

Advances in Government Policy and Regulatory Communication: Nigeria Customs Service Perspective

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Abstract:

Effective communication is central to the success of government policy implementation and regulatory enforcement, particularly in complex governance systems such as Nigeria. This paper explores the advances in government policy and regulatory communication from the perspective of the Nigeria Customs Service (NCS), a key agency responsible for trade facilitation and revenue generation, suppression of smuggling and implementation of government fiscal policies. Drawing on contemporary scholarly literature and practical case studies, the paper examines how the NCS has increasingly adopted strategic communication tools, such as digital platforms, stakeholder engagement, public awareness campaigns, and media framing, to improve transparency, facilitate compliance, and enhance institutional credibility. It highlights key initiatives, including the implementation of the Pre-Arrival Assessment Report (PAAR), the border closure policy, and the ongoing trade modernisation project, as evidence of the agency's evolving communication practices. The paper also discusses the challenges that continue to undermine effective regulatory communication, including policy inconsistency, infrastructural constraints, misinformation, and limited professional communication capacity. The paper concludes that while significant progress has been made, sustained improvement in regulatory communication within the NCS requires institutional reforms, enhanced inter-agency coordination, and the professionalisation of communication functions to foster inclusive, accountable, and efficient public governance.

Keywords:

Advances, Communication, Government, Perspective, Policy, and Regulatory

I. Introduction

In an era where public trust and policy effectiveness are intricately linked to strategic communication, government institutions must rethink their communication frameworks. Public sector communication has grown beyond mere dissemination to strategic engagement, reputation management, and fostering informed participation. Effective communication builds trust, a cornerstone of legitimacy for regulatory bodies. In the evolving landscape of public administration, government policy and regulatory communication have emerged as vital components for ensuring transparency, accountability, and the efficient functioning of state institutions. Particularly in developing countries like Nigeria, effective communication mechanisms within government agencies are increasingly recognised as central to promoting compliance, fostering public trust, and driving policy outcomes. The Nigeria Customs Service (NCS), a key revenue-generating and border control agency, provides a compelling case study in understanding the strides and challenges associated with policy and regulatory communication in the contemporary era.

Government policy communication refers to the structured transmission of policy intentions, decisions, and implementations from governing institutions to the public and relevant stakeholders. Regulatory communication, in turn, entails the methods by which government agencies inform, engage, and enforce compliance with rules and procedures (Yar'Adua et al.,

2023a). These communicative processes are essential not only for internal coherence within government structures but also for fostering inclusive governance, citizen participation, and institutional credibility (McNair, 2018; Graber & Dunaway, 2021). In the context of the NCS, these functions are particularly pertinent given the organisation's mandate in revenue mobilisation, trade facilitation, and national security. Over the past decade, the NCS has been at the forefront of adopting strategic communication innovations, both in terms of digital transformation and stakeholder engagement, to improve regulatory compliance and service delivery (Adewale, 2020).

Significant advances in this domain can be seen in the implementation of electronic customs processes such as the Nigeria Integrated Customs Information System (NICIS I & II), Pre-Arrival Assessment Report (PAAR), and the recent migration to the Trade Modernisation Project (TMP), also known as e-Customs. These initiatives represent deliberate policy communication efforts aimed at increasing transparency, reducing bureaucratic red tape, and minimizing corruption at Nigeria's ports of entry. By digitising customs procedures and automating trade processes, the NCS not only expedites cargo clearance and boosts investor confidence but also reinforces Nigeria's compliance with global trade protocols under frameworks such as the World Trade Organisation's Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) (WTO, 2022). The shift from traditional paper-based systems to electronic platforms reflects broader efforts in regulatory communication to ensure consistency, accuracy, and real-time dissemination of information (Mojaye & Aondover, 2022).

Furthermore, the NCS has prioritised public engagement strategies to strengthen its communication with traders, agents, and the general public. Through media briefings, online portals, community sensitisation campaigns, and partnerships with trade unions, the service has sought to demystify complex customs procedures and bridge information asymmetries (Aliyu, 2022). The rise of social media and digital platforms has also been leveraged by the NCS to disseminate real-time updates, counter misinformation, and enhance its public image in a security-conscious and politically charged environment. However, despite these advancements, challenges persist, including infrastructural limitations, resistance to change among personnel, and intermittent policy inconsistencies that undermine public confidence in regulatory institutions (Eze & Iwueke, 2021).

In addition to technological reforms, capacity-building programs have been instituted within the NCS to improve staff competencies in communication, negotiation, and international trade protocols. These human capital investments reflect a growing recognition of the link between effective policy communication and the professionalism of government operatives (Yar'Adua et al., 2023b; Akinyemi & Nwogu, 2021). The NCS also engages in inter-agency coordination with other regulatory bodies such as the Nigerian Ports Authority (NPA), National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC), and Standards Organisation of Nigeria (SON), emphasizing the interdependence of regulatory communication across institutional frameworks.

