systems, and virtual community meetings to enhance public involvement in government and political affairs, decision-making and public policy designs (Molobela, 2023). Although, the South African government has been rejecting the e-voting system, political office bearers should be tech-skilled of the digital world, and they need to be attentive to the demands of communities and be cautious of ICTs programs that should be implemented so as to bring the government closer to the citizens (Munyoko & Maharaj, 2019). Despite the complexity and challenges of ICTs programs to make e-Governance a success, public managers, and IT specialists ought to work in a collaborative manner to make decisions and provide a strategic leadership in e-Government implementation (Louw, 2012). Technologically skilled professionals should be deployed within government to implement e-Government services and prioritise the need to achieve a digitally-connected-society. Politicians should also not treat e-Governance as disruptive factor that hinders political-administration structures to function traditionally, but a tool to enhance government’s efficiency in the delivery of public services (Louw, 2012). In fact, training and development of some politicians becomes very necessary as e-Government and e-Governance requires new set of skills in order to guarantee successful e-Government implementation (Chadwick, 2023).

**Pros and cons of e-Governance within public administration**

The acceptance and adoption of e-Governance if implemented effectively can offer profound benefits within the public administration context. E-Governance play a fundamental role in ensuring that government services are delivered to citizens with speed and efficiency, and can also offer quality government-citizens’ interaction. From this perspective, there are multiple advantages that e-Governance seems to offer within public administration. This include but not limited to access to information, better communication channels, improved government efficiency, and transparency.

**Access**

In the information age, South African citizens deserves unhindered access to government services regardless of their race, socio-economic status and location. Public internet terminals may be the best tools to help enhance accessibility to all preferred government services (Blom & Uwizeyimana, 2020). Customer experience can be enhanced through access to public services, and e-Governance technologies must be implemented to eliminate any barrier of accessibility.

**Electronic participation (e-participation)**

Public participation play a huge role in governance. Governments cannot claim effective or good governance without the involvement of the governed. This means that the governed must be allowed to provide inputs in all decisions that have the potential to control their daily lives. From this point of view, e-Governance through the application of the ICTs becomes a necessity to implement and design e-participation platforms that run smoothly even after scheduled public working hours. In so doing, e-democracy is being promoted and advocated for in all public affairs. Within this context, issues of e-procurement can be discussed and information concerning the procurement of goods by the government may be retrieved from the designed e-participation platforms. Fraud, crime, corruption and bribes may be reduced if several services such as e-passports, e-health, e-agriculture, smart identity cards, e-filling, and driver’s license are being accessed online. E-Governance could become a major success for the government.

**Government efficiency and transparency**

One of the most obvious advantages of e-Governance is government’s efficiency to transition from paper-based system to digital government system. This means that preferred public services can be digitalised, and e-Governance can help enhance administration and reduce the tedious paperwork and also save the government time and money that would have been lost through costliness administrative experiments. In addition, e-Governance can improve transparency by informing the public about new policies the government is attempting to promulgate and implement (Blom & Uwizeyimana, 2020). Establishing a strong government-citizens’ interaction through the application of ICTs can lead to better governance, accountability and transparency.

Despite numerous advantages of e-Governance, several disadvantages must be considered in order to prepare for a better public administration. Amongst others; digital divide, cyber-attacks, and ICT skills shortages appear to be common across the country. The disadvantages of e-Governance may cause the disintegration of a society if neglected and not thoroughly addressed.
Digital divide

One of the most common disadvantages of e-Governance is the negative effect of the digital divide across communities. Due to digital divide, various community still remain isolated and mostly this communities can be found within the marginalised areas (Molobela, 2023, p.109). The past segregation laws have partly caused a serious problem in creating a society that reflects propensities of segregation and isolation. E-Governance cannot succeed with the majority of the people living in isolation with inadequate access to the interact hindering their ability to interact with the government. Illiteracy is another disadvantage exacerbating digital divide within communities. The majority of those in local municipalities are tech-illiterate, making e-Governance difficult for them to understand and access online services or participate in virtual public meetings either by their local government or any other public organisation (Blom & Uwizeyimana, 2020).

ICT skills shortages

The disadvantage of ICT skills shortages in South Africa affects the sustainability and success of e-Government services (Molobela, 2023, p.109). In the context of public administration, inadequate ICT skills comprises a wide range of factors including but not limited to lack of proper investment in ICT education, ICT infrastructure, insufficient funds channeled for research and development (Blom & Uwizeyimana, 2020). Most importantly, e-Governance cannot benefit the citizens thoroughly because several government departments still encounter a shortage of skilled and professional ICT personnel. 

A series of e-Governance advantages and disadvantages cannot be exhausted due to the rapid rise in innovative technologies. Issues of cyber-attacks, privacy and security, illiteracy and information manipulation seem to be affecting the success of e-Governance (Sethunya, 2015, p.29). While on the other hand, improved efficiency, cost curtailment, less bureaucracy, transparency, e-participation, e-procurement and e-democracy are some of the benefits that e-Governance can offer.

