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EXPLORING THE EFFECTS OF THE ONLINE PASSPORT APPLICATIONS SYSTEM ON  
PUBLIC PERCEPTION AND TRUST ON GHANAIAN GOVERNMENT WITH THE FOCUS  
ON PUBLIC RELATION

BY

ISSAHAKU ISSAH NAPODOW  
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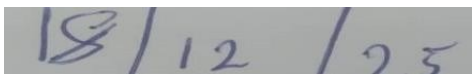


## STUDENT DECLARATION

I, hereby declare that this dissertation is my original work and has not been submitted for any degree or diploma at any other university or institution. I confirm that all sources have been properly acknowledged and referenced in accordance with the guidelines provided by the University for Art and Media communications.

STUDENT'S NAME: ISSAHAKU ISSAH NAPODOW

SIGNATURE .....  


DATE .....  .....

## CERTIFICATION BY SUPERVISOR

I hereby declare that this dissertation submitted by Issahaku Issah Napodow in partial fulfilment of the requirements of MA in Strategic Public Relation management for Masters, is an original work and has been supervised by me.

SUPERVISOR'S NAME: DR. STANLEY SEMARCO (PHD)

SIGNATURE .....  


DATE.....

18/12/25

## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this work to my wife and children for the continue prayers and support throughout my stay in this noble university. I also dedicates this work to my colleagues at the office who always come to my aid anytime I needed to attend to lectures.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENT**

First of all, I will like to thank the Almighty Allah for giving me the strength, guidance and protections since the beginning of this program till the end. I am grateful to my supervisor Dr Stanley Semarco for making this work a reality, and to all lecturers in the faculty of business and strategic communications who supported me throughout my academic journey I say thank you and may the Almighty Allah bless you all.

## ABSTRACT

This study examined the impact of the online passport application system on public perception, user experience, and trust in government service delivery in Ghana. A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining quantitative surveys of 300 applicants across Accra, Kumasi, and Tamale with qualitative interviews of six key informants, including passport office staff and intermediaries. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, mean scores, standard deviations, and inferential tests to assess differences and relationships among demographic groups and system-related variables. Qualitative data were analysed thematically to explore operational challenges and opportunities for improving service delivery. Findings indicate that the online system is largely perceived as efficient, convenient, and supportive of a smoother application process, with high mean scores for overall satisfaction, convenience, and error reduction. Challenges remain in areas such as technical reliability, guidance for first-time users, and data privacy, highlighting the need for enhanced communication, system stability, and user-centred support. The study demonstrates that the online passport system has improved citizen experiences and public confidence while identifying areas for further optimisation. Ethical standards were strictly observed, ensuring participant confidentiality, voluntary participation, and secure data handling. The findings provide practical insights for policymakers and public service managers seeking to enhance e-government initiatives in Ghana and similar contexts.

**Keywords:** Online passport system, e-government, user experience, public trust, service efficiency and transparency, satisfaction.

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**LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

C-IB	Competence, Integrity, Benevolence (framework for Public Trust Theory)
E-Gov	E-Government
ICAO	International Civil Aviation Organization
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
M	Mean
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration
PAC	Passport Application Centre
PR	Public Relations

SD	Standard Deviation
SDLC	System Development Lifecycle
SMS	Short Message Service
U1–U6	User Participants 1 to 6
WAGS	WhatsApp Gateway Service
WDLC	Web-based Development Lifecycle
Technological Innovation (specific e-service X1 component)	
X2	Access Innovation (specific e-service component)



# **CHAPTER ONE**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **1.0 Introduction**

The global shift towards e-governance has revolutionized public administration, promising enhanced efficiency, transparency, and accountability United Nations, 2020. Ghana, in its pursuit of digital transformation, has introduced several initiatives, including the online passport application system. This system, accessible at [passport.mfa.gov.gh](http://passport.mfa.gov.gh), replaced the manual system in March 2020, aligning with International Civil Aviation Organization ICAO regulations. The online system features online payment processing, electronic tracking, and faster turnaround times, aiming to rectify the inefficiencies and corruption plaguing the manual process Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration, 2020.

### **1.1 Background of the Study**

The global push towards e-governance has become a cornerstone of modern public administration, promising to enhance efficiency, transparency, and accountability Dwivedi et al., 2016. Governments worldwide are leveraging Information and Communication Technologies ICT to streamline processes and improve public service delivery. Ghana, in its quest for digital transformation, has embarked on a series of digitalization initiatives, including the Ghana Card, the paperless port system, and, most notably for this study, the online passport application system. The online application is accessible at [Passport.mfa.gov.gh](http://Passport.mfa.gov.gh), replacing the manual system which ceased operation on March 1st, 2020 Ministry of Foreign Affairs MFA, 2020. This is in line with the International Civil Aviation Organization ICAO regulations and underscores the fulfilment of one of Ghana's foreign policy objectives MFA, 2020.

The launch of this innovative system is a bold testament to Ghana's commitment to security and global connectivity. Key features of the new system include online payments processing, an electronic tracking system for application status, and faster turnaround times for passport processing. Historically, the manual passport applications process in Ghana was fraught with significant challenges, including long queues, bureaucratic delays, a lack of transparency, and allegations of corruption Ackah, 222; Osei-Tutu, 2021. These issues severely eroded public confidence and trust in government institutions.

The introduction of the online passport system was a strategic public policy response aimed at rectifying these deep-seated problems. From a public relations perspective, this system is more than just a technological upgrade; it is a critical communication tool Stromback & Kioussis, 2013. The way the public perceives its accessibility, user-friendliness, and reliability directly impacts their overall trust in the government's ability to govern effectively West, 2005. This study, therefore, delves into how this specific digital intervention influences the citizen-government relationship.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

While extensive literature exists on e-governance in developing nations Alomari & Sandhu, 2014, a clear research gap remains concerning a specific, in-depth analysis of the Ghanaian online passport application system from a public relations perspective. Previous studies have often focused on the technical aspects or general e-governance trends, overlooking the citizen's lived experience and the critical role of strategic communication in shaping public trust Pandey & Suri, 2020). This research uniquely contributes by using public relations theories to specifically analyze how this particular digital intervention has affected citizen perceptions and trust. It provides

practical, context-specific recommendations for both public relations practitioners and government officials in Ghana, thus filling a notable gap in the literature.

A technically successful digital system may still fail from a public relations standpoint if it doesn't meet public expectations or address their underlying concerns Almuqrin et al., 2022. The core problem is the knowledge gap between the government's intentions and the public's lived experience with the new system. Issues such as inadequate internet infrastructure, digital illiteracy, technical glitches, and concerns over data security can all create new challenges that may inadvertently undermine the very trust the system was designed to build Belanger et al., 2002. The lack of a comprehensive understanding of how these factors affect public perception and trust is a critical public relations challenge that this study seeks to address.

### **1.3 Objectives of the Study**

Primarily, the study assesses the impact of the online passport application system on the public's perception of and trust in the Ghanaian government. The specific objectives of are:

1. To investigate the perceived efficiency, transparency and public trust associated with the online passport application system among the Ghanaian public
2. To examine how the online system has influenced citizens' experiences and satisfaction during the passport application process.
3. To identify the public relations challenges faced and the opportunities presented by the system's implementation.

### **1.4 Research Questions**

This study aims to answer the following questions

1. How do Ghanaian citizens perceive the efficiency, transparency and public trust associated with the online passport application system?
2. How has the online system influenced citizens' experiences and satisfaction during the passport application process?
3. What public relations challenges and opportunities have emerged from the implementation of the online passport application system?

### **1.5 Scope of the Study**

This study focused on the effects of the online passport application system on public perception and trust within the context of Ghana. The research specifically targeted Ghanaian citizens who had used the system. The study's geographic scope primarily covered urban areas where the system was most prevalent, such as the Accra, Tamale and Kumasi Passport Application Centres, to ensure accessibility to the target population. It analysed public relations aspects and did not delve into the system's technical infrastructure or software development.

### **1.6 Significance of the Study**

This research holds significant value for multiple stakeholders. For the Ghanaian Government, the findings will provide a crucial evidence-based assessment of a major e-governance initiative. The insights can be used to improve the online passport system and inform public relations strategies for future digital projects, ensuring they are not just technically sound but also publicly accepted. For public relations practitioners, this study will serve as a valuable case study on the application of public relations principles in the public sector of a developing nation. It will highlight the importance of strategic communication in managing public expectations and fostering trust during periods of digital transformation.

For academia, the research will contribute to the body of knowledge on e-governance, public administration, and public relations in an African context, filling a notable gap in the literature regarding the citizen-facing impact of such initiatives. The study focuss on public perception and trust related to the online passport application system, and this is significant because it will provide insights into the impacts of online applications service on public perception and trust in Ghana.

The research focuses on public perception and trust related to the online passport application system, providing insights into the impacts of online applications on public perception and trust in Ghana. The findings will inform strategies for improving public trust and confidence in government institutions. Policy and Practice, it Informs policy makers on opportunities for digital transformation, e-governance, and cybersecurity. Knowledge, it will add empirical insights into how digital government platforms influence public trust, shedding light on Ghanaians' feedback and experiences. Public Administration, encourages citizen centered service delivery, transparency, and best practices in digital engagement.

### **1.7 Organization of the Study**

This research is organized into five chapters. Chapter One provides the introduction, outlining the background of the study, the problem statement, research questions, objectives, scope, limitations, significance, and the gaps this study intends to fill. Chapter Two presents a comprehensive literature review, establishing the theoretical framework, conceptual definitions, and an empirical review of existing studies. Chapter Three details the research methodology, including the design, population, sampling, and data collection and analysis methods. Chapter Four presents and discusses the findings from the data collection process, addressing the research questions. Finally, Chapter Five concludes the study, summarizing the key findings and providing practical recommendations for stakeholders.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.0 Introduction**

This chapter provides a comprehensive review of scholarly literature and theoretical frameworks relevant to the effects of the online passport application system on public perception and trust in the Ghanaian government. It establishes the conceptual foundation of the study and identifies the research gap that this project intends to address.

#### **2.1 Theoretical Framework**

To fully understand the dynamics of this study, it is essential to apply theories from both public relations and public administration. This study will be guided by two key frameworks:

##### **2.1.1 The Excellence Theory of Public Relations**

The Excellence Theory, developed by Grunig and Grunig (1992), posits that the value of public relations lies in its ability to build and maintain mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and its publics. This theory moves beyond one-way communication models to a two-way symmetrical model, where communication is a dialogue and not just a message broadcast. In the context of government, this means that the government should not just inform citizens about the new online system but also listen to their feedback, address their concerns, and adjust its operations accordingly.

A government that employs this model is more likely to build trust and a positive reputation. The online passport system, therefore, is not just a service; it is a platform for relationship-building.

When the system is reliable, user-friendly, and responsive, it demonstrates that the government values its citizens, fostering a symmetrical and trusting relationship. The Excellence Theory of Public Relations by James Grunig and his colleagues, posits that public relations are most effective when it serves a strategic management function that helps an organization achieve its mission by building and maintaining quality, long-term relationships with its publics.

The Excellence Theory guide study through organizational practices and communication models that will lead to the best outcomes such as enhanced service delivery, positive public perception, and increased public trust. Public Relations as a strategic management function, the theory asserts that PR should be involved in the decision-making process, not just communication execution. Symmetrical communication model excellence theory identifies the Two-Way Symmetrical Model as the most ethical and effective form of PR. This model emphasizes dialogue, mutual understanding, and balance between the organization government and its publics citizens.

The theory predicts that a more symmetrical communication approach will lead to better public service delivery by fixing system flaws, more positive public perception, and ultimately higher public trust. Relationship Outcomes, the ultimate goal of excellent PR is to build and maintain quality relationships. In a nutshell, this theory shows that the quality of communication between the government and citizens shapes how people perceive and trust the online passport system. It also suggests that stronger, more balanced relationships can improve satisfaction with public services.

### **2.1.2 Public Trust Theory**

Public trust is a cornerstone of effective governance Stromback & Kiouisis, 2013. As defined by Belanger et al. 2002, trustworthiness is the "perception of conviction in the trusted entity's

reliability and integrity." In the context of e-governance, this means citizens must trust the government's ability to deliver services effectively competence, handle their data securely and ethically integrity, and act in their best interest benevolence Ferreira et al., 2022. The online passport system's success in building trust is directly related to how well it demonstrates these three dimensions. If the system is plagued by technical failures a lack of competence or data breaches, it will inevitably lead to a decline in public trust, regardless of the government's intentions.

Public Trust Theory fundamentally underpins the research by providing the key dependent variable Public Trust and specifying the mechanisms through which E-governance the online passport system must operate to achieve success. The theory, particularly its core dimensions of Competence, Integrity, and Benevolence the C-IB framework, directly links the technical performance and administrative behavior of the egovernance system to citizens' perception and trust outcomes.

The Public Trust Theory provides the theoretical lens through which the data is interpreted. Explaining System Adoption, the theory suggests that a citizen's initial propensity to use the online passport system e-governance adoption is heavily dependent on their pre-existing belief in the government's competence and integrity to run the system securely. Structuring the Questionnaire. The competence integrity and benevolence C-I-B framework gives specific sub variables to measure. In otherwise questions that map to. Competence, Integrity, Benevolence.

Explaining Perceived Success or Failure. The theory predicts a clear causal path, high Performance on Competence, Integrity and Benevolence C-I-B Dimensions. Positive Egovernance Experience Increased Public Trust and Positive Public Perception. Therefore, if the system fails through,

technical errors, the theory attributes the resulting drop in public perception directly to a breakdown in the government's perceived competence. In a nutshell, this theory helps the study explain how citizens judge the online passport system through the government's competence, integrity and benevolence. It also shows that trust rises or falls depending on how well the system performs on these dimensions, which then shapes public perception and willingness to use the service.

## **2.2 Conceptual Review**

This section defines key concepts and their interrelationships as they apply to this research.

### **2.2.1 E-Governance and Public Service Delivery**

E-governance refers to the use of information and communication technology ICT by government agencies to provide public services to citizens. Its primary goals are to enhance efficiency, reduce costs, increase transparency, and improve service delivery (Dwivedi et al., 2016). The Ghanaian online passport system is a prime example of such an initiative, aiming to transform a notoriously inefficient and corrupt manual process into a modern, streamlined one.

### **2.2.2 Public Perception and Public Trust**

Public perception is the general feeling or opinion of the public towards an organization or its services. It is influenced by a multitude of factors, including personal experiences, media coverage, and word-of-mouth Almuqrin et al., 2022. Public trust, while closely related, is a deeper, more fundamental belief that the government will act with integrity and in the public's best interest. Studies have shown a strong link between positive e-governance experiences and increased public trust West, 2005. Key factors influencing this link include perceived usefulness, ease of use, reliability, and security of the digital service Pandey & Suri, 2020. This theory is a strategic

management function that helps an organization achieve its mission by building and maintaining quality, long-term relationships with its publics.

Public relations in the public sector is a strategic management function aimed at building and maintaining relationships between a government body and its citizens Stromback & Kiouisis, 2013.

Its role is not just to disseminate information but to manage a government's reputation and create a positive environment for policy implementation. The online passport system's success is therefore heavily reliant on a sound public relations strategy that manages public expectations, communicates system benefits, and promptly addresses any user-related issues or criticisms.

### **2.2.3 E-Government Portal Development**

E-Government portals offer benefits like personalization and improved content management Gmelch & Pernul, 2011. Their development is a dynamic process shaped by the interaction of people, technology, and organizational structures Mcleod & Doolin, 2012. Development methodologies like the Web-based Development Lifecycle WDLC are often preferred over the traditional System Development Lifecycle SDLC due to the unique requirements of web-based systems Kumar & Sangwan, 2011. However, the literature confirms that most government projects still largely adhere to variations of the traditional SDLC Tsai et al., 2009. The key challenge remains ensuring that these development processes capture the interconnected flow of services and adapt to dynamic operational realities Sun & Li, 2014.

