Evolution and Emergence of the Ministry of Information: An Empirical Perspective

RESEARCH ARTICLE

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ABSTRACT

This study traced the history and evolution of the Ministry of Information in Nigeria from the British colonial administration up to 1990. Based on Harold Lasswell's communication model, the study investigated the Ministry's emergence from a government printing press outfit to a full-fledged Ministry, reflecting broader trends in strategic communication evolution in Nigeria. It used a historical approach, employing archival and documentary research methods and relying heavily on primary and secondary sources for data gathering. Some in-depth interviews were also conducted with top officials of a few Information Ministries to strengthen data from archival sources. Findings show that there has been an overlapping of functions between the Ministry of Information and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in recent times. It reveals that the Ministry of Information took root from the government printing press in the 1920s-1940s and grew into an "octopus" government Ministry, playing a significant role in the government's public communication. Furthermore, it highlights that the British colonial government, which founded the Ministry, used it for publicity and public relations purposes to gain the goodwill of citizens, a practice relevant to government-media relationship studies. The study concludes with some recommendations, among which is the creation of units of the Information Ministry in the local government areas of the country, believing that the localisation of this important Ministry would improve the relationship between society and the government and promote good governance.

Methodology	**Time Period**	**Key Finding**
Historical approach using archival/documentary research methods with primary and secondary sources	Evolution traced from British colonial administration (1920s) to 1990	Ministry evolved from government printing press to full-fledged "octopus" Ministry with overlapping functions

Keywords: Ministry of Information, colonial administration, government communication, public relations, information dissemination.

INTRODUCTION

The Ministry of Information in Nigeria is an important, if not the most important, government Ministry on which successive Nigerian governments pin their hopes and expectations for effective public enlightenment, country-wide information diffusion, and social mobilisation of the citizenry for their contributions to the social, political, and economic development of the country. It is on the Ministry of Information, both at the federal and state levels, that the government depends and relies upon to carry out the functions stated above. No other government Ministry undertakes such a magnitude of obligations, though there are scores of other government Ministries performing different functions. The Ministry of Information is therefore an "octopus" Ministry with diverse functions and inter-ministerial relations with other government Ministries and departments, both domestically, regionally, and internationally. This Ministry has a long history, as could be seen in its documented historical records.

As a service Ministry, perhaps it has a longer history than other government Ministries because its evolution dates back to the 1920s, when the British colonial administration introduced the concept of government's information services as a government section, and later as a department, for purposes of government publicity and public relations. The Ministry is organised on the structure of the civil service; though it combines journalism, public relations, and public enlightenment functions, it is a civil service apparatus. It has a civil service expert as its head of operations, known as the Director of Information, who oversees and supervises all Information Officers and gives directions on how information concerning the government should be processed and handled. He is a personality of professional calibre but also a civil servant. The Ministry is run by a top civil servant called the Permanent Secretary, who has a retinue of civil service officials under his authority.

However, it should be stated that though it is known as the Ministry of Information, it is a politicised institution. Its foundation was grounded in the colonial politics of the British administration of Nigeria. It has since remained so, but with some modifications. Many of the decisions on political campaigns regarding health issues, economic policies of government, including the government's policy on Foreign Policy, national culture, and rural development, have been and will continue to be the concern of the Ministry. From the beginning, the Ministry of Information was designed to carry out all these functions and simultaneously serve as a veritable channel of communication for the government, even though its approach is civil service-tailored.

In addition to all its functions, it has another important obligation to discharge for the government as a veritable outfit. It liaises with the entire country's media by establishing a dependable and reliable distributive network of information sharing with the press and acts on behalf of the government, organising press conferences with journalists in the media and the Guild of Editors whenever the government has issues at hand that bother on the people's lack of confidence in its administration. It is amazing that researchers in Nigeria have not conducted studies nor concentrated on this important arm of government, especially on its information function regarding the cultural orientation of the Nigerian public. This study, therefore, traces the history of the Ministry of Information from the beginning of its colonial foundation to date.

