



USING INFORMATION COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY FOR THE PRESERVATION OF ORAL CULTURAL SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT

The oral culture of Africans is mostly unwritten and it is going through many changes in this global age; many of the cultures and their expressions are being lost. Lack of preservation and protection of these cultures in this information age is draining this rich reservoir thereby causing it to go into extinction and creating gap and lack of access to the knowledge that it has developed for many years. The paper identified oral cultural society as a common practice among African people, and the importance of information communication technology (ICT) in preserving and disseminating African culture within information society. The paper suggested ways by which the computing power of ICT can be used by librarian and other professional to harness the preservation of culture of the people in a society for future use.

Keywords: Africans, oral cultural society, ICT, Culture, Expression, Preservation

Introduction

Africans are people from different communities and cultural background, each community is being identified with its culture and valuable heritage. The rich reservoir of the Africans have a sense of catching and holding something valuable from the receding tide of the past, which are history, tradition and the culture and there are myriad ways of sharing and keeping these values. Thus, the human memory has been used as knowledge storage and access, recognising the memory as an integral part of human existence. There are other terminologies used to describe oral tradition; intangible cultural heritage, living expressions, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (2013), oral traditions, oral expression (Hakkins, 2004) and oral information (Okoro, 2010). Omeluzor, Imam and Bamidele (2014) argued that oral expression and communication has been the basis of sustaining and disseminating culture and indigenous knowledge throughout the world, this in essence suggested that social values, culture, knowledge, ideas and know-how peculiar to the community is shared within the community through oral expression. Different approaches exist to communicate and share these norms and societal values.

Social practices, rituals and festive events are habitual activities that structure the lives of communities and groups and that are shared by and relevant to many of their members. They are significant because they reaffirm the identity of those who practise them as a group or a society and, whether performed in public or private, are closely linked to important events. Oral history preserves for future generations a sound portrait of where they are in the present and what they remember about the



past (Baylor University Institute for Oral History, 2016). Africans are in the age of digital literacy and they live in information society, an era where both young and old can have access to information through Information Communication Technology (ICT). The effect of this is that the world has turned to global village. ICT according to Rieger (2010) are technologies and associated practices that support creating, sharing, accessing, processing and archiving information as well as facilitating communication. It is the electronic means of gathering, processing storing, retrieving, communicating and sharing information (Omeluzor *et al.*, 2014). The advantage of which is in the capability to effectively capture the oral information of African culture, process and preserve it. ICT can also be used to document indigenous knowledge using audio tapes, video tapes, published in a book and conversion into artefacts (Onyemaizu, 2015).

Lack of preservation and access to traditional knowledge is causing cultural gap between generations. Little or no attention is given to the culture of the Africans; it is assumed to be the reason why the culture, knowledge and the value are going into extinction. Information technologies are useful to gather information in any format, to store and disseminate it. The culture of the Africans that is mostly passed down orally can through their consent be stored and disseminated for users and researchers. Thus, the preservation of the culture and values can only continue if there are ways through which it can be preserved and made available for the future generation and for researchers. It is assumed that information passed on orally is prone to omission or addition due to human nature. Communication technology, which has become indispensable in preserving traditional knowledge, will enable information professionals (archivist, librarian, researchers, and information brokers) to protect the culture of the society and protect it for future use. Based on the fore, the study therefore explores how ICT can be used in supporting the acquisition and preservation of oral tradition. It also present how the use of ICT will enhance the level of government's attention to the value of oral tradition and how others can learn from it in moving forward socially, politically and economically.

Oral Cultural Society

Indigenous cultural expressions means those expressions that resulted from creativity of individuals, communities, groups and societies, and that have cultural content including but not limited to phonetic or verbal expression, musical and sound expression, expression by action and tangible expressions (Government Gazette, 2015). It is a part of indigenous knowledge that focuses only on the culture that is transmitted orally and the oldest system of cultural memory. Most African society view oral transmission as an avenue to preserve the history, traditions, genealogical and cultural legacies of their community. Written systems of cultural transmission are less than 6000 years old as submitted by Goucher, Le Guine and Walten (1998) but orally transmitted cultural knowledge dates back from the time human species became capable of speech and communication. This was argued to be the cornerstone of sustaining, perpetuating and disseminating information in many cultures throughout the world (Hakkins, 2004). These suggest a society where most of their cultural practices are transmitted on to other generation orally for continuity.

The system of transmitting and preserving culture, history and information are common and practicable among people living in villages without any access to other means of preserving their culture. This agreed with the submission of Moss and Mazikana (1986) that oral traditions are sometimes recorded in remote villages and often among people of whom a transcript review would be meaningless. In a community where most of them are illiterate and have little or no value for written information, where their history and culture is preserved in poetry, songs, stories, proverbs, narrative devices and various rituals. As mentioned by Burtis (2009), the expression includes art and crafts, symbols and architecture. The custom is recorded and preserved in the memory system of the indigenous people which exert powerful influence over the society. One importance of oral tradition is in creating social reality, making the past present Vansina, (1998) cited in Rieger (2010). It was asserts that orality, in the form of oral tradition, functions to represent both the past and the present and ensure the enduring capacity of this



culture by the society. It was submitted that oral genealogy is kept in Africa for a variety of economic, social and political reasons this can be in the management of inheritance which, represent the socio-economic function of genealogy (Bonsu & Thacher, 2007; Mabawonku, 2005).