This underscored the position of Zhang and Bryson (2020) that the credibility and impact of regulatory communication depend not only on content accuracy but also on the perceived integrity, responsiveness, and cultural alignment of the institutions involved. In a multicultural and often fragmented polity like Nigeria, tailoring communication strategies to reflect local realities, languages, and stakeholder expectations is essential (Maikaba & Msughter, 2019). Therefore, while the Nigeria Customs Service has made commendable strides in reforming its communication frameworks, sustained investment in institutional capacity,

stakeholder trust-building, and participatory feedback mechanisms remains critical for long-term impact. Thus, the Nigeria Customs Service presents a dynamic example of how government policy and regulatory communication can evolve in response to changing technological, political, and economic imperatives. The trajectory of its communication reforms reflects broader shifts in public sector governance in Nigeria, shifts that prioritise transparency, digitalisation, and citizen engagement. Continued scholarly attention to these trends will be crucial in assessing the effectiveness, inclusivity, and sustainability of government communication strategies in regulatory environments.

1.1 Objectives of the Paper

1. To provide an overview of the Nigeria Customs Service's mandate and its significance within the Nigerian regulatory framework.
2. To analyse contemporary government and regulatory communication approaches, highlighting best practices and evolving trends.
3. To showcase specific communication tools and platforms utilised to engage stakeholders effectively.
4. To identify key challenges the NCS faces in communicating complex policies and regulations.
5. To propose actionable solutions for enhancing policy and regulatory communication strategies.

II. Review of Literature

2.1 Overview of the Nigeria Customs Service's Mandate and its Significance within the Nigerian Regulatory Framework

The (NCS) plays a pivotal role within the country's regulatory and economic governance structure. As a paramilitary agency under the Federal Ministry of Finance, its primary mandates include the collection of customs duties, facilitation of international trade, prevention of smuggling, and enforcement of customs and excise laws. These functions position the NCS as a strategic institution at the intersection of trade policy implementation, border security, and national revenue generation. Agogo and Okonjo (2022) observed that the Service's responsibilities have grown increasingly complex in recent decades, reflecting Nigeria's evolving economic structure, integration into the global economy, and the need for robust regulation at its porous borders.

Established under the Customs and Excise Management Act (CEMA) of 1958 and reformed through various amendments and policy instruments with new legal framework called Nigeria Customs Service Act 2023, the NCS is mandated to enforce compliance with Nigeria's customs laws, administer import and export procedures, and protect the country against illicit trade, including the smuggling of arms, narcotics, and counterfeit goods. Beyond fiscal functions, the NCS is central to Nigeria's national security architecture, particularly in addressing transnational criminal networks that exploit Nigeria's extensive and often ungoverned land and maritime borders (Idris & Okafor, 2021). Thus, the Service's mandate extends beyond mere revenue collection to encompass regulatory enforcement, intelligence gathering, and the promotion of legitimate trade, making it indispensable to Nigeria's development agenda (Maiwada et al., 2025).

The significance of the NCS within the Nigerian regulatory framework is underscored by its contribution to national revenue. According to data from the Federal Ministry of Finance, the NCS consistently ranks among the top three non-oil revenue-generating agencies in Nigeria, with

a record N3.2 trillion revenue remittance in 2023, attributed to improved automation, policy enforcement, and a clampdown on revenue leakages (Ministry of Finance, 2024). This performance reinforces the NCS's critical role in cushioning Nigeria's fiscal deficits amid fluctuating global oil prices and the country's ongoing push toward economic diversification.

Scholarly literature by Adeniran and Omotosho (2023) emphasises that the NCS operates as a frontline actor in the implementation of Nigeria's trade policies and regional commitments. As a member of the World Customs Organization (WCO) and signatory to the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), Nigeria has committed to reducing trade barriers and improving cross-border processes. The NCS is thus responsible for harmonizing customs procedures with international best practices, including the World Trade Organization's Trade Facilitation Agreement (WTO, 2022). To this end, the Service has undertaken several modernization initiatives such as the Nigeria Integrated Customs Information System (NICIS II), the Pre-Arrival Assessment Report (PAAR), and the Trade Modernization Project (TMP), which aim to digitize and streamline customs operations.

In the broader context of regulatory governance, the NCS also performs coordinating functions with sister agencies including the Nigerian Immigration Service (NIS), the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA), the Standards Organisation of Nigeria (SON), and the Nigerian Ports Authority (NPA). These collaborations are vital for managing inter-agency overlaps and ensuring a unified response to trade and security challenges. For instance, at the seaports and border posts, the NCS leads joint task forces to enforce import standards, detect contraband, and regulate entry and exit points in line with national laws and international treaties (Bamidele & Adegoke, 2022).