FROM PRINTING PRESS TO INFORMATION SERVICE

The Federal Ministry of Information is probably the most important government Ministry in which successive governments of Nigeria always place their hopes for massive dissemination of information about government activities on matters such as political, economic, diplomatic, or legislative affairs. No other Ministry shares the responsibilities of gathering government information and disseminating such news and information about government actions through the mass media.

THE OCTOPUS MINISTRY

The Ministry of Information is the "octopus" government Ministry that has connections with all government departments as an all-purpose service Ministry. The Ministry of Information was fully established in 1955 and was given additional status in the early sixties before the attainment of independence from Britain in October 1960. The Ministry was not given the appellation "Ministry" until late in the fifties when it assumed full-fledged government civil service status. It had formerly functioned as a unit in the colonial governor's office and later, in the early 1940s, became the Department of Information. It all began as a printing unit known as the Government Printing Office, or Government Press, with the official function of printing government gazettes, government bulletins, government memoranda, and official documents such as calendars, files, and diaries, etc.

01
Government Printing Press (1920s)

Started as a printing unit for government gazettes, bulletins, memoranda, and official documents under European civil servant W.H. de Boltz.

02
Public Relations Office (1940s)

Created during the Second World War to keep Nigerians informed on war prosecution and address nationalist political activities.

03
Government Information Service (1954)

Public relations office renamed and regionalised with offices in Ibadan, Enugu, and Kaduna, leading to the Federal Information Service.

04
Full Ministry Status (1955)

Ministry of Information fully established with ministerial appointees, achieving full-fledged government civil service status.

The printing unit was headed by a European civil servant called W.H. de Boltz. He was assisted by a superintendent, Mr. C.H. Townley, who was also assisted by three superintendents and a European proofreader, who was responsible for reading all printed matter for errors and misspelled words. Mr. de Boltz was designated as "Government Printer" and placed on an annual salary of six hundred and thirty pounds with allowances (Nigerian Handbook, 1927:363). Between 1925 and 1927, the Government Press or Government Printing Office retained its status, as its name indicated, though it carried out some functions relating to gathering and collating information on government affairs under Sir Graeme Thomson as colonial governor.

As at that period, the following departments had been in existence: Police, Prisons, Veterinary Medical, Forestry, Agriculture, Marine, Audit, Judicial, Railways, Customs, etc. All of them were conspicuously listed in the government documents seen and examined during the process of this study. However, the colonial government in Nigeria issued a number of publications to inform the public, especially the educated élites, on its activities. The "Nigeria Gazette" and "Blue Book" published vital information about government activities. The Gazette was circulated weekly on Thursdays, while the "Blue Book" was published annually as a periodical information book. It was the duty of the Government Press to do the needful to print and distribute the publication under the control and supervision of the Chief Secretary (an equivalent of today's Secretary to the Government). He was a top member of the colonial Executive Council, but the Government Printer was not a member of the Executive Council.

There was no rigid centralised information services and information delivery to the public in the period being reviewed. Later, small information offices were established in customs, railways, marine (ports authority), medical (health department), etc., for the purpose of publicising their activities for public interest. On the other hand, the secretaries to the Southern Province and Northern Province were the colonial officers who handled all matters relating to their provinces. They also created similar sections in their offices to handle information matters. There were no radio nor television services during the period, but there were privately owned newspapers such as: Nigerian Weekly Spectator (1923), The Nigerian Advocate (1923), The Nigerian Messenger (1921), The Lagos Weekly Record (publishing since 1890), The Nigerian Pioneer (1914), Lagos Daily News (1925), and Daily Times (1926).

THE SECOND WORLD WAR AND THE PUBLIC RELATIONS OFFICE

During the Second World War, the colonial government in Nigeria increased communication, strategically using propaganda and information dissemination to inform Nigerians about the war and address nationalist calls for self-rule (Mordi, 2009; Sule & Ridwanullah, 2023). The Public Relations Department was created as an offshoot of the Government Press, which continued its operations. In 1954, amidst federalism politics, this office was renamed the "Government Information Service" and reorganised to establish regional services in Ibadan, Enugu, and Kaduna, taking over duties previously managed by the colonial Lagos office.