In other jurisdictions like Indonesia, the primary goal of public service delivery is to fulfill citizen needs and expectations RI, 2018. The government, as a democratic nation, is fully responsible for ensuring accessible, quality, and satisfying services, as providing quality public services is a citizen's right and the state's duty Imaduddin, 2016. To improve service performance, public sector organizations must adhere to the "four Es" principles: economy, efficiency, effectiveness,

and ethics Doherty & Horn, 2005; Withon, 2007. Achieving world-class service standards requires innovative approaches and strong, transformative leadership that fosters creativity through idealized influence, inspiration, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration Bass & Avolio, 1994.

E-Government E-Gov is defined as the advanced phase of public service digitalization, utilizing Information and Communication Technology ICT to provide continuous, efficient, and transparent services Bertot et al., 2016; UN E-Gov Survey, 2018. Innovation in this context involves introducing new knowledge, systems, technologies, or procedures to enhance efficiency and citizen satisfaction Osborne & Kerry, 2005. Governments innovate to meet citizens' evolving needs, increase efficiency, reduce costs, and improve service speed, accuracy, and accessibility. Innovation within government systems transforms old systems into simpler, faster, and more effective ones. The WAGS initiative represents multiple forms of innovation product e-passport, process fewer office visits, and organizational new contact channel aimed at creating new value that directly benefits citizens.

E-Government portals offer benefits like personalization and improved content management Gmelch & Pernul, 2011. Their development is a dynamic process shaped by the interaction of people, technology, and organizational structures Mcleod & Doolin, 2012. Development methodologies like the Web-based Development Lifecycle WDLC are often preferred over the traditional System Development Lifecycle SDLC due to the unique requirements of web-based systems Kumar & Sangwan, 2011. However, the literature confirms that most government projects still largely adhere to variations of the traditional SDLC Tsai et al., 2009. The key challenge remains ensuring that these development processes capture the interconnected flow of services and adapt to dynamic operational realities Sun & Li, 2014.

#### **2.2.4 Development of E-Passport Application Portal**

The application of Information Technology in public service delivery, known as E-Government EGov or transformational government, is a global trend aimed at enhancing efficiency, transparency, and public trust Grant & Chau, 2006. The e-passport, or biometric-enabled passport, falls directly within this domain Pasupathinathan et al., 2008). While the benefits reduced costs, improved service, and strengthened democracy are recognized Bolivar et al., 2015, e-government initiatives in developing countries face unique challenges rooted in sociocultural, human, and economic factors Shareef, 2013.

Prior e-government studies have predominantly focused on the adoption and implementation phases, often neglecting the complexities inherent in the development and pre-adoption processes Murad, 2015. Moreover, existing developmental models Layne & Lee, 2001; Gartner, 2000, frequently fail to capture the specific contextual realities of developing nations Heeks, 2005. Successful projects hinge on managing the intricate relationship between institutional structures and human actors Heeks, 2003.

This study addresses this gap by investigating how structural and human factors within the Ghana Passport Office shaped the development of its e-passport application portal. Research Aim: This study aims to analyze the development of the e-passport application portal in Ghana using Giddens' Structuration Theory to understand the reciprocal influence between the Passport Office's institutional structures and the actions agency of the developers and staff.

### **2.2.5 Citizen Satisfaction with Online Passport Service**

Indonesia's commitment to enhancing democracy, human rights, public trust, and welfare is formalized in Act No. 25 of 2009, which mandates continuous improvement in public services (Hutahaen et al., 2018; Denhardt & Denhardt, 2007). These services cover three main areas: public goods, public services, and administrative services. This study specifically focuses on innovation in administrative services, particularly the online passport issuance system managed by the Directorate General of Immigration. To enhance efficiency and accessibility, the Directorate General launched the WhatsApp Gateway Service (WAGS) on May 17, 2017. WAGS represents a multidimensional innovation, integrating five core elements: technology, access, process, product, and payment to simplify interactions between citizens and the government.

The introduction of WAGS was intended to address internal organizational challenges, aligning with the view that public sector innovations often solve operational problems (Mulgan & Albury, 2003). Initial goals included reducing visits to the Immigration Office from three to two and shortening processing time from up to two weeks to just three days, thereby making passport services faster, more efficient, and citizen-friendly. However, by early 2019, the practical implementation of WAGS faced significant challenges. Despite enhancing government-citizen interaction on paper, the system was plagued by issues such as frequent login failures, unclear information, and protracted appointment waiting times, often exceeding three weeks. This gap between the system's innovative potential and the poor user experience led to reduced citizen satisfaction, particularly for those needing urgent services.

Citizen satisfaction reflects the extent to which government services meet public expectations. It is a function of service quality, efficiency, and innovation (Satapathi et al., 2014; Bouckaert, 1995). Satisfaction occurs when actual service performance meets or exceeds expectations, thus

enhancing public trust Kotler, 2005. Because public organizations often operate under a monopoly, dissatisfaction directly impacts public trust and loyalty Van de Walle, 2016. To maintain trust, service quality must meet standards such as clarity, simplicity, accuracy, safety, responsibility, and friendliness. Innovation, driven by creative leadership and technology, is crucial for continuous improvement in service quality and satisfaction Wahyudi, 2016. In the context of e-government services like WAGS, citizen satisfaction is benchmarked against eservice quality dimensions. For instance, frequent login failures relate directly to the reliability of the technological innovation X1, while long appointment waiting times contradict the expected responsiveness of the access innovation X2.

Therefore, this study aims to evaluate citizen satisfaction with the WAGS service, identify its specific weaknesses, and recommend improvements to make the online e-passport issuance system faster, more reliable, affordable, and user-friendly. It also seeks to promote wider adoption of the secure e-passport product, which features essential digital security components like the CSCA, DSC, and DSO certificates.

### **2.2.6 Challenges of E-Government Portals E-Passport Portals**

E-Government and Challenges in Developing Countries. E-government is not merely the introduction of technology; it demands a fundamental transformation of business processes and institutional functions (Bigdelia et al., 2013). In developing countries, implementation is constrained by pervasive challenges such as limited internet connectivity, widespread computer illiteracy, and a lack of comprehensive national digital identification frameworks (Nkohkwo & Islam, 2013). The frequent failure of e-government projects is often attributed to the complexity of managing organizational change, resistance to change, system novelty, and political influences (Anthopoulos et al., 2016). Crucially, the absence of robust digital systems for identification and

verification, common in the developing world as urged Piccolino (2015), creates fundamental integration hurdles. Also, most government projects still largely adhere to variations of the traditional SDLC Tsai et al., 2009. The key challenge remains ensuring that these development processes capture the interconnected flow of services and adapt to dynamic operational realities Sun & Li, 2014. Successful initiatives require a holistic perspective that equally considers technological, organizational, and human factors Al-Kharusi et al., 2016.

### **2.3 Empirical Studies**

Studies exploring e-governance in developing nations show mixed results. Many initiatives have some promise, but structural and behavioral barriers frequently work against their success. As an example of this, researchers conducted a study of e-government adoption in Jordan and found that there was limited digital literacy and resistance to change, which hindered adoption with the general population, making recommendations to the government that it could intervene from public perception and public awareness to minimize early resistance Alomari & Sandhu, 2014. International evidence provides strong insight which suggests the quality of digital services has an impact on trust levels at the community level. One comparison between member states in ASEAN found positive strong correlations of e-government adoption to public trust, and that the two predict more significantly than economic indicators of trust in terms of reliability and transparency Almuqrin et al., 2022.

Additional investigations indicate that the interface, clarity, and accessibility of a system influence people's perceived ease of use, as a result driving trust toward digital public services Pandey & Suri, 2020. This shows that technological performance and usability should be both weighed in how governments introduce new systems. E-government is the application of e-based technologies

to facilitate government service delivery and communications among government and nongovernment actors Cupido & Ophoff, 2014. Its central values are the pursuit of efficiency, cost control, transparency, and trust from the public on the government services Grant & Chau, 2006; Dwivedi et al., 2016. In developing nations, digitalisation is framed as a way to enhance accountability and democratic participation Bolívar et al., 2015. But successful e-government means much more than adopting new technology. Its evolution relies on the intricate intersection of infrastructure and citizen acceptance.