Nevertheless, challenges persist that affect the full realisation of the NCS mandate. These include lack of infrastructural investment, capacity deficits, and policy inconsistencies that occasionally undermine regulatory enforcement. Additionally, Nigeria's border complexity, marked by thousands of unofficial crossing points and difficult terrains, presents formidable obstacles to customs surveillance and control (Onyejelem et al., 2024). In response, scholars argue for a more integrated regulatory framework that enhances the autonomy, operational efficiency, and digital capacity of the NCS while promoting institutional synergy with other regulatory and security agencies (Awojobi, 2021).

From a policy perspective, the significance of the NCS is also tied to its evolving role in supporting economic development. Efficient customs administration not only reduces transaction costs for businesses but also increases Nigeria's attractiveness as a destination for investment and trade. The World Bank (2023) has repeatedly highlighted the importance of modern customs services in improving a country's Doing Business indicators, particularly in areas related to trade across borders. In Nigeria's case, the NCS is strategically positioned to contribute to these improvements by reducing port congestion, improving clearance times, and fostering greater predictability in the regulatory environment.

The Nigeria Customs Service occupies a central position in Nigeria's regulatory and economic governance framework. Its mandate goes beyond revenue collection to encompass critical functions related to trade facilitation, security enforcement, and policy implementation. The significance of the NCS lies in its ability to influence the ease of doing business, secure Nigeria's territorial integrity, and support fiscal sustainability. However, to fully leverage its potential, sustained reforms in transparency, inter-agency collaboration, capacity building, and digital infrastructure are required.

2.2 Understanding Government Policy and Regulation

Government policy and regulation are fundamental instruments through which states intervene in social, economic, and political systems to promote public welfare, ensure legal compliance, and address market failures. Policies serve as strategic frameworks that guide decision-making and action across different sectors of society, while regulations operationalise these policies through enforceable rules and standards. In contemporary governance, especially within complex and dynamic environments like Nigeria, understanding the intersection between policy development and regulatory enforcement is crucial for achieving developmental goals, promoting accountability, and protecting public interests (Oreoluwa et al., 2024).

Public policy is typically understood as the outcome of authoritative decision-making by governmental actors aimed at addressing specific societal issues. It encompasses the formulation, implementation, and evaluation of strategies designed to influence the behaviour of individuals, institutions, or markets in ways consistent with the goals of the state (Cairney, 2019). In Nigeria, policies range from macroeconomic frameworks such as the National Development Plan (2021–2025) to sector-specific strategies in health, education, security, and infrastructure. These policies are often shaped by political ideologies, administrative capabilities, stakeholder influence, and global trends, making the policy-making process both political and technical (Jega & Fatile, 2021).

Regulation, on the other hand, involves the establishment and enforcement of rules that guide the conduct of individuals and organisations in accordance with established policies. It serves to correct market failures, ensure public safety, protect the environment, and secure equity in the distribution of resources and services. Regulatory frameworks are particularly essential in environments characterised by weak institutions, widespread informality, and governance gaps—as seen in many parts of sub-Saharan Africa. In Nigeria, agencies such as the National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC), the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), and the Nigeria Customs Service (NCS) exemplify the institutional embodiment of regulatory authority, charged with implementing specific policy mandates and ensuring compliance with national and international standards (Adewuyi & Akinbinu, 2022).

The relationship between policy and regulation is inherently complementary. Policy provides the vision and direction, while regulation ensures its execution through mechanisms of control, incentives, and sanctions. This symbiosis requires strong institutional capacity, legal frameworks, and stakeholder engagement to be effective. According to Braithwaite (2020), the legitimacy and effectiveness of regulation depend on its consistency, predictability, and responsiveness to societal needs (Vitalis et al., 2024). Where policies are poorly communicated or regulations are inconsistently applied, public trust erodes, leading to noncompliance, corruption, and policy failure (Yar'Adua et al., 2023c).

In the Nigerian context, challenges such as overlapping mandates of regulatory agencies, politicization of policy processes, limited enforcement capacity, and inadequate stakeholder consultation have constrained the effectiveness of government policies and their corresponding regulations. Additionally, the ad hoc nature of some policy interventions, often driven by regime-specific agendas rather than long-term development planning, undermines the coherence and sustainability of Nigeria's regulatory landscape. For example, inconsistent policies on fuel subsidy removal, import restrictions, and foreign exchange regulation have had fluctuating impacts on economic growth and public perception (Uchenna & Omodia, 2023).