Research and Methodology

Methodologically, this study employed the qualitative research method with the aid of secondary data from accredited scholarly journal articles, books, trusted academic websites and databases (Molobela, 2023). First, scholarly journal articles, books and internet articles were selected based on the title of this study focusing on e-Government, e-Governance, Public Administration paradigms, politics and administration, ICTs, and digital governance from various scholars in order to establish the main arguments and develop empirical knowledge and evidence on whether or not e-Governance should be declared a new paradigm in Public Administration. Secondly, a literature search was conducted using the database sources namely GoogleScholar; ResearchGate, EBSCO, ScienceDirect, JSTOR, Scopus, ProQuest, Semantic Scholar, WorldCat, IBSS, and websites. Prior to screening, the researchers reviewed a sample of more than 60 scholarly journal articles, websites, government legislations, reports on digital plans and academic thesis to determine whether or not they support e-Governance as a new paradigm of Public Administration. Discrepancies were thoroughly identified, analysed and eliminated through a data cleaning strategy. A data cleaning strategy was employed in manner to allow the researchers to clean data based on its relevance and credibility to form an integral part in building arguments, discussion, systematic and content analysis to support the claims in the study (Molobela, 2023). Thereafter, over 30 secondary materials were found to be relevant and supportive of the study. Other secondary materials were excluded based on titles, keywords, abstract, findings, discussions and conclusions which addressed different arguments other than that contained within this study. Therefore, a list of secondary materials/sources were then collated within the context of the generated research question with the aim to answer whether or not e-Governance is a new paradigm of Public Administration. With aid of content analysis, the researcher analysed, interpreted and presented the content of textual data obtained from the selected database sources. Concepts, patterns, views, quotes, statements, perceptions, arguments, and conclusions on the investigated matter were captured and presented throughout the study.

Findings and Discussions

Literature findings reveals the importance of e-Governance as it renders a new perspective and style in public administration (Begum, 2023). E-Governance appears to be forcing a new paradigm shift in public administration, which has improved the way governments used to provide services (Mukonza, 2014, p.499). It has brought about changes in public administration, government structures, functions and processes of delivering public services (Islam & Ehsan, 2023). In addition, e-Governance has helped government to enter the era of the Information Age, which has also created a transformative system of governance to ensure effective interaction, public engagement, and with platforms designed to streamline the public affairs and relations between the government, citizens, businesses and other interested stakeholders (Kassen, 2014).Irrespective of the limitations associated with e-Government, good e-Governance has been found to be effective as it offers unlimited potential for creating a well-informed society, reducing fraud and corruption especially with the application of electronic procurement to avoid fraudulent activities within the South African public sector (Maepa, Mapwanyana & Phume, 2023). The following sections attempts to present the secondary findings of e-Governance within the context of Public Administration, and also tries to answer whether or not e-Governance can be declared a new paradigm of Public Administration:
i. E-Government and e-Government language in public administration

The complexities and specialised knowledge and skills required to implement e-Government services is found to be one of the most problematic issue facing African countries including South Africa to comprehend the importance of e-Governance (Singh & Travica, 2018). In particular, the literature findings shows that some people still label e-Government as a complicated and disruptive technological advancement controlled and driven only by specialists within the government and the private sector (Singh & Travica, 2018). Therefore, the main concern is that e-Government and e-Governance is not yet being intrinsic in order to include all citizens and ensure a deeper understanding of how the digital government works due to manual paper-based methods that are still used within the South African public sector (Maepe et al., 2023). This is cannot be ignored, especially in a state whereby e-Governance debates suggest it as a new paradigm.

ii. E-Government and e-Governance through the use of ICTs

The findings shows that governments across the world have initiated programs to emphasize the adoption and utilization of ICTs as a means to transform governments’ performance and efficacy (Chohan & Hu, 2020). This is done through initiatives aimed at increasing government’s efficiency by employing official websites and platforms designed to provide easy access for public services, and maintain government-citizens’ relationship. Maepe et al. (2023) reveals that there are limited legislations regulating e-Government services and enhance e-Governance, in their study they found that some government departments still heavily rely on manual paper-based procurement system with less e-features regardless of the high political interference leading to fraud, corruption, inefficiency, favoritism and manipulation with the manual paper-based methods. This implies that e-Government services remain minimal within South Africa.

iii. E-Government and e-Governance on politics-administrative structures

E-Governance was found to have enhanced public accountability and transparency in some public affairs via new forms of digital debates and parliamentary discussions in South Africa (Fokane, 2021). On issues of politics, online political polls (e-voting promoting e-democracy) and procedures have promoted various political parties, however, in the South African context, the government has rejected plans to implement e-voting system (Fokane, 2021). Internet portals and the use of social media platforms have also enhanced citizen-centered information community in South Africa, other African countries and Western societies while improving efficiency in the delivery of public services (Lindner & Aichholzer, 2019).

iv. E-Governance as a new paradigm

According to Kassen (2014) e-Governance suffers from overgeneralisation as a tool to attain good governance. Moreover, e-Governance continues to be criticised for failing to capture the importance of heterogeneous political and institutional contexts from various countries. It is also reported that e-Governance carries enormous limitations in promoting technological, political and economic values, hence it is necessary to set an agenda to consider e-Governance as a tool and not necessarily a paradigm to enhance government’s efficiency. Begum (2023, p.104) found that e-Governance enables governments including South Africa to establish governance procedures to enhance administrative transparency and efficiency, and that ICTs programs in the public sector improves accessibility for public services which indicates good governance administration.