E-government projects often experience failure, due to the underestimate of the relationship between those institutional structures and those who work within them (Heeks, 2003; Abdulkareem, 2015). As Ghana's story with initiatives such as the National Identification Card and the paperless port reveals, digital reforms frequently encounter technical shortfalls and bureaucratic impediments Osei-Tutu, 2021; Ackah, 2022. These are not due to technical glitches, but rather deep structural and human problems. Giddens' Structuration Theory 1984 is helpful for this, which is the theory showing how rules of an organisation, norms and practices of an individual interrelate. This conceptual framework illuminates conflicts between codified actions and informal activities, loss of control fears, and the pushback generated by new technologies to undermine established ways of working.

The effect or success of an e-government system relies crucially on how these citizens experience it. Public trust in digital government is an incredibly fragile trait based on the data Osei-Tutu, 2021, and is highly impacted by convenience, efficiency and transparency. Good systems, usable interfaces and secure platforms have been found to enhance satisfaction and trust Pandey & Suri, 2020). Adoption is in addition driven by citizen perceptions of value, reliability, and ease of use Grunig & Grunig, 1992. Khanna and Bansal 2018 explored e-government portals in India, and

service convenience and process transparency significantly enhanced user satisfaction, but that infrastructure and digital literacy are still necessary for citizen involvement. In the same vein, Almarabeh and AbuAli 2010 investigated online government service adoption in Jordan and determined that user-friendliness and internet infrastructure are critical factors in adoption, while differences in rural vs urban areas can reveal problems with equal access.

Sharma and Gupta 2019 looked at online identity documents applications and found frustrations due to the presence of system errors, unclear instructions, and extended virtual queues, which corroborates anecdotal evidence of problems with Ghana's online passport system. Trust and perceived reliability in Saudi Arabia were related to system security, uniform operation and unambiguous procedural details, thus echoing trust building objectives in PAOS Alharbi & Drew, 2014. Morgeson et al. 2013 also tied technology-mediated government interaction to the impression on citizens of the credibility and effectiveness, revealing how technical glitches or obscure procedures erode trust; thus, emphasizing the significance of exploring the effect of the online passport system on Ghanaian citizens' trust in public bodies.

The literature shows associations between system quality, user experience, and public trust. Nonetheless, there is little empirical research on how these dynamics unfold in Ghana's digital service landscape, especially as it pertains to the online passport application system. Previous research has primarily centered on national ID systems or more sweeping digital reforms, leaving a void as it pertains to citizen ratings in one of the most popular e-government channels in Ghana. This study fills that gap by examining user experience, public perception, and trust outcomes as they relate to Ghana's online passport system.

### **2.3.1 Research Gap and Contribution**

Despite a general framework of e-governance, a considerable gap remains in research, particularly a substantive analysis of the online passport application system in Ghana through a public relations perspective. Previous studies have primarily concentrated on technical features or general e-governance tendencies without taking into consideration closely the relational component that is at the heart of public trust. There is little research that has utilized public relations theories in understanding how the implementation and management of Ghana's online passport system has affected citizens' views, trust, and experiences at large. This disparity weakens knowledge about the PR-specific elements influencing the success or failure of the system in service delivery.

This study aims to fill this gap by examining perceived efficiency, transparency, and levels of public trust in the online passport application system, the impact of the system on citizens' experiences and satisfaction during the application process, and public relations challenges faced along with the opportunities posed by its implementation. It also investigates the relationship between user-friendliness, reliability, and official communication in constructing citizen perceptions, with implications for the practical, context-bound recommendations for PR practitioners and government officials in Ghana.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.0 Introduction**

This chapter meticulously outlines the research methodology employed to achieve the objectives of this study: to assess the effect of the online passport application system in Ghana. It details the rationale for the chosen mixed-methods research design, explicitly defines the population and sampling strategy, describes the data collection instruments and procedures, and specifies the data analysis plan. This comprehensive methodological approach ensures that the study is systematic, rigorous, and capable of generating reliable, valid, and nuanced findings that effectively address the research questions.

#### **3.1 Research Paradigm**

This study is framed within a philosophical framework in pragmatism, which prioritizes practical usefulness over the search for absolute truth or, conversely, subjective interpretations. Pragmatism gives priority to the research question and embraces using different methods in solving problems that are difficult Saunders et al., 2016. In this study, it rationalizes the mixture of quantitative and qualitative approaches to gain a broad and in-depth knowledge of the online passport application system. Data collection and analysis decisions were made based on their potential to provide the most relevant and actionable insights. The study thus presents data with evidence-based insight, which is directly applicable for enhancing public perception, trust, and delivery of public services through triangulation.

#### **3.2 Research Design**

The research study utilized an exploratory and descriptive research design to evaluate the effects of the online passport application system in Ghana. The exploratory dimension was used to gather insight into participants' experiences, perceptions, and challenges which had not been clearly

communicated or documented. The descriptive part was focused on developing a coherent description of patterns of user satisfaction, perceived efficiency, transparency, and trust, giving a sense of the state of the system at the moment. Integrating these elements enabled the study to create new insights and present an accurate, evidence-based representation of the system's effects on public perception and trust.

### **3.3 Research Approach**

This research used a mixed-methods design, which includes both quantitative and qualitative methods in examining the study objectives. The first and second aims were met through quantitative surveys that evaluated statistical trends with respect to user satisfaction, perceived efficiency, transparency, and trust and were relevant for the broader population of online passport applicants. The quantitative approach provided measurable, objective, and generalizable data that allowed for statistical analysis, identification of trends, and rigorous testing of hypotheses across the study population Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Fowler, 2014.

The qualitative element augmented the quantitative, giving context and justifying why the observed quantitative data patterns existed Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2015. For the third goal, qualitative approach solely was used; qualitative interviews were conducted with key informants passport office staff and intermediaries. This process allowed for a detailed examination of operational constraints, communication deficiencies, technological shortcomings, and user experiences that survey data alone could not capture. The qualitative data provided contextual insights into system challenges and potential improvements, complementing the quantitative measures. This approach aligns with the pragmatic paradigm, which values practical solutions through both objective and subjective perspectives.

### **3.4 Population**

The target population of this study comprised all individuals involved in or affected by the online passport application system in Ghana. This included passport applicants who had successfully applied for or attempted to apply using the online system, passport office staff engaged in administrative, technical, or approval processes, and intermediaries, often referred to as “Goro /o] ],Boys,” whose activities interact with or are influenced by the system. These groups collectively represent the stakeholders most directly impacted by the system and provide relevant insights into user experiences, operational challenges, and perceptions of government efficiency and trust.

### **3.5 Sampling Size and Technique**

Sampling in research refers to the process of selecting a subset of individuals from a population to represent the larger group, allowing for manageable data collection while ensuring meaningful insights Creswell & Creswell, 2018. For this study, the population comprised all individuals involved in or affected by the online passport application system in Ghana, including applicants who had completed the online process, passport office staff, and intermediaries “Goro Boys” whose activities interact with the system. Given the absence of a comprehensive list of all online passport applicants, a practical sampling frame was adopted, centred on the three main Passport Application Centres (PACs) in the country: Accra, Kumasi, and Tamale. These centres represent the geographical and demographic diversity of Ghana and provide access to a range of experiences across regions.

The study recruited a quantitative sample of 300 respondents from the three main Passport Application Centres (PACs) in Ghana: Accra, Kumasi, and Tamale, ensuring equal representation with 100 participants from each centre. Participants were approached in public spaces immediately

after completing their physical application process, allowing the capture of recent and relevant experiences. This distribution ensures that regional perspectives are adequately represented and enables meaningful comparisons across the three regions. The sample size of 300 was statistically valid and sufficiently large to support generalisation, and reliable descriptive statistics.