Existing literature emphasised the need for more participatory and evidence-informed policy processes. This involves incorporating scientific research, stakeholder perspectives, and data analytics in the design and implementation of public policies. Such approaches improve the legitimacy and efficacy of regulation while enhancing accountability. Moreover, with the rise of digital governance and e-regulation, governments are increasingly turning to technology to streamline regulatory functions, improve transparency, and reduce the cost of compliance. Nigeria's adoption of platforms like the Integrated Payroll and Personnel Information System (IPPIS), the Treasury Single Account (TSA), and the NCS Trade Modernization initiative are examples of how digital tools can reinforce the effectiveness of policy implementation (Okereke & Olatunji, 2022).

Therefore, understanding government policy and regulation involves grasping the frameworks, institutions, and processes that shape public governance. It requires an appreciation of the complex interplay between vision-setting and rule-making, and the institutional capacities necessary for translating policy goals into actionable outcomes. As Nigeria continues to grapple with developmental challenges and governance reforms, building more coherent, inclusive, and adaptive policy and regulatory systems remains essential for national progress.

III. Research Methods

3.1 Strategic Communication of Government Policy and Regulation

Strategic communication is increasingly recognized as a vital element in the successful formulation, implementation, and public reception of government policy and regulation. It involves the purposeful use of communication by government actors to inform, engage, and influence target audiences in ways that align with broader policy objectives and regulatory goals. In democratic and transitional governance systems such as Nigeria's, strategic communication serves not only as a tool for policy dissemination but also as a mechanism for building legitimacy, fostering transparency, and enhancing compliance (Graber & Dunaway, 2021). Without effective communication strategies, even well-crafted policies and regulations risk misinterpretation, resistance, or outright failure due to lack of public awareness or stakeholder buy-in.

Government policy communication entails deliberate efforts to translate complex policy content into clear, accessible messages that can be understood and acted upon by diverse audiences (Vitalis et al., 2023). This is particularly important in pluralistic societies where citizens possess varied levels of literacy, political engagement, and access to information. Strategic communication frameworks are designed to bridge this gap by using multiple platforms, mass media, social media, town hall meetings, stakeholder consultations, and digital outreach, to ensure inclusiveness and responsiveness (Cairney & Kwiatkowski, 2017). In Nigeria, the shift towards more open governance and digital communication platforms has underscored the need for regulatory institutions to deploy communication not just as an informational tool but as a participatory and persuasive process.

The success of strategic communication in policy and regulatory environments is anchored on message clarity, credibility of the source, appropriateness of channels, and consistency over time. According to Mefalopulos and Kamlongera (2020), effective policy communication must consider audience segmentation, cultural sensitivities, and feedback mechanisms to enhance comprehension and responsiveness. In the Nigerian context, agencies such as the National Orientation Agency (NOA), Nigeria Customs Service (NCS), and National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA) are increasingly adopting communication strategies that blend traditional and digital media to reach heterogeneous

audiences. These efforts are especially crucial during the rollout of sensitive reforms, such as the removal of fuel subsidies or changes to import tariffs, where citizen trust and understanding significantly determine outcomes.

Strategic communication is also central to regulatory enforcement, as it helps to frame regulations not merely as directives but as shared social responsibilities. Public campaigns, stakeholder meetings, and sectoral dialogues can clarify the rationale for regulation and minimise opposition or non-compliance. For example, in the implementation of Nigeria's Border Closure policy in 2019, the Nigeria Customs Service utilized press briefings, data releases, and community outreach to justify the policy in terms of economic protection and national security (Okeke & Oduh, 2020). Though the policy drew mixed reactions, its communicative framing influenced how various stakeholders interpreted its intentions and legitimacy.

Scholars have emphasised that strategic communication must be dynamic and two-way, incorporating public feedback and adapting to social and political contexts. As noted by Nabatchi and Leighninger (2015), government communication that integrates deliberative elements, such as town halls and participatory policymaking platforms, enhances democratic legitimacy and strengthens regulatory compliance. In Nigeria, however, a key challenge remains the low institutional capacity for proactive and consistent communication, often resulting in gaps between policy design and public perception. This is compounded by misinformation and disinformation, especially in the digital media space, which undermines the credibility of official communications unless actively countered.

Furthermore, strategic communication has implications for governance transparency and accountability. When regulatory agencies openly communicate performance metrics, enforcement procedures, and stakeholder responsibilities, they not only inform but also empower citizens and businesses to hold institutions accountable. This approach is evident in regulatory sectors such as public procurement, financial regulation, and health governance, where digital dashboards and public service announcements are used to communicate standards and outcomes (Igbokwe-Ibeto et al., 2021). Such practices reinforce public confidence and encourage voluntary compliance with regulations.