The Federal Information Service (FIS) was then established, intensifying its role as an authority for national information dissemination both internally and externally. It published books and pamphlets, produced films on governmental activities, and operated mobile cinemas in rural communities to update citizens on Nigeria's affairs. While the three regional information offices published government-owned newspapers, the FIS was responsible for the "Children's Own Newspaper," reflecting the colonial public sphere and the evolution of the Nigerian press (Kperogi, 2020).

According to Duyile (1991), regional publications included: *Eastern Outlook and Cameroon Star* (Eastern Nigerian Information Service, ENIS); *Western News* and *Western Illustrated* (Western Nigeria Information Service, WNIS); and *Gaskiya Ta Fi Kwabo*, an Hausa language newspaper by the Northern Nigerian Information Service (NIS), which also had Tiv and Kanuri language publications. The Federal Information Service (FIS), an offshoot of the Public Relations Department in 1954, as summarised by Duyile (1991), eventually metamorphosed into the present-day Federal Ministry of Information.

Between 1944 and 1954, the British colonial government utilized the Public Relations Department as an effective tool for national and international communication and image-making, improving government relations with internal and external publics (Mordi, 2009). Prior to 1944, the printing department had served as the information department. The evolutionary stages leading to the Ministry of Information can be summarised chronologically:

- Government Printing Press (1920s)
- Public Relations Office (1940s)
- Government Information Service (1954)
- Regionalisation of Information Departments: Ibadan, Enugu, Kaduna (1954)

Since 1954, six years before Nigeria's independence, the Government Information Service, which had existed since the 1940s, had assumed the status of a Ministry of Information, headed by a minister of government who reported to the Prime Minister of the country. The office of Minister of Information from 1956 to 1990 was occupied by fifteen eminent Nigerians, who were nominated by the Prime Minister and later by the President. The ministers, in order of their service years, are:

Early Ministers (1956-1975)

- Kola Balogun (1956-1958)
- Theophilus O. Benson (1960-1964)
- Ayo Rosiji (1965-1966)
- Anthony Enahoro (1967-1975)
- Edwin Clark (1975)

Military Era Ministers (1975-1979)

- Major General I.B.M. Haruna (1975-1977)
- Ayo Ogunlade (1977)
- G.B. Leton (1977-1978)

Recent Ministers (1979-1990)

- Timothy Olu Adebanjo (1979-1982)
- Malam G. Wushishi (1982-1983)
- Alh. Maitama Sule (1983)
- Group Captain Samson Omeruah (1984-1985)
- Colonel A.S. Ukpo (1985-1986)
- Prince Tony Momoh (1986-1990)
- Alex Akinyele (1990)

Since 1990 to date, the Federal Ministry of Information in the thirty-six states of the Nigerian Federation has been performing public relations functions for the government. In addition to its basic public enlightenment and domestic information dissemination functions, the Federal Ministry of Information also carries out external publicity obligations for the federal government.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

No government can perform effectively in governance without the service of a full-fledged Ministry of Information, which continuously publicises government plans, policies, and important governmental activities to the governed. However, little is known by the public about the Ministry of Information, which ranks among the top and important government ministries and parastatals. Good governance focuses on public opinion, which can be formed when the public is well-informed about government activities that are of public interest. Such acquisition of knowledge regarding government actions, government policies, and political communication is a prerequisite for the full and active participation of the citizenry and civil society actors in governance. This is, however, premised on the effective flow of information between the government and the citizens of the nation.

However, little has been known about the history and functions of this important arm of government, called the Ministry of Information. It is against this backdrop that the study seeks to find out the historical background of the Ministry's evolution, its development, its importance to society, its functions, and also to identify those who have been involved in its development up to the period of 1990. This is because little or nothing has been known as to whether the Ministry had played a major role in governance.