For the qualitative component, six key informants, including passport office staff and intermediaries, were purposively recruited to provide in-depth insights into operational challenges and user experiences. Some researchers have found that data saturation can be reached with as few as six participants Guest et al., 2006, although this depends on the population studied. The qualitative sample complements the quantitative data by contextualising trends and helping explain the “why” behind observed patterns.

Convenience sampling was employed on-site due to practical considerations, including time, budget, staffing, and scheduling constraints, making it a feasible approach for this type of field research Etikan et al., 2016. While this method may limit the generalisability of findings to the entire population of online passport applicants, it remains appropriate for capturing relevant, timely, and context-specific experiences.

### **3.6 Type of Data**

The study employed both primary and secondary data sources. Ajayi 2023 defines primary data as original and unique information gathered directly by the researcher from sources such as observations, surveys, questionnaires, case studies, and interviews, tailored to meet the specific objectives of the study. Primary data were collected directly from study participants, including passport applicants, staff, and intermediaries, using administered questionnaires and semistructured interviews. Secondary data are those collected by someone other than the researcher or originally gathered for a purpose different from the current study Pederson et al.,

2020. These data can be obtained from various sources, including censuses, government records, organisational documents, and information initially collected for other research objectives Johnston, 2014; Smith, 2008. Secondary data comprised information gathered during the literature review, including academic papers, government reports, official statistics, and media articles related to e-governance, passport application systems, and public service delivery in Ghana. These sources provided the source from which data were collected to address the study objectives.

### **3.7 Data Collection Instrument**

Questionnaire and semi-structured interview were employed as data collection instruments for this study. For the quantitative component, a structured questionnaire was used. This instrument comprised mostly closed-ended items measured on a 5-point Likert scale, with a few open-ended questions to allow additional insights. The questionnaire was administered both in person and digitally, including via WhatsApp, to accommodate participants' digital familiarity and ensure efficient data collection. The Likert scale measured constructs such as perceived usefulness and ease of use (aligned with the Technology Acceptance Model, overall user satisfaction, perceptions of system efficiency, transparency, anti-corruption effectiveness, and general public views on e-governance initiatives. Structured questionnaires are widely recognised for their ability to collect standardised, comparable data from a large number of respondents efficiently and systematically Bryman, 2016; Fowler, 2014. The first and second research objectives primarily relied on this quantitative instrument to capture measurable trends in public perception, experiences, and satisfaction with the online passport system.

For the qualitative component, a semi-structured interview guide was used to capture in-depth insights. This approach enabled the interviewer to probe responses, clarify points, and explore emergent themes. The interviews focused on participants' personal experiences, challenges

encountered, perceptions of the system's impact on transparency and anti-corruption, suggestions for improvement, and operational issues from the perspectives of staff and intermediaries. Semistructured interviews are valuable for eliciting rich, detailed narratives and understanding the context, motivations, and experiences of participants, which cannot be captured through structured questionnaires alone Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2015. The third research objective primarily employed this qualitative instrument to explore challenges and opportunities in greater depth, providing context to interpret the quantitative findings.

### **3.8 Reliability, Validity, Credibility and Trustworthiness**

The quantitative component of the study was prioritised and pre-tested to ensure the survey instrument effectively addressed the first and second research objectives. Approximately 10% of the intended population, around 30 participants, completed the pilot survey, and they were not included in the main study. The pre-test identified ambiguous questions, estimated completion time, and allowed adjustments to question order for improved clarity and flow. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha to ensure internal consistency, with a threshold of 0.70 considered acceptable Cronbach 1951; Tavakol and Dennick 2011. These steps helped confirm that the questionnaire was capable of capturing valid, reliable, and generalisable data.

For the qualitative component, the semi-structured interview guide was pre-tested with a small group similar to the main study population. Questions were reviewed for clarity and their ability to elicit detailed responses aligned with the third objective, which explored challenges and opportunities in the online passport system. Trustworthiness was ensured through careful engagement, follow-up prompts, and detailed note-taking. Credibility was reinforced by comparing responses across participants, while dependability, transferability, and confirmability

were supported through consistent protocols and clear documentation Lincoln & Guba, 1985. Content, construct, and face validity were also ensured, confirming that the instrument captured reliable, meaningful, and contextually relevant data.

### **3.9 Data Analysis**

Data analysis is a critical component of research, enhancing the validity and usefulness of study findings. It involves the collection, transformation, cleaning, and modelling of data to extract the necessary information Alem, 2020. The quantitative data collected from the questionnaires were processed using IBM SPSS and Microsoft Excel. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, were used to summarise demographic characteristics of respondents. For the first and second objectives, which examined perceptions of efficiency, transparency, user experiences, and satisfaction with the online passport system, mean scores and standard deviations were computed to capture patterns and trends.

For the third objective, which explored challenges and opportunities associated with the online passport system, qualitative data from semi-structured interviews were transcribed, coded, and analysed thematically. Patterns, categories, and emerging themes were identified iteratively to accurately reflect participants' experiences, operational challenges, and suggestions for improvement. This approach ensured that the qualitative findings complemented the quantitative results, providing contextual depth and enhancing the credibility, trustworthiness, and overall richness of the study.

### **3.10 Ethical Considerations**

Ethics refers to the principles that govern proper conduct, particularly regarding the protection, rights, and wellbeing of research participants Resnik, 2018. This study adhered strictly to the

highest ethical standards to ensure the safety, privacy, and dignity of all participants. Prior to data collection, participants were fully briefed on the purpose of the study, the procedures involved, potential risks or benefits, and the voluntary nature of their participation. They were also informed of their right to withdraw at any point without penalty. Confidentiality was rigorously maintained: no names, specific locations beyond the city, or other identifying information are included in the final report. Interview transcripts and survey responses were assigned codes to ensure anonymity, and all collected data were securely stored on a password-protected computer. By following these ethical practices, the study ensured compliance with recognised standards for human research and safeguarded participant trust and integrity.

**CHAPTER FOUR**  
**FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS**

**4.0 Introduction**

This chapter presents the findings from the research, both quantitative and qualitative, and discusses their implications in the context of the study's theoretical framework and existing literature. The analysis is structured to directly address the research questions. This section presents the data collected through the survey and interviews without interpretation. The use of visual aids like tables, pie charts, and bar charts makes the findings clear and easily digestible.

**4.1 Demographics of Respondents**

The study successfully captured a diverse range of participants. Analysing the demographics, including age, gender, and educational level, is important because it helps to understand the background of respondents, identify patterns in responses, and ensure that the findings are representative of the target population.

**Table 4.1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents**

Demographics	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	165	55.0
	Female	135	45.0
Age	18–25	75	25.0
	26–35	150	50.0
	36–45	60	20.0
	45+	15	5.0
Educational Level	High School	60	20.0
	Diploma	90	30.0

Degree	120	40.0
Postgraduate	30	10.0

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Source: Author’s Field Survey (2025).

Table 4.1 reveals the demographics of the respondents. The findings show that users of the online passport application system are predominantly young and middle-aged adults. The largest group is the 26–35 age cohort, representing half of all respondents. This group is typically digitally literate and actively engaged in education or formal employment, making them frequent applicants for passports. When combined with the youngest cohort (18–25 years), 75% of respondents are aged 35 or below. Their experiences and perceptions are therefore likely to heavily influence the overall findings on the efficiency, user-friendliness, and accessibility of the system. Utilisation decreases with age. The 36–45 age group constitutes 20% of respondents, while the 45+ group is the smallest at 5%. This decline may indicate challenges in digital inclusion or lower demand for new passports among older citizens.

The respondents were composed of both male and female users, with males slightly outnumbering females. This balanced representation allows for meaningful analysis of satisfaction and system usage across genders. The slightly higher proportion of male respondents (55%) may reflect demographic or behavioural trends in passport application or online system usage. Overall, the gender distribution suggests that both male and female perspectives are adequately captured, supporting reliable comparisons in the study.