In this context, the strategic communication of government policy and regulation is indispensable in modern governance. It enhances public understanding, fosters participation, and strengthens compliance with regulatory measures. In Nigeria, ongoing reforms in public service delivery, digital governance, and civic engagement have underscored the importance of embedding strategic communication within the lifecycle of policy and regulation. To be effective, such communication must be inclusive, consistent, evidence-based, and responsive to the complexities of Nigeria's sociopolitical environment.

3.2 Communication as a Strategic Tool for Fiscal Policies and Enforcement of Regulations in NCS

Communication is central to the successful formulation, implementation, and enforcement of fiscal policies and regulatory frameworks in contemporary governance. In the context of the Nigeria Customs Service (NCS), communication has become a strategic tool for explaining complex customs policies, fostering compliance, minimizing smuggling, and enhancing public confidence in government institutions. As an agency responsible for the enforcement of trade-related regulations and a major non-oil revenue generator, the NCS increasingly relies on targeted and strategic communication to translate fiscal objectives into operational outcomes and public understanding (Adewale & Lawal, 2023).

Strategic communication within the NCS context involves deliberate efforts to align messaging, platforms, and engagement processes with the agency's fiscal mandates, particularly in revenue mobilization, trade facilitation, and national security enforcement. The use of communication in fiscal policy implementation goes beyond public information, it incorporates behavioral change communication, stakeholder engagement, and reputation management. Through official press releases, customs portals, public campaigns, and social media platforms, the NCS disseminates information about tariffs, duty rates, import guidelines, and enforcement actions, aiming to create clarity, reduce uncertainty, and encourage voluntary compliance among traders and port users (Okonkwo & Akintola, 2021).

Communication is also critical in mitigating resistance to fiscal reforms. For instance, during the introduction of the Pre-Arrival Assessment Report (PAAR) system and the Nigeria Integrated Customs Information System (NICIS II), effective communication was used to build trust among stakeholders, including freight forwarders and importers, by emphasizing the benefits of transparency, faster clearance, and lower transaction costs (Onuoha & Musa, 2020). Without proper communication, such digital reforms might have been misinterpreted or resisted by vested interests accustomed to manual and opaque procedures. Strategic messaging thus helped frame the narrative around modernization and compliance as patriotic and economically beneficial.

Research highlights that successful fiscal policy enforcement depends not only on legal authority but also on how regulations are communicated, perceived, and internalized by target groups. The NCS has, in recent years, intensified its use of mass media and digital tools to communicate regulatory crackdowns on smuggling, issue public warnings, and highlight prosecution outcomes, thereby creating a deterrent effect. This approach aligns with deterrence communication theory, which emphasizes visibility, certainty, and swiftness of enforcement as vital elements in influencing behavior (Ajibade, 2022).

Moreover, communication facilitates inter-agency coordination and policy coherence. The NCS often collaborates with the Nigerian Ports Authority (NPA), Standards Organisation of Nigeria (SON), and other regulatory agencies to communicate unified messages about trade procedures, regulatory changes, and compliance requirements. This cross-institutional communication reduces confusion among stakeholders and enhances the efficiency of border and port operations (Akinola & Ogunyemi, 2023). Strategic communication also supports internal alignment within the NCS by ensuring that officers across commands understand and consistently implement policy directives, particularly during fiscal transitions or enforcement drives.

Despite these gains, challenges remain in fully institutionalizing communication as a core strategic function within the NCS. Studies have identified gaps such as limited communication training for officers, poor feedback mechanisms, and weak audience targeting, which reduce the impact of policy messaging (Uche & Ojo, 2023). Additionally, misinformation and the politicization of fiscal policies can distort the intended messages from the NCS, undermining regulatory legitimacy.

Furthermore, the NCS can benefit from two-way communication approaches that incorporate stakeholder feedback into policy design and enforcement. Participatory communication frameworks enhance not just compliance but also trust and transparency in fiscal governance. For example, regular consultations with business associations, freight operators, and border communities can reveal bottlenecks and help refine enforcement strategies in ways that

are both lawful and context-sensitive (Omolaye & Olatunde, 2023). Therefore, communication serves as an indispensable tool in the strategic implementation of fiscal policies and enforcement of customs regulations in Nigeria. Within the Nigeria Customs Service, effective communication supports revenue mobilization, ensures stakeholder cooperation, enhances regulatory enforcement, and projects institutional credibility. However, to maximize its value, communication must be systematically integrated into fiscal governance, supported by professional expertise, inter-agency collaboration, and continuous stakeholder engagement.