Research Gap	Study Focus
• Little known about the Ministry's historical evolution	• Historical background and development
• Limited understanding of its functions and importance	• Evolution from printing press to a full Ministry
• Insufficient documentation of its role in governance	• Functions and societal importance
• Lack of comprehensive historical analysis	• Key personalities in development (1920-1990)

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This study covers seventy years (1920 to 1990), a period during which Nigeria gained independence from Britain and broke free from colonialism (Mordi, 2009). This seventy-year period is crucial for understanding the institutional evolution of public administration in Nigeria (Adeyemi, 2019). During this time, the Ministry of Information also evolved through multiple stages. These seventy years mark the stage-by-stage development of the Ministry, which began as a government printing press and reached its peak as a full Ministry (Duyile, 1991).

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study aims to achieve the following objectives, drawing insights from historical perspectives on local government administration and public administration development (Adeyemi, 2019):

1. To investigate how the Ministry of Information emerged as a powerful government Ministry.
2. To ascertain its functions as a government information outfit and how the Ministry operated.
3. To identify the pioneers behind its establishment and how it grew into a full Ministry with ministerial appointees.
4. To identify the Ministers who were in charge of the Ministry during their chronological service years and their assignments up to 1990.
5. To investigate its relationship with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to establish their interwoven functions.

METHODOLOGY

The study employed a historical method, utilizing primary and secondary sources, alongside an archival/documentary research approach. Data was gathered from primary documents and archival records at the National Archives. Additionally, survey interviews were conducted with ten (10) senior officers in the Federal Ministry of Information and ten senior information officers from five selected states' information Ministries via mailed questionnaires.

Historical Method

Primary and secondary sources from archival records and government documents for comprehensive historical analysis.

Interview Approach

Survey interviews with ten senior federal officers and ten state information Ministry officers via mailed questionnaires.

Documentary Research

Archival/documentary research approach using the National Archives and primary government documents.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Nigerian government information ministry evolved through four distinct phases: a printing outfit, an information office, a public relations office, and finally a full Ministry of Information (Mordi, 2009). This progression signifies the increasing formalisation of public communication within colonial and post-independence governments, influenced by various media policies (Nzeaka, 2023). The British colonial government pioneered public sector public relations, appointing Mr. D.C. Fletcher, a European official, to head the new public relations unit in the 1940s (Oke, 2013). The early information office's functions, including public relations and information dissemination, were always intertwined, acknowledging communication's vital role in development and societal stability (Chile, 2025).

Research indicates the public sector pioneered modern public relations in Nigeria (Lawal et al., 2025). During World War II, the Lagos Press sought a reliable information source regarding the war, leading to the establishment of an information office by the government in 1940 to consistently brief the press (Oke, 2013; Mordi, 2009). The Public Relations Office (later a department) then organised press conferences for journalists and issued press releases on government activities, laying groundwork for national orientation and development through communication (Iyorza, 2018).

Historical accounts reveal that the information office conducted daily press briefings with journalists, fostering a cooperative relationship between the press and the government (Mordi, 2009). The official designation "Public Relations Office" was adopted in 1944, marking a significant step in institutionalising government communication. The fundamental responsibility of journalists lies in purveying information, as both leaders and citizens depend on the press for understanding the world around them. This crucial role grants the press significant influence in human affairs (Oke, 2013). Furthermore, political leaders frequently utilise information as a vital mechanism for feedback and engagement with the populace.

In 1990, a content analysis study conducted on five national newspapers and five radio stations' news bulletins revealed that a substantial portion of news materials originated from official government sources. Specifically, 45% of news content published by three of the newspapers was sourced from press releases issued and distributed by the Federal and State Ministries of Information. The remaining two newspapers showed 24% and 31% of their content, respectively, deriving from the Ministry's press releases. The study's findings further indicated that radio news bulletins broadcast between December 1989 and October 1990 included 39.5% of press release materials from the Ministry of Information. These statistics underscore the Ministry of Information's significant role as an indispensable arm of government in public communication.