The educational profile shows that the majority of respondents have post-secondary qualifications. Degree holders make up the largest group (40%), followed by Diploma holders (30%). High school graduates and postgraduate respondents are smaller groups, accounting for 20% and 10%

respectively. This indicates that most users are likely comfortable with digital technologies. Such educational distribution is important as it may influence the adoption and perception of the online passport system, with higher-educated users potentially adapting more easily to e-governance platforms.

#### 4.2 Perception of Efficiency and Transparency of Online Passport Application System

The first objective examines the public’s perception of the efficiency and transparency of the online passport application system. The focus is on how users view the system’s ability to simplify the application process, provide clear information, and reduce delays or influence from intermediaries. Descriptive statistics, mean scores, and standard deviations, are used to summarise the responses from the respondents. The result is presented on Table 4.2 below.

**Table 4.2 Perception of Efficiency and Transparency of Online Passport Application System**

Statement	Mean Score	Standard Deviation
The online system has made the passport application process faster	4.1	0.9
The system provides clear information about application requirements	3.8	1.0
The online platform makes the status of applications transparent	3.9	1.0
The online system has reduced the influence of middlemen in the process	4.0	0.9
I find the online process easier than the previous manual system	4.2	0.9
The system provides sufficient guidance for first-time applicants	3.7	1.0

Source: Author’s Field Survey (2025); Cronbach’s Alpha = 0.916

Table 4.2 shows the respondents’ perceptions of the efficiency and transparency of the online passport application process. The findings indicated that the highest mean was observed for the statement “I find the online process easier than the previous manual system” (M = 4.2, SD = 0.9).

This indicates that among the users of digital mode, the online mode is more convenient and less

time consuming compared to the time-consuming manual mode. Such finding is consistent with the Technology Acceptance Model that predicts that ease with use will lead to uptake of digital services by society (Davis, 1989). Alhassan & Adam (2021) study found that online systems enhance user convenience and decrease administrative burden in delivery of public services.

Also, the statement “The online system has made the passport application process faster” was scored a mean 4.1 (SD = 0.9) which means that the majority of respondents are aware of material efficiency improvements. This shows how much users appreciate shorter wait times and less red tape. The mean of 4.0 was recorded for “The online system has reduced the influence of middlemen in the process”. This indicates that the platform increases fairness and transparency, reducing the possibilities for informal intermediaries. This supports the findings of Heeks (2006) that e-government initiatives can enhance accountability and minimise corruption in service delivery.

The study also shows that guidance and information clarity received moderate mean scores. The highest scores were “The system provides clear information about application requirements” (M = 3.8, SD = 1.0) and “The system provides sufficient guidance for first-time applicants” (M = 3.7, SD = 1.0). The score suggests that in most cases the system is quite cost-effectively efficient, but users face some problems while they are trying to navigate the platform (especially when applying for the first time). Unclear instructions or little user support can limit use and satisfaction of e-government services according to research Alhassan et al., 2022.

Additionally, “The online platform makes the status of applications transparent” had a mean value of 3.9 (SD = 1.0), which indicates moderate levels of agreement that users have a way to track their progress. This suggests that transparency is seen favorably, but can be enhanced further by

confirming to applicants their current application situation. Transparency is essential to trust and public confidence in digital government services Bannister & Connolly, 2014.

It can be inferred from the results that online passport system is perceived as efficient, faster, and more user-friendly than the manual systems, as it is somewhat less dependent on middlemen. Still, there is some lack of guidance for novice users and less clarity on information, indicating scope for further optimization which can enhance trust and adoption.

### **4.3 Influence of the Online System on Citizens’ Experiences and Satisfaction During the Passport Application Process**

The second objective investigates how the online system has influenced citizens’ overall experience and satisfaction during the passport application process. This analysis looks at convenience, error reduction, ease of tracking applications, appointment scheduling, and overall satisfaction. Like the first objective, descriptive statistics are employed to present the findings in a clear and measurable manner. The analysis is presented on Table 4.3 below.

**Table 4.3: Influence of the Online System on Citizens’ Experiences and Satisfaction During the Passport Application Process**

Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation
Using the online system has made applying for a passport more convenient.	3.95	0.97
The online system reduces errors during application.	3.91	0.99
I am satisfied with the overall process of applying through the online system.	3.96	0.94
The system allows for easy scheduling of appointments.	3.87	1.05
I can easily track my application progress online.	3.85	1.01
The system improves overall trust in the passport application process.	3.70	1.12

Source: Author’s Field Survey (2025); Cronbach’s Alpha = 0.912.

Table 4.5 assessed the influence of the online passport application system on citizens' experiences and satisfaction. The results indicate a positive perception, suggesting that many users view the system as beneficial and supportive of a smoother passport application process. Respondents also agreed that the system minimizes application-related errors ( $M = 3.91$ ). According to these results, structured digital forms and automated validation checks help to avoid errors made in the manual process. Mean scores for appointment scheduling ( $M = 3.87$ ) and application tracking ( $M = 3.85$ ) were slightly lower, but still beneficial. The results suggest that users may still have occasional trouble with the function, like system latencies or no real-time updating. Previous research points out that reliable scheduling and transparent tracking mechanisms play a crucial role in enhancing levels of user confidence and perceived control during e-government services Bannister & Connolly, 2014.

The average score for trust in the passport application process was 3.70. Although this value remains above the neutral midpoint, it suggests that trust is less strongly perceived compared with other aspects of the user experience. System-related issues of system stability, data safety or interconnectivity between online and on-site offices, are issues that may play a role in this result. Based on previous research, trust is an ever-growing concern in e-government adoption, especially when users feel the potential risk of privacy concerns or a lack of service reliability Rehman et al., 2012.

Overall satisfaction had the mean score highest ( $M = 3.96$ ), followed by convenience ( $M = 3.95$ ). This is an indication that, on the one hand, the users value to apply from distance, have to avoid long queues, and on the other hand they tend to avoid going back and forth repeatedly to passport offices. The implication is consistent with the Technology Acceptance Model which indicates that usefulness and simplicity of use will be key to user satisfaction and continued use of an application

(Davis, 1989). This shows that the online platform seems to satisfy major user expectations around efficiency and friendliness.

These results suggest that citizens' experiences have been improved by the online passport system, and that the approach is particularly convenient, satisfying, and error-reducing in the online passport application system. On the other hand, the modest lower trust score indicates that trustworthiness, transparency and data confidentiality in system integrity and its security still need improvement. Focusing on such issues can enhance the user's confidence and maintain the user's adherence to the online system.

#### **4.4 Public Relations Challenges Faced and the Opportunities Presented by the Implementation of the Online Passport System**

The third objective examines the public relations challenges faced and the opportunities presented by the implementation of the online passport system in Ghana. This section uses a qualitative approach, relying on interviews to capture detailed experiences, difficulties, and suggestions from six selected participants (U1–U6). The analysis identifies five key challenges and four opportunities for improving the system.

##### **4.4.1 Communication and Information Gaps**

Communication gaps were consistently identified as a major challenge in the use of the online passport system. Participants reported that instructions provided on the website, via email, or through SMS were often unclear, incomplete, or inconsistent, creating confusion about required documents, payment procedures, and appointment scheduling. Several users noted that different sources sometimes provided conflicting information, making it difficult to know which instructions to follow. U1 explained:

"I often receive conflicting emails about what documents are needed; sometimes the website says one thing, the SMS another. Even after following all instructions, I am unsure if my application is complete because updates are sporadic."

These observations show that weak communication reduces user confidence and trust in the system. Unclear instructions and irregular updates make applicants feel uncertain about the process and its outcomes. Clear, consistent, and timely communication is therefore important for transparency and public confidence in e-government systems Tasrif & Haeril, 2024.

#### **4.4.2. Technical and System Errors**

System failures, timeouts, and document upload errors were frequently cited by participants as recurring technical problems. These issues often interrupted the application process, forced users to restart submissions, and increased frustration. Several participants explained that such disruptions led to delays, additional costs, and repeated visits to the system, which undermined confidence in the reliability of the online platform. U2 stated:

"I uploaded my documents three times before the system accepted them; it kept crashing. Also, sometimes the portal is down for maintenance without prior notice, disrupting my application timeline."