3.3 Navigating the Hurdles: Challenges and Strategic Responses

Public sector institutions in developing contexts often face a range of institutional, infrastructural, and socio-political challenges that hinder effective policy implementation and regulatory enforcement. In Nigeria, these challenges are particularly pronounced in government agencies such as the Nigeria Customs Service (NCS), where fiscal mandates and regulatory functions are constrained by systemic inefficiencies, limited resources, policy inconsistencies, corruption, and inadequate stakeholder engagement. Navigating these hurdles requires strategic responses grounded in institutional reform, capacity building, technological innovation, and inclusive governance practices (Ezeani & Igbokwe-Ibeto, 2022).

One of the core challenges confronting agencies like the NCS is institutional fragmentation and overlapping mandates. Multiple agencies often operate in the same regulatory space with little coordination, resulting in duplicated efforts, administrative bottlenecks, and conflicting directives. This is evident at Nigeria's ports and borders where the NCS interacts with several other agencies, leading to procedural delays and inefficiencies. The absence of coordinated border management system hampers the ability of customs and other agencies to process goods efficiently and enforce fiscal and trade regulations seamlessly.

Corruption and lack of transparency remain persistent barriers to institutional effectiveness. The NCS, despite technological reforms, continues to grapple with entrenched informal practices that undermine revenue collection and regulatory integrity. These include bribery, under-declaration of goods, and sometimes collusion between officers and traders. Strategic responses have focused on digitalization and automation to reduce human discretion and improve traceability in customs operations. The implementation of the Unified Customs Management System (UCMS) also known as Bo'dogwu under the Trade Modernization Project are part of broader reforms aimed at curbing revenue leakages and enhancing regulatory compliance through data-driven systems (Okonkwo & Akintola, 2022).

Policy inconsistency also undermines regulatory stability and institutional credibility. Frequent changes in tariff structures, trade restrictions, and fiscal incentives create uncertainty for businesses and impede long-term planning. Such unpredictability discourages compliance and fosters circumvention strategies among importers and exporters. Scholars emphasize the need for greater coherence and continuity in policy design, backed by evidence-based decision-making and stakeholder consultation to ensure that reforms are well understood, contextually appropriate, and widely accepted.

Another significant challenge is limited institutional capacity, particularly in terms of human resources and technical expertise. Many regulatory agencies, including the NCS, operate with outdated training curricula and insufficient exposure to emerging global standards in trade facilitation and customs enforcement. Capacity gaps hinder the effective interpretation and application of new technologies, international protocols, and evolving risk management techniques. As a strategic response, international partnerships, staff retraining programs, and

investments in professional development have been initiated to upgrade competencies and align regulatory practices with global norms (Ogundiya, 2023).

Inadequate public communication and weak stakeholder engagement also pose challenges to effective policy and regulatory enforcement. When policies are poorly communicated or rolled out without sufficient public awareness and consultation, they often face resistance, misinterpretation, or outright noncompliance. This has been observed in Nigeria's attempts to reform fuel subsidy policies and border closure strategies, where communication gaps created uncertainty and public backlash. To address this, agencies are increasingly adopting strategic communication frameworks that include media briefings, public awareness campaigns, and feedback mechanisms to foster transparency and trust.

Infrastructural limitations, especially at border posts and seaports, further complicate regulatory enforcement. Poor road conditions, inadequate storage facilities, unreliable power supply, and outdated scanning equipment constrain efficient cargo processing and compromise inspection protocols. Strategic investments in infrastructure development through public-private partnerships and donor-funded modernization programs have been pursued to enhance logistics and customs efficiency (Ajayi & Lawal, 2022).

Political interference and the politicization of regulatory agencies also threaten the autonomy and professionalism of institutions like the NCS. Interventions by political elites in operational decisions, appointments, or enforcement priorities erode institutional independence and often compromise the integrity of fiscal enforcement. Enhancing governance structures, strengthening legal safeguards, and promoting merit-based appointments are recommended strategic responses to insulate regulatory agencies from undue political influence (Ibrahim & Okonjo, 2021). As such, navigating the institutional, procedural, and contextual hurdles in Nigeria's regulatory environment requires a combination of strategic responses that are systemic, participatory, and adaptive. For the NCS and similar agencies, addressing these challenges involves not only technological upgrades and structural reforms but also a reorientation toward transparency, public engagement, and long-term institutional resilience. Sustainable reform must be anchored in political will, inter-agency collaboration, and continuous learning from both local experiences and international best practices.

3.4 Case Studies on Government Policy Communication by the Nigeria Customs Service

Government policy communication in Nigeria has evolved as agencies increasingly recognize the importance of strategic engagement with stakeholders to improve transparency, compliance, and institutional credibility. The Nigeria Customs Service (NCS), as a critical actor in fiscal policy enforcement and trade regulation, offers instructive case studies on how public communication is employed to support policy implementation. These cases reflect not only the complexity of the Nigerian regulatory environment but also the growing reliance on communication tools to bridge policy intent and public understanding (Akinyemi & Lawal, 2022).