PRESENTATION OF DATA

Data were obtained from the following sources: primary and secondary sources, archives (the National Archive), the National Library, and questionnaire interviews with 20 high-ranking Senior Information Officers in the Federal Ministry of Information, together with 10 Senior Information Officers in the Ministries of Information in five states of the federation. The use of a triangulation research approach aimed to increase the reliability and credibility of the study's results. The primary sources, comprising official records in the Ministry, provided the researcher with useful information on the topic, revealing the true dates and years when the colonial government began to establish the foundation of the printing office.

From the National Archives and the National Library emerged reliable data that also reveal the steady growth of the printing office to the Public Relations Department and to the Information Service of the government. The government gazettes and newspaper editions, along with government handbooks from the 1920s-1950s and from then to the 1960s, contain usable information for the study. These old publications proved very useful in the investigation. The questionnaire was administered to 20 respondents only. All 20 questionnaires were returned and found usable.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study was anchored on Harold Lasswell's (1948) model of communication, which outlines three functions of communication: surveillance of the environment (described as the news function), correlation of the different parts of society (the editorial function), and transmission of cultural heritage from one generation to another (termed the cultural transmission function). Lasswell's communication model states that when analysing a communication process, one must ask the questions:

- Who?
- Says What?
- In which channel?
- To whom?
- With what effect?

The model, according to Esimokha, is also called the interrogative model since it uses questions to provide explanations.

Surveillance Function

Environmental monitoring and news gathering functions of communication systems in society.

Correlation Function

Editorial function that connects different parts of society through information analysis and interpretation.

Cultural Transmission

Transfer of cultural heritage and values from one generation to another through communication processes.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The study reveals that the Ministry of Information is a very important organ of both the federal and state governments due to its extensive functions in publicising government activities. The Ministry of Information is widely recognised as an indispensable government organisation handling domestic publicity, external publicity, public enlightenment on political and cultural orientation, and the economic policies of government (Eze, 2018; Olubiyo & Olubiyo, 2022). The Ministry also retains its long-standing functions, supervising the government printer who handles sensitive government publications, along with all publicity pertaining to political, legal, judicial, diplomatic, and international affairs of government (Akinyele & Ogundipe, 2020; Eyo & Onyewuchi, 2025).

Findings reveal regular friction and an overlapping of external publicity functions between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs/External Affairs and the Ministry of Information, a recurring theme in Nigerian government communication discussions (Idowu, 2019; Olubiyo & Olubiyo, 2022). Reflecting its perceived importance, former Nigerian President Shehu Shagari integrated the Federal Ministry of Information into the presidency from 1979 to 1984, changing the Minister's title to "Presidential Adviser on Information." Subsequent presidents, however, reverted to the title of Minister.

As Presidential Adviser on Information, the office holder was influential, advising the President on information matters while simultaneously serving as Minister. This dual role highlighted the strategic importance of the position in both information and political spheres during that era (Olaniyan, 2015). Under this leadership, the Ministry oversaw institutions such as the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA), Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN), The News Agency of Nigeria (NAN), Nigerian Film Corporation (NFC), Nigerian Television College (Jos), The National Archives, and the National Institute of Public Information (Kaduna) (Adeeko, 2023).

Currently, the Minister of Information serves as the President's closest advisor on national information and communication matters (Adetunji, 2021), accountable for all Ministry actions. The Ministry's broad philosophy includes weekly advice to the President on international and domestic publicity. It also ensures adequate government publicity through public enlightenment programs like media publicity, film production, journalism, press relations, and employing drama, folklore, and radio jingles for rural development mobilisation (Uche, 2017; Eyo & Onyewuchi, 2025).

A core tenet of its philosophy is to elevate and improve public attitude and behaviour, fostering a national atmosphere conducive to socio-political development through new orientations toward better citizenship and civilised social and self-discipline. Opubor, in his NBC lecture series "Communication and Nigerian Identity," corroborated this by stating that massive government information dissemination in both rural and urban settings is synonymous with socio-economic development and assists economic growth, aligning with Rodney's observation that human societal development rests on social discipline, self-discipline, and material well-being.