Technical unreliability negatively affects efficiency and can discourage continued use of online services, as system interruptions weaken user confidence (Rehman et al., 2012). A stable and dependable platform is therefore essential for sustaining user satisfaction and building trust in digital public services. Frequent disruptions also increase perceived risk and frustration among users, which may lead to reliance on informal intermediaries. Over time, this undermines the intended goals of transparency and efficiency in e-government initiatives.

#### **4.4.3 Procedural Delays and Poor Integration**

Discrepancies between online booking and actual office appointments caused frustration and confusion among applicants. Users explained that appointment dates confirmed online were sometimes changed or not recognized at the passport offices, leading to delays and repeated visits.

As one respondent remarked,

"I booked a slot online, but when I arrived, the office said no appointment was registered; I waited hours. There is no coordination between the online system and physical processing; it wastes time and causes confusion."

This highlights poor integration between digital systems and offline operations, undermining perceived efficiency Alannary, 2025. When online platforms are not fully synchronized with physical service points, users experience uncertainty and delays. Over time, such gaps can weaken confidence in digital reforms and discourage continued use of e-government services.

#### **4.4.4 Limited User Support and Digital Guidance**

Participants reported insufficient support for first-time users, particularly in relation to guidance, instructions, and step-by-step assistance throughout the application process. Several interviewees noted that the system appears designed for repeat users, with limited prompts or explanatory support for those applying for the first time. This gap was described as creating uncertainty and increasing the likelihood of mistakes during form completion and document submission. U3 explained,

"There is no clear tutorial, and the helpdesk is slow to respond. A chatbot or stepby-step guide would make a huge difference for beginners."

Lack of accessible guidance particularly affects citizens with lower digital literacy, reducing system usability Abdulkareem & Oladimeji, 2024. This limitation can exacerbate existing digital

inequalities, leaving some users unable to complete applications efficiently. Consequently, portions of the public may be discouraged from fully engaging with the online passport system, undermining the platform's overall effectiveness and adoption.

#### **4.4.5 Data Security and Privacy Concerns**

Concerns over personal data protection were frequently mentioned, with participants expressing anxiety about how their sensitive information is stored, shared, and potentially accessed by unauthorised parties within the online system. Many users reported feeling uneasy about submitting personal identification documents and payment details online, fearing misuse or data breaches. U2 stressed,

"I am unsure who has access to my details; it makes me anxious about submitting sensitive information. The system doesn't clearly explain data storage or privacy policies, which undermines trust."

Concerns about data privacy were a recurring theme among participants. Many reported fear that their personal information could be misused or accessed without consent. Such perceived risks can reduce user confidence and discourage engagement with online government services Rehman et al., 2016. These concerns may also lead users to hesitate before submitting sensitive documents or payment details online. Over time, unresolved privacy anxieties can weaken trust in digital government platforms and limit their wider acceptance.

#### **4.5 Opportunities to Enhance the Online Passport Application**

The potential opportunities to enhance the online passport application system was also explored. Insights were drawn from participants' suggestions and experiences, highlighting ways to improve

efficiency, transparency, and user satisfaction. The focus is on identifying practical measures that could strengthen system performance and public trust.

#### **4.5.1 Strengthened Multi-Channel Communication**

Participants suggested enhancing communication through multiple channels, including emails, SMS notifications, and social media updates, to ensure timely and consistent information delivery. They emphasized that proactive communication could help applicants stay informed about requirements, application status, and potential delays. Improved messaging across these platforms would likely reduce confusion, manage expectations, and foster greater user confidence in the online system. Participants suggested enhancing communication through emails, SMS, and social media. U1 mentioned,

"A clear SMS every time my application moves to a new stage would help a lot. Regular updates via WhatsApp or Facebook could reach more people quickly."

Enhanced and timely communication across multiple channels helps build transparency and trust, reinforcing users' confidence in the system. Consistent updates and clear guidance demonstrate the government's commitment to efficient service delivery. Such practices are critical in strengthening public perception and engagement with e-government platforms Indama, 2022.

#### **4.5.2 Enhanced Technical Reliability and System Integration**

Participants emphasised that ensuring system stability and seamless integration between online bookings and physical office appointments would significantly enhance user experience. Minimising technical glitches and aligning digital and offline processes can reduce frustration,

prevent delays, and foster greater confidence in the system. They also noted that consistent system performance would encourage continued use and reduce reliance on informal intermediaries.

U2 noted:

"If the system worked smoothly and appointments matched office capacity, we would save hours. Automatic sync between online slots and office schedules would prevent confusion."

Furthermore, integrating real-time updates and automatic synchronisation could improve transparency and overall trust in the passport application process. Ensuring consistent system performance and proper integration with offline operations helps prevent errors and delays, improving overall user experience. Users are more likely to trust and continue using a service that functions reliably and smoothly. System reliability and integration are essential for efficiency and user satisfaction.

#### **4.5.3 User-Centred Support Services**

Another important intervention identified to enhance user experience is regular system updates and maintenance. Participants emphasised that timely updates can prevent technical glitches, improve functionality, and ensure smoother processing of applications. They also noted that proactive maintenance increase's reliability, reduces user frustration, and strengthens confidence in the online system. Additionally, keeping the platform current with user needs and technological improvements can promote wider adoption and long-term satisfaction. U3 suggested:

"A video guide showing step by step would help first-time users.

Live chat support or a hotline could resolve problems instantly, especially for older users."

Additionally, implementing user-centred support mechanisms, such as personalised guidance and accessible help resources, was identified as essential. These interventions can greatly enhance accessibility, support users with differing levels of digital literacy, and encourage broader adoption of the online passport system AbdulKareem & Oladimeji, 2024. Participants also highlighted that interactive tools, such as chatbots or step-by-step tutorials, can reduce errors and improve overall user satisfaction.

#### **4.6 Discussion of Results**

The main objective of this study is to assess the impact of the online passport application system on the public's perception and trust in the Ghanaian government. The first objective examines citizens' perceptions of the system's efficiency and transparency, while the second objective explores users' experiences and satisfaction. Both objectives are analysed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, mean scores, and standard deviations. The third objective investigates challenges and opportunities associated with the system through a qualitative approach using interviews.

The findings of this study indicate that the online passport application system has had a generally positive influence on public perception, user experience, and satisfaction. Across the quantitative results, mean scores consistently fall above the neutral midpoint, suggesting that many users regard the system as a beneficial and practical alternative to the former manual process. This pattern reflects a broader trend in e-government adoption, where digital platforms are valued for improving efficiency, accessibility, and service delivery (Davis, 1989; Heeks, 2006).

Perceptions of efficiency and transparency were particularly strong. Respondents largely agreed that the online system is easier and faster than the manual process, and that it reduces the influence of middlemen. These findings suggest that digitalisation has simplified procedural steps and limited opportunities for informal intermediaries. Similar studies report that online public service platforms can enhance transparency and accountability by standardising processes and reducing discretionary human interaction Bannister & Connolly, 2014; Alhassan & Adam, 2021. The relatively high mean scores for application tracking and process transparency further indicate that users value being able to monitor progress and understand system outcomes, which contributes to a sense of fairness and openness.

However, the findings also reveal moderate perceptions regarding information clarity and guidance, especially for first-time users. Although respondents generally agreed that the system provides information on requirements, the lower mean scores suggest that instructions may not always be sufficiently clear or detailed. This may affect users with limited digital experience and reduce the perceived inclusiveness of the system. Prior research notes that inadequate guidance and weak user support can limit the effectiveness of e-government initiatives, even when the technical infrastructure is functional Alhassan et al., 2022; AbdulKareem & Oladimeji, 2024.