One notable case is the implementation of the Pre-Arrival Assessment Report (PAAR), introduced in 2013 to enhance trade facilitation and reduce delays at Nigerian ports. PAAR replaced the Risk Assessment Report (RAR) system previously managed by third-party contractors, positioning the NCS as the sole agency responsible for pre-arrival processing of import documentation. The introduction of PAAR required extensive communication with importers, clearing agents, and logistics operators to educate them on the new digital procedures, documentation requirements, and compliance expectations. According to Onuoha and Musa

(2020), the NCS deployed public service announcements, organized workshops, and partnered with trade associations to manage the transition. Despite initial resistance from freight operators who were skeptical of the NCS's capacity to manage such a system internally, consistent and clear communication helped stabilize the process within a year.

Another key case is the 2019 land border closure policy, a controversial decision aimed at curbing smuggling and encouraging local production by halting the legal movement of goods across Nigeria's land borders. The NCS played a prominent role in both enforcing and communicating the rationale for the closure. Public briefings, press releases, infographics, and data on seizures and arrests were used to justify the policy as necessary for national security and economic protection. Okeke and Oduh (2020) argue that while the initial communication was reactive and focused on enforcement, the NCS eventually shifted to more proactive engagement, using media platforms to highlight successes and explain the policy's alignment with broader government goals. However, critics noted that inconsistent messaging from different government officials created confusion, illustrating the need for a more coordinated and coherent communication framework.

The Trade Modernisation Project (TMP), also referred to as e-Customs, represents another important case in the strategic communication of reform. Launched in partnership with private investors, the TMP aims to automate the entire customs process, reduce physical contact in transactions, and increase revenue through improved efficiency. The NCS has communicated the goals and benefits of this initiative through stakeholder engagements, digital platforms, and official statements to counter fears of job losses and resistance to automation. Akinola and Ogunyemi (2023) observe that communication under this project has focused on transparency, efficiency, and alignment with global best practices. However, they also note the limited use of participatory communication tools such as feedback forums and community dialogues, which could have strengthened public trust and buy-in.

An additional case is the communication strategy surrounding seizures of contraband and public awareness campaigns on illegal imports, such as arms, drugs, and substandard products. The NCS frequently showcases high-profile seizures through televised briefings, press tours, and social media updates. These are aimed at demonstrating institutional vigilance and discouraging non-compliance. According to Uche and Ojo (2023), such communication not only informs the public but also serves as a deterrent strategy to smugglers and collaborators. These efforts, however, have faced criticism for being more symbolic than participatory, often lacking mechanisms for engaging the communities most affected by customs operations, particularly at border points.

Finally, the NCS's engagement with trade unions and professional associations, especially during tariff adjustments or new import guidelines, reveals the strategic use of stakeholder communication in preventing industrial disputes. For example, during tariff restructuring under the ECOWAS Common External Tariff (CET), the NCS organized consultative forums with stakeholders in the textile, automobile, and pharmaceutical sectors to explain tariff changes and compliance timelines. These engagements contributed to smoother implementation and fewer disruptions in trade.

In this contestation, case studies of NCS policy communication demonstrate that while the agency has increasingly recognized the importance of strategic and structured communication, there are areas that require further institutionalization. These include integrating public feedback into policy decisions, improving inter-agency message coherence, and expanding

outreach beyond urban centers and trade elites. As the regulatory environment continues to evolve, the effectiveness of government policy communication will remain a critical factor in policy success and public legitimacy.

3.5 Strategies for Enhanced Policy and Regulation Communication

Effective communication of policy and regulation is increasingly recognized as a critical determinant of public understanding, stakeholder engagement, and successful implementation in modern governance. In complex administrative contexts such as Nigeria's, the challenge of translating technical regulatory frameworks and fiscal policies into comprehensible and actionable messages necessitates the adoption of deliberate, well-coordinated communication strategies. Strategic communication in this sense is not limited to information dissemination but includes audience analysis, media planning, stakeholder feedback, and the alignment of messaging with broader governance objectives (Cairney & Kwiatkowski, 2017).

One key strategy is the use of audience segmentation and targeted messaging. This involves identifying specific groups affected by a policy—such as traders, transporters, or rural communities, and tailoring messages to their needs, languages, and media preferences. For example, the Nigeria Customs Service (NCS) has increasingly adapted its communication efforts to different stakeholder groups by using localized radio programs, digital infographics, and town hall meetings to explain changes in import regulations and tariffs. According to Akinola and Ogunyemi (2023), audience-targeted communication increases policy relevance and reduces misinterpretation, especially in diverse and multilingual societies.