This supposed that most cultural people keep the tradition of the community they belong. This is in agreement with the position of Harvilahti (2003) that folklore in its oral and traditional form is in most cases transmitted orally and serves as shared tradition-based creations of a cultural community. Globally, there has been an increasing emphasis on culture and cultural heritage of a people. Thus, organizations, especially UNESCO are focusing some of their research on indigenous knowledge and cultural values. However, there are few records of different cultural values, indigenous knowledge and heritage material especially on Africa unlike the developed countries of the world which have the highest contribution of their culture on the Internet (Omeluzor et al., 2014).

Preserving Oral Tradition

Oral traditions like other forms of intangible cultural heritage are threatened by rapid urbanisation, large-scale migration, industrialisation and environmental change (UNESCO, 2013). However, preserving oral culture and tradition can be done professionally by the archivists, the custodians of archival materials or the librarians using ICT. Archives according to Society of American Archives, cited in Archives and Records Administration (2008-2009), are the non-current records on individual, group, institution and government that contain information of enduring value. The record though not current has values that endure. Okoro (2010) referred to archive as non-current records of an organisation or institution, preserved as a result of their 'continuing value' It is any records with long-term continuing value that have been kept either because they may be necessary for ongoing organisational purpose to their creating body or because they have additional research value (Williams, 2006). From the submission of the above definition, any records that will be referred to as archival material must have values that are not only immediate but values that endures which individual, organisation or even the government can refer to anytime.

The same term archive is also used for the physical location of the documents, the associated tasks required for managing them and the professional responsibilities of the archivists. A sound archives is an institution created to preserve, make available, and develop a documentary heritage through concentration on deliberately structured interviews and performances made by recording devices. Its theory must be an elastic one (taking into account contributions from social anthropology, folklore, linguistics, psychology, history and oral history) responding to new factors and incorporating concepts from numerous contributors (Neugebauer, n.d). The knowledge of the custom and culture needs to be properly managed in order to adequately share it with outside population. Mabawonku (2005) referred to it as indigenous knowledge and also submitted that promoting the re-discovery of some lost African traditional and allowing more access to the tradition and culture of the people by putting on web sites for global consumption, information and business, health, medicine, agriculture etc., creating a niche and increasing the African content on the internet are part of the importance of preserving African culture. It also project Africans to the rest of the world and facilitate sustainable development.

The benefit of these devices to the oral society cannot be overestimated in that, it serve as a collective institutional memory and also as a major source of information for research purpose. Audio and graphical characteristics of some mobile technology, speak to strengthen indigenous oral and graphical culture. The new technologies have allowed libraries and archives to collect, store and preserve massive amounts of information and this same technology has enabled communication of data at very high speeds to any location in the world with a phone line and computer (Meugebauer, n.d). Burtis (2009) affirmed that traditional cultural expression and indigenous knowledge are found in library as original artifacts but are just as likely to take the form of audio and video recordings, photographs, and as textual description of expressions. The advent of information technology has given opportunity to information professionals to have access to more information and also be able to perform better on their job, this is in support of



Carreras (2005) posited that over the last decade a great number of technological applications have been applied and assessed by memory institutions like museum, library and archive. It was also identified by Falola and Ngom (2009) in their study that the use of text message on mobile phones, as well as phone calls and text messages in the local language has made the use of mobile phone popular among illiterate. This has enhanced the performance of the librarians in serving their community even the illiterate.

Falola and Ngom (2009) affirmed that Indigenous people around the world are becoming more and more interested in ICT. This is evident also in the researches among farmers (female especially), gender, indigenous knowledge, fisheries management, linguistic and cultural diversity (Sao & Andrade, 2013; UNESCO, 2014). Capturing the culture and heritage of the remote community, modulation and demodulation media facility can be used to store and transmit people's culture in a multilingual form (Omeluzor et al., 2014). Therefore, the festivals and religious practices can be documented using camera to capture and store these activities. The major factor in the growth of oral archive in this modern time has been a series of products of the technological revolution. Burtis (2009) recommended that library should not only acquire, preserve and provide access to scientific materials alone, access should be provided to indigenous knowledge also since storing and disseminating indigenous information by the librarians is a requisite for development (Mouahi, 2012). The resources and systems in successfully creating community repositories of indigenous knowledge vary and these include: the multimedia of video recorders, audio recorders and digital photography. The availability of these resources and the ability to handle the equipment will go a long way in preserving the heritage of the Africans using ICT, this was supported by Moss and Mazikana, (1986) that to preserve the greater historical and interpretive value of the original source as actually spoken, the technology of sound reproduction is required as a minimum.

In more recent years it has become practical to add a visual aspect to the record through the use of video sound recordings that combine both visual images and sound images on magnetic tape, and still more recently on video-disk or optical digital disks read by lasers. Still photographs, of course, have long been used to give a visual supplement to audio recordings just as they have to written texts (Peter, 2006). It has also assist as pointed out by Omeluzor *et al.* (2014) in creating healthy digital content, broadcasting in rural communities, digitalization of recorded oral culture and preserving content in digital libraries. Achieving this cannot be done by the library alone; Collaboration with indigenous communities is of great importance to this process. Information professionals must collaborate with the community in the planning and implementation of preserving their culture, so that it will be evident that documenting and recording the culture and value of the communities will not lead to its disempowerment. Intellectual property right as pointed out by Adam (2007) must be considered so that the intellectual property rights of the individuals and the communities will be protected and royalty if generated can be given to the party concerned

Librarians and ICT

It was posited by International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, (2003) that library and information services are key actors in providing unhindered access to essential resources for economic and cultural advancement. In doing so, they encourage social inclusion, by striving to serve all those in their user communities regardless of age, gender, economic or employment status, literacy or technical skills, cultural or ethnic origin, religious or political beliefs, sexual orientation, and physical or mental ability. The communities they serve may be geographically based or, increasingly, linked only by technology and shared interests. This suggests why librarