Emerging impact of Nigeria's Open Budget Data

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Introduction

Nigeria, the most populous country in Africa and the 6th highest crude oil producer in the world still grapples with poverty and ranks lowly on international indices for transparency and development, 50 years after independence. Corruption, bad governance and misallocation of resources play a major role in keeping Nigeria from reaching its expected potential. To foster transparency, the national budget of Nigeria has been published online since 2007.

Research Question: How engaged are stakeholders in Nigeria with the global open data movement and the "open" national budget data and what are the emerging impacts?

Methods

Survey and in-depth interviews:

A range of budget data suppliers, users and intermediaries were consulted through survey and in-depth interviews using structured questionnaires having sections on:

- Awareness and understanding of open data (supply and demand side)
- Demand for open data
- Open Data and Freedom of Information (FOI);
- Supply of budget data
- How budget data is being used
- Users and Intermediaries for budget data
- Potential to use Nigeria's online budget data
- Perceived impacts of Open Data.

Media analysis:

Media artefacts such as newspapers and social networking sites were reviewed for empirical evidence of this engagement.

Six **Newspapers** were scanned and stories on the budget from 2009-2013 were classified using value options under *Type of story, Theme, Prominence, Direction, Tone, Quality, Source of story*.

For **social media analysis**, discourse around the budget of Nigeria for 2013 was extracted if a post had at least one feature of engagement, that is, "like", "retweet", "follow", "comment", "share", etc. Impressions were classified under *Direction, Tone, Source of post, Target of post.*

Active engagement:

Active exploration of what Open Data means in practice –

- Participants at a national hackathon
- Organisation of the first hackathon in Nigeria hacking on the budget data
- Involvement in activity directed at commencing the open government data (OGD) portal for Nigeria
- Organisation of Stakeholder Workshop to discuss preliminary findings from this case study
- Increased academic focus on open data research and API development at the University of Ilorin.

Evidence and findings

Awareness of open data varies among different stakeholder groups (see Figure 1) but demand is strong for different types of data to be open, especially for actual expenditure across all areas of public spending but there are differences of opinion over the best data formats for open data.

Respondents who were aware of Nigeria's 2011 FOI Act made the link with open data practice but indicated that stakeholders were not taking enough advantage of the Act.
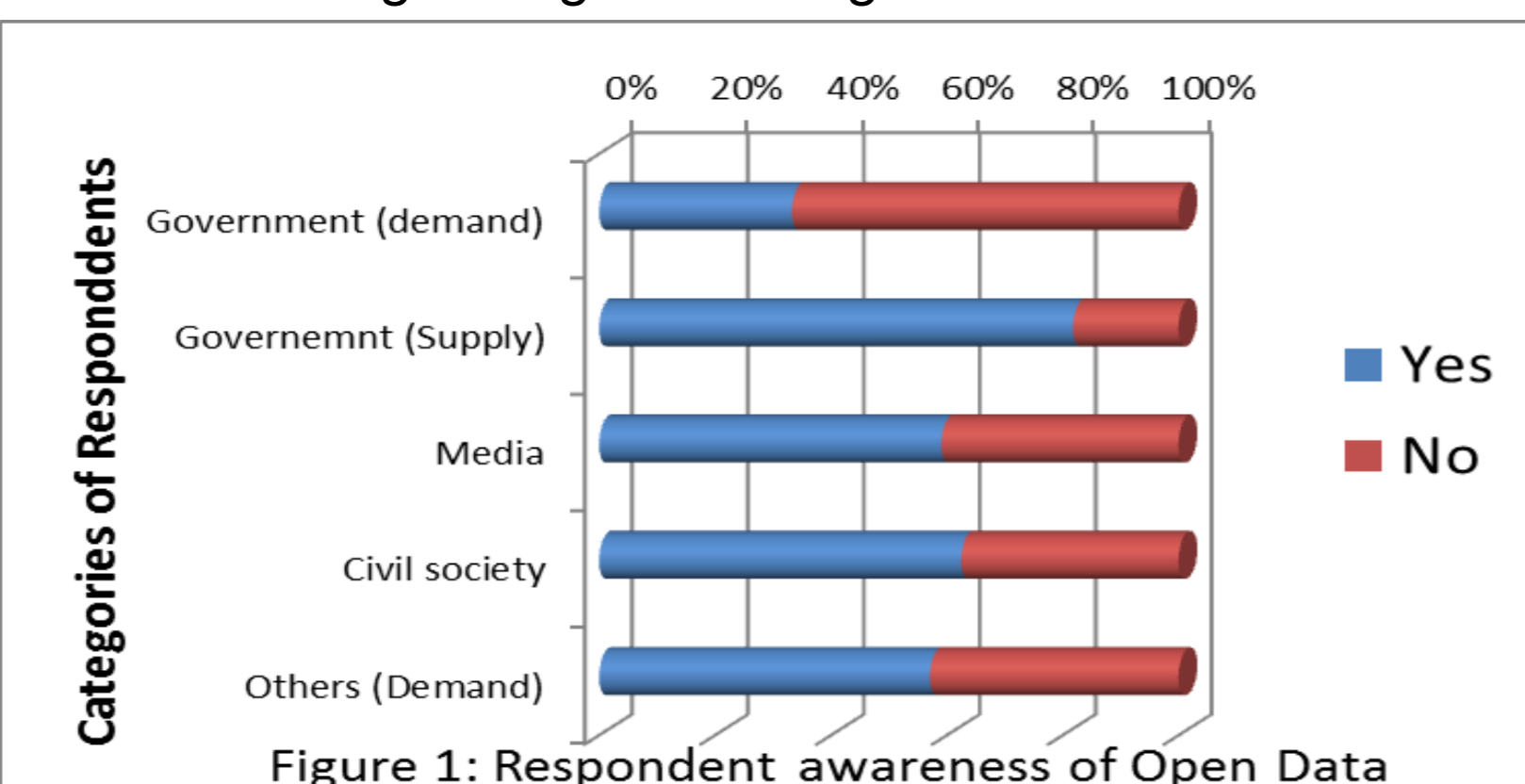

Figure 2: Tone of prompter posts (social media)
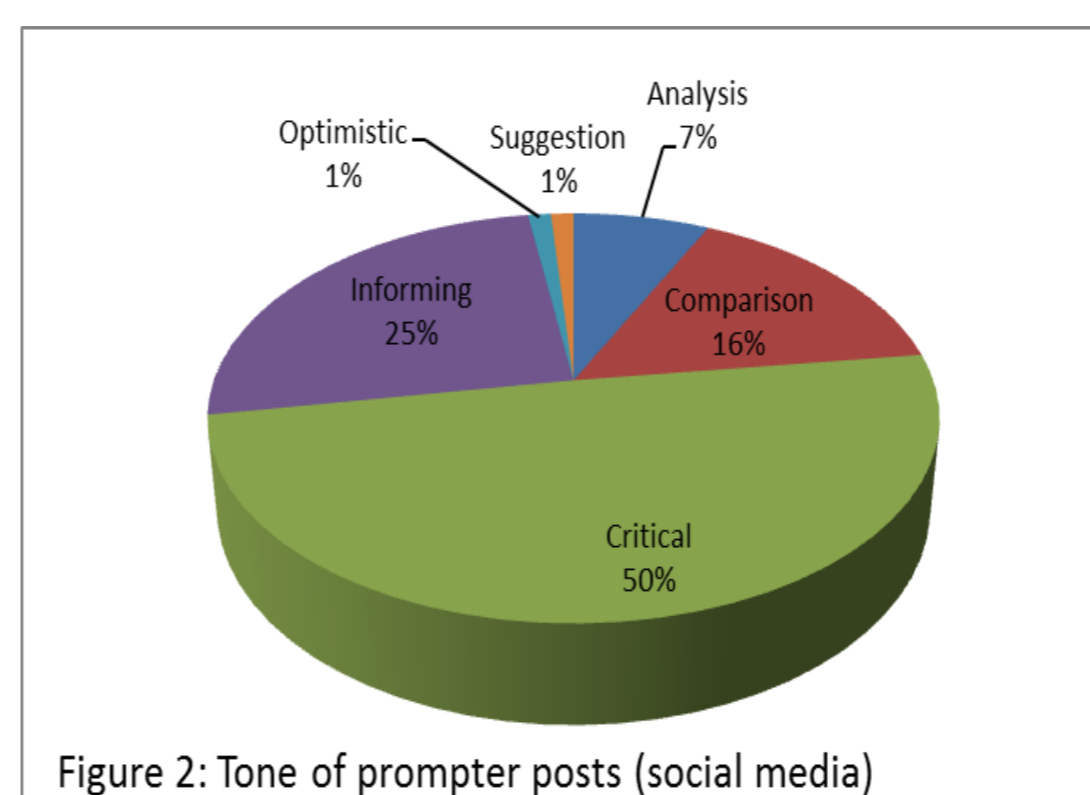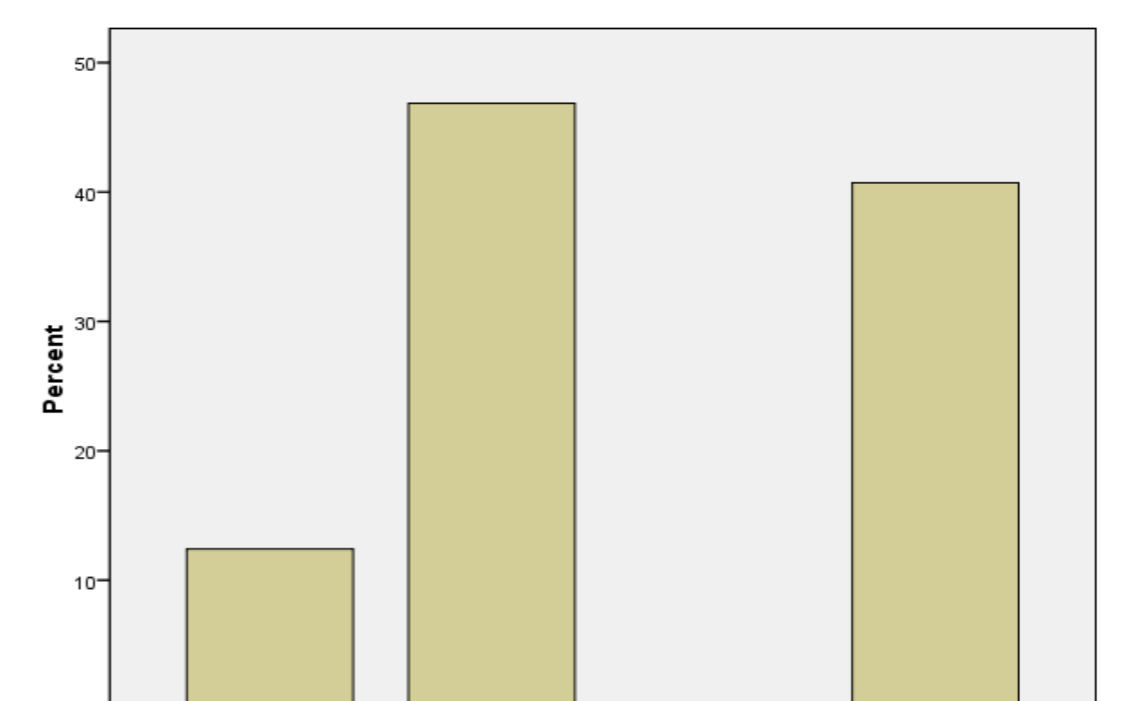

Figure 3: Tone of newspaper stories

Figure 1: Respondent awareness of Open Data

Citizen engagement was more visible and with critical undertones on social media compared to print media (cf. Figures 2 and 3).

Major intermediaries in the budget data flow are media professionals and NGOs/CSOs. With respect to simplifying the budget for wider citizen understanding, four re-packagers were identified, republishing the budget data as web-based APIs or geo-referenced visualisations or in print.

Respondents perceived the impact of the budget data as low at present but with potential for higher impact in future and pointed to ignorance, apathy, illiteracy and the format in which the budget data is published online as hindrances to the optimal use of the budget data.

Conclusions & recommendations

Policy - There is growing awareness of open data in Nigeria and the demand is strong for expenditure data to be published in the open domain. International organisations working with Nigeria to start the national OGD portal should take note of this as a very important data set of interest to citizens.

Practice - If open data practice would have high impact in Nigeria, the differences in opinion about the best data formats for open data must be addressed, possibly as a point of action for academia, researchers and NGOs/CSOs. Use of social media rather than newspapers can generate interest and engagement from a wide spectrum of citizens and should be incorporated in the design of open data portals.

Future research – Research, particularly through action research, into innovative ways of removing infrastructural, social and technical impediments to the optimal use of open data would be beneficial in addition to continuous investigation of citizen engagement with such data.

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