Another important strategy is integration of digital communication tools. With the proliferation of mobile technology and internet access, government agencies now leverage websites, mobile applications, social media platforms, and SMS to reach citizens directly. Digital communication not only expands reach but also enhances interactivity and allows for real-time feedback and clarification. The NCS, for instance, operates a dedicated indigenous online portal where importers can access the Unified Customs Management System (USMC) known as B'odogwu, to monitor policy updates, and track clearance status. As Okonkwo and Akintola (2022) note, digital platforms improve transparency and reduce the information asymmetry that often characterizes bureaucratic institutions.

Stakeholder engagement and participatory communication are also central to effective policy dissemination. Policies that are discussed with affected groups before implementation tend to enjoy higher levels of compliance and legitimacy. This participatory model includes consultative forums, focus groups, community dialogues, and sector-based meetings, all designed to gather feedback and foster shared ownership of regulatory decisions. Ezeani and Igbokwe-Ibeto (2022) argue that when stakeholders are involved in shaping policy messages, they are more likely to trust the source and act in accordance with regulatory expectations.

Closely linked to participation is the strategy of framing and narrative construction. Public reception of policy often depends not just on the content of regulation but on how it is framed. Emphasizing benefits over burdens, highlighting success stories, and connecting policies to national goals or values can increase public acceptance. During the rollout of the border closure policy in 2019, the NCS framed its communication around national security, local economic empowerment, and anti-smuggling efforts. Though controversial, this framing appealed to patriotic sentiments and softened public resistance.

Two-way communication channels and feedback loops are equally crucial. Communication must be dialogic, enabling stakeholders to express concerns, seek clarifications, and provide insights that can improve policy implementation. Establishing hotlines, online complaint platforms, and response teams enhances the responsiveness of government agencies and strengthens regulatory trust. According to Nabatchi and Leighninger (2015), feedback mechanisms institutionalize accountability and help correct policy missteps before they escalate into crises.

Capacity building in government communication units is another strategic imperative. Many public agencies in Nigeria, including the NCS, still operate without fully professionalized communication departments equipped with skills in public relations, behavioral communication, media relations, and data analytics. As Umar and Nwankwo (2023) observe, investing in skilled communication personnel and modern communication infrastructure improves the precision, consistency, and impact of government messaging. This includes training customs officers and policy staff to effectively engage with media and civil society actors.

Lastly, inter-agency coordination and message harmonization are necessary to prevent contradictory information and ensure coherence in public communication. In regulatory domains involving multiple actors—such as customs, immigration, and standardization agencies—conflicting messages can confuse stakeholders and undermine policy credibility. Strategic communication must therefore include a coordination mechanism that aligns communication efforts across ministries and departments, as recommended by (Adebayo & Ojo, 2021). Thus, enhanced policy and regulation communication relies on a blend of strategies that are inclusive, adaptive, and institutionally grounded. In the case of the Nigeria Customs Service, sustained improvements in digital engagement, stakeholder participation, and narrative framing have strengthened the communication function. However, further investment in professional capacity, feedback systems, and inter-agency collaboration will be necessary to optimize policy outcomes and build enduring trust in governance.

IV. Conclusion

Advances in government policy and regulatory communication have become indispensable in enhancing transparency, fostering compliance, and improving the overall effectiveness of public administration in Nigeria. From the perspective of the Nigeria Customs Service (NCS), strategic communication has evolved into a vital tool not just for disseminating fiscal policies and trade regulations but also for engaging stakeholders, managing public perception, and reinforcing institutional legitimacy. As the NCS assumes an increasingly central role in national revenue generation and border security, its efforts to modernize communication, through digital platforms, stakeholder consultations, participatory dialogues, and targeted messaging, reflect a broader shift toward responsive and accountable governance.

Despite persistent challenges such as policy inconsistency, limited professional communication capacity, infrastructural deficits, and public distrust, the NCS has demonstrated that deliberate and coordinated communication strategies can enhance the public understanding and implementation of complex regulatory frameworks. Case studies such as the rollout of the Pre-Arrival Assessment Report (PAAR), the border closure initiative, and the trade modernization project underscore the critical role that structured communication plays in navigating institutional hurdles and achieving policy objectives. Going forward, the effectiveness of regulatory communication within the NCS and across Nigeria's public sector will depend on sustained investments in professional capacity, integrated feedback systems, inter-agency

coordination, and inclusive communication models that reach diverse audiences. Strengthening these areas will not only improve policy outcomes but also deepen public trust and democratic accountability in Nigeria's evolving governance landscape.

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