Islam and Ehsan (2023) further reveal that an effort to declare e-Governance as a new Public Administration remain debatable in the academic community. However, current trends and applications of e-Governance are visible, inevitable, widespread and modest influencing the research community to suggest a paradigm shift as it due for Public Administration to introduce a new paradigm (Islam & Ehsan, 2023). From a public administrative perspective, the claim emanates from the transformative structures e-Governance has brought into public administration (Mukonza, 2014). Indeed e-Governance has brought about a holistic improvement in public administration functionaries.

A study by Frauenholz and Unnithan (2003) claims that e-Governance is a paradigm that has been rapidly gaining much momentum within the context of public administration to improve government interaction with citizens and businesses. After a decade of intensive research, Emikh and Fomina (2023) found that e-Governance is a new paradigm in the context of its digitalization of public services. Moreover, Ucar, Bozkurt and Zawacki-Richter (2021) reveal that there seem to be an academic procrastination hindering the process of e-Governance as a new paradigm especially with regard to regulation of online services. From this point of view, it is clear that e-Governance is already treated as new paradigm since its emergence. However, there are still ongoing debates suggesting that e-Governance are just a postmodern fever seeking to equalise itself as the new paradigm. It is against this research position that, this study contend that e-Governance may be a paradigm as suggested by various scholars, however, it is limiting or limited in terms of promoting democracy and involving all people in government affairs even to this day.

It is worth noting that, although the South African government through the National e-Governance Framework promised a “Digitally-enabled Society”; it is difficult to claim e-Government services transformation and enhanced e-Governance due to lack of empirical evidence in both practice and research (National e-Government Strategy and Roadmap, 2017, p.21). Hence, e-Governance as a new paradigm of Public Administration still remain debatable.
Conclusions

The ongoing public discourse suggesting to establish e-Governance as a new paradigm, literature highlights various concerns about the limitations and intra-organisational focus of e-Governance. This study revealed that there is still a serious need to engage into a comprehensive, empirical and systematic analysis to present the art and science of public administration and management in order to examine and frame e-Governance as a new paradigm.

Despite the greater opportunities that comes with e-Government reforms, the e-Governance approach is still painted with some critics making it debatable to declare it a new paradigm in Public Administration. The obvious critics are but not limited to e-Governance being much concerned with the managerial perspective of online services in relation to the New Public Management and Post-New Management by prioritising the use of internet for promoting democracy, while neglecting the majority of the marginalised communities as they still lack access to the internet affecting their ability to reap the benefits of e-Government services in South Africa. Therefore, e-Government services may be fully enjoyed by the elites, and only those privileged enough to access the internet within and between communities. Online services could neglect the large majority of the citizens, and leaving them out to participate on issues that concerns their day-to-day lives. Therefore, this study concludes that, the traditional face-to-face contacts between the government, business and citizens cannot be satisfactorily be substituted by the use of ICTs to reduce human and financial costs. However, the use of the ICTs still plays a fundamental role in improving efficiency and e-Governance has caused a massive paradigm shift in public administration, but however, it still need some transformation for it to be considered a new paradigm. Below are some recommendations to be considered:

i. The issue of e-Governance as a new Public Administration paradigm is still between the two lines of ‘normative proclamation’ (rhetoric) or ‘empirical claim’ (reality). Therefore, both lines must be acknowledged, clarified with scientific and empirical evidence and declared in public and in practice that e-Governance has not only caused a paradigm shift, but it is a paradigm of Public Administration

ii. In improving policy development through research, future research studies must find new ways in addressing the inevitable digital divide, tech-illiteracy and ICTs skills shortage. Research must be able to assist the government to ensure that all communities have equal access to e-Government services and can interact with their government in order to maintain e-Governance.

This study further recommends that, public administration as a field and practice must incorporate IT skills in order to equip and prepare communities and public servants of the future technological advancements. A serious government commitment and funding become a pre-requisite, implying a major collaborative effort would be necessary from both the private and public sectors to ensure the maintenance of e-Governance.

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to appreciate the substantial works of the different scholars used in this study. The Research and Innovation Division at the University of Johannesburg is therefore acknowledged for their financial support in covering the fees of this publication. Above all, the Creator of the Universe is acknowledged as the One who enabled the authors to work together as a team to produce this publication.

All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, D.E. and T.T; methodology, T.T., validation, D.E.; formal analysis, T.T., and D.E.; investigation, T.T; resources, T.T; writing—original draft preparation, T.T; writing—review and editing, T.T. and D.E.

Funding: This research was funded by the Research and Innovation Division University of Johannesburg

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was waived in the study as it contains secondary data.

Data Availability Statement: The data presented in this study are available within the study.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

References


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