With respect to user experience and satisfaction, the results show that respondents view the system as convenient and largely satisfactory. High mean scores for convenience and overall satisfaction indicate that users appreciate reduced travel, shorter waiting times, and the ability to complete applications remotely. These outcomes are consistent with the Technology Acceptance Model, which emphasises perceived usefulness and ease of use as key drivers of satisfaction and continued system use Davis, 1989. The perception that the system reduces application errors further

reinforces its practical value, as automated forms and validation checks can minimise common mistakes associated with manual processing.

Nevertheless, some aspects of the user experience appear less robust. Appointment scheduling and application tracking, while positively rated, recorded slightly lower mean scores. This suggests occasional operational or technical challenges, such as delays or inconsistencies between online bookings and physical office processes. Studies on e-government implementation highlight that weak integration between digital platforms and offline service points can undermine efficiency and user confidence Bannister & Connolly, 2014; Alansary, 2025.

Trust in the online passport application process, although positively rated, emerged as a relatively weaker dimension compared to convenience and satisfaction. This may reflect lingering concerns related to system reliability, data security, or communication gaps. Trust is widely recognised as a critical factor in e-government adoption, particularly where citizens are required to submit sensitive personal information online (Rehman et al., 2012). Where such concerns persist, users may remain cautious despite recognising the system's functional benefits.

Overall, the findings suggest that the online passport application system has improved efficiency, convenience, and user satisfaction, contributing positively to public perception of government service delivery. At the same time, challenges related to guidance, system integration, communication, and trust indicate that digital transformation alone is insufficient. Continuous system improvement, clearer communication strategies, and stronger user support mechanisms are necessary to sustain confidence and maximise the long-term impact of e-government initiatives.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS 5.0 Introduction**

This chapter presents a summary of the key findings, conclusions, recommendations, and directions for future research arising from the study on the online passport application system in Ghana. It synthesises insights from the analysis to show how the system has shaped public perception, efficiency, transparency, user experience, and trust in government service delivery. Practical recommendations are also provided to support improved system performance and the sustained adoption of digital public services.

#### **5.1 Summary of Results**

The study examined the impact of the online passport application system on citizens' perceptions and trust in the Ghanaian government, guided by three main objectives.

First, findings related to efficiency and transparency show that the online system is widely perceived as faster, easier, and more convenient than the previous manual process. Respondents indicated that the system has reduced waiting times, simplified procedures, and limited the

influence of middlemen. These outcomes suggest that digitalisation has enhanced fairness and transparency in passport service delivery. However, moderate ratings for information clarity and guidance indicate that some users, particularly first-time applicants, still experience challenges in navigating the platform.

Second, the study assessed the influence of the online system on citizens' experiences and satisfaction. Results reveal generally positive perceptions, with users reporting high levels of convenience, satisfaction, and reduced application errors. The ability to apply remotely, track progress, and avoid repeated physical visits to passport offices was particularly valued. While appointment scheduling and tracking were positively rated, the findings suggest occasional operational challenges, such as system delays or inconsistencies between online bookings and office processes. Overall, the system is viewed as a helpful solution that supports a smoother and more efficient application experience.

Third, qualitative findings revealed several public relations challenges and opportunities. Key challenges included communication and information gaps, technical system errors, poor integration between online and offline operations, limited user support, and concerns about data security and privacy. Participants expressed frustration over unclear instructions, inconsistent updates, system downtime, and inadequate support for users with lower digital literacy. At the same time, opportunities were identified to enhance the system through improved multi-channel communication, stronger technical reliability, better system integration, and user-centred support services.

## **5.2 Conclusion**

The study concludes that the online passport application system has had a positive impact on public perception, efficiency, and user experience in Ghana. Citizens generally view the system as a

beneficial and practical alternative to the manual process, offering greater convenience, reduced errors, and improved transparency. These improvements contribute to a more efficient public service delivery model and support broader digital government reforms. However, the findings also show that challenges remain. Communication gaps, technical disruptions, limited guidance for first-time users, and concerns about data security affect user confidence and trust. While trust in the system is generally positive, it is not as strong as perceptions of convenience and satisfaction, indicating the need for continued improvement. The effectiveness of the online passport system therefore depends not only on technological deployment but also on consistent communication, system reliability, integration with offline operations, and responsive user support. Addressing these issues is essential for sustaining public trust and encouraging long-term adoption. **5.3**

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are proposed:

Clear, consistent, and timely communication should be prioritised. The Passport Office should strengthen the use of emails, SMS notifications, and social media to provide accurate updates on requirements, application status, and delays. This will reduce confusion and improve public confidence.

System stability and technical reliability should be enhanced through regular maintenance and upgrades. Reducing system downtime, upload errors, and timeouts will improve efficiency and user satisfaction.

Better integration between online booking systems and physical passport offices is essential. Synchronising appointment schedules with office capacity can minimise delays and frustration during in-person visits.

User-centred support services should be expanded. Tutorials, step-by-step guides, chatbots, and responsive helpdesks can support first-time users and citizens with lower digital literacy, promoting inclusiveness.

Stronger data protection and privacy communication is needed. Clear explanations of how personal data are stored and protected should be provided to reassure users and strengthen trust in the system.

#### **5.4 Suggestions for Further Research**

Future studies could examine how demographic factors such as age, education, and digital literacy influence adoption and satisfaction with the online passport system.

Comparative studies between Ghana and other countries implementing similar e-government platforms could provide broader insights into best practices.

Further research could also explore the long-term impact of improved communication and system integration on public trust and confidence in digital government services.

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**APPENDIX**  
**QUESTIONNAIRE**

Dear respondent,

My name is Issahaku Issah Napodow and I am a researcher from university of Media, Art and Communication. Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study, the purpose of this interview is to understand your experiences and perspectives on the online passport application system in Ghana. Your participation is completely voluntary, and you can choose to stop the interview at any time. Everything you share will be kept confidential, and your name will not be used in the final report.

**SECTION A: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION**

Please indicate your response by ticking [✓] the appropriate box.

**1. Age of Respondent:**

- a. 18–25  b. 26–35  c. 36–45  d. 45+

**2. Gender of Respondent:**

- a. Male  b. Female

**3. Educational Level:**

- a. High School  b. Diploma  c. Degree  d. Postgraduate

**SECTION C: PERCEPTION OF EFFICIENCY AND TRANSPARENCY**

This section addresses the first objective: to examine how the public perceives the efficiency and transparency of the online passport system. Indicate your level of agreement using the scale:

1 = Strongly Disagree    2 = Disagree    3 = Neutral    4 = Agree    5 = Strongly Agree

No.	Item	1	2	3	4	5
C1	The online system has made the passport application process faster.					
C2	The system provides clear information about application requirements.					
C3	The online platform makes the status of applications transparent.					

C4	The online system has reduced the influence of middlemen in the process.						
C5	I find the online process easier than the previous manual system.						
C6	The system provides sufficient guidance for first-time applicants.						

## SECTION D: CITIZENS' EXPERIENCE AND SATISFACTION

This section addresses the second objective: to examine how the online system has influenced citizens' experiences and satisfaction during the passport application process. Indicate your level of agreement using the scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree 2 = Disagree 3 = Neutral 4 = Agree 5 = Strongly Agree

No.	Item	1	2	3	4	5
D1	Using the online system has made applying for a passport more convenient.					
D2	The online system reduces errors during application.					
D3	I am satisfied with the overall process of applying through the online system.					
D4	The system allows for easy scheduling of appointments.					
D5	I can easily track my application progress online.					
D6	The system improves overall trust in the passport application process.					

## INTERVIEW GUIDE

### PUBLIC RELATIONS CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Please answer openly and provide as much detail as possible.

1. What specific challenges have you experienced while using the online passport system?

.....  
.....

2. Can you describe any difficulties related to communication, information, or interaction with the government when using the system?

.....  
.....

3. What suggestions or ideas do you have for improving the online passport application process to make it more efficient, transparent, and user-friendly?

.....  
.....

**Probing guidance for interviewers:**

- Can you give a specific example of that challenge?

.....  
.....

- How did it affect your experience?

.....  
.....

- What could have made the process easier or more effective?

.....  
.....

Thank you for your time and cooperation