The Ministry of Information possesses the qualities and means to achieve national success in its information agenda, as discovered from archival data. Findings show it evolved from printing government papers and gazettes to its present powerful and influential status, surpassing contemporary ministries in status and capacity (Mordi, 2009; Adekunle, 2022). Despite the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' existence, the Ministry of Information is entrusted with external publicity functions, a functional overlap that likely contributes to regular friction between the two ministries, highlighting ongoing inter-ministerial coordination challenges (Egbunike & Chukwu, 2023; Olubiyo & Olubiyo, 2022). The Ministry of Information is also the oldest among Nigerian government ministries.

Government Institutions Under Ministry

- Nigerian Television Authority (NTA)
- Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN)
- News Agency of Nigeria (NAN)
- Nigerian Film Corporation (NFC)
- Nigerian Television College, Jos
- National Archives
- National Institute of Public Information, Kaduna

Key Functions

- Domestic and external publicity
- Public enlightenment programmes
- Cultural orientation
- Media publicity and film production
- Press relations and journalism
- Rural development mobilisation

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Ministry of Information's history reveals significant institutional development within political governance, establishing it as *primus inter pares* among government ministries. However, its functions and policies exhibit recurring overlaps with the Ministry of External Affairs (Idowu, 2019; Egbunike & Chukwu, 2023). The government must address this by clarifying functions and preventing friction, possibly through policies like federal character to ensure representative bureaucracy (Ejere & Umana, 2025).

From its origins as the Government Printing Press and Public Relations Department, the Ministry of Information evolved into an all-embracing information and national orientation body (Mordi, 2009), securing government-citizen rapport. This highlights a continuous information dissemination culture, from the colonial era's serious governmental efforts to address citizen information needs, to today's modern digital communication impacts on governance (Ologunebi & Taiwo, 2025).

The colonial Public Relations Department and Information Service infrastructure established a dependable communication channel to publicize Nigeria both internally and externally. These publicity and journalistic activities effectively countered nationalist pressures for independence.

The Ministry of Information's history, detailed in this study, began in the 1920s as a printing section, evolving into Public Relations and Information Offices in the 1940s. This development led to similar information diffusion outfits in the West, East, and North regions, with subsequent post-independence improvements assumed to build on British Colonial Administration (BCA) legacies.

Currently, the Federal Ministry of Information operates with over five divisions, including Domestic and External Publicity, Public Enlightenment, and National Orientation. However, its external publicity functions often clash with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Idowu, 2019; Egbunike & Chukwu, 2023), an overlap requiring urgent stakeholder attention. Based on these findings, the following recommendations are made:

01

Regular Press Briefings

To foster good governance and strengthen public goodwill, all Ministries of Information, at both state and federal levels, should reinstate regular press briefings on government activities, plans, and social programs. This will intensely promote public support and participation in decision-making, increasingly aided by Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) (Eneanya, 2021).

02

Local Government Information Units

State Ministries of Information should urgently establish information units in their local government areas, utilizing village town criers to disseminate domestic and national development information. Trained young information officers, preferably Mass Communication graduates, should staff these new posts.

03

Rural Information Officers

Given information's critical role in democracy and increased local government autonomy, information officers in villages should co-opt local announcers to facilitate effective information diffusion for rural dwellers.

04

Press Release Distribution

Directors-General of Information at state and federal levels should revive the pre- and post-independence practice of producing and distributing press releases daily to mass media for public communication. This aligns with the evolving digital communication landscape and its impact on governance (Ologunebi & Taiwo, 2025).

Press handouts should contain news about government and environmental occurrences, supported by feature articles and photographs to illustrate reported events. This is a vital role of communication in governance. As highlighted by the Department for International Development and the World Bank, "citizens, civil society and all social and political associations are entitled to form opinions on how they are governed. To achieve this objective, all citizens need information to enable them to make informed decisions."

Kaufman's study, "Media, Governance and Development: An Empirical Perspective," reported a strong relationship between communication and governance; thus, this study concludes that communication is inseparable from governance. The Ministry of Information mediates messages between the government and society, acting as a public information agency for public enlightenment, information, and cultural orientation.

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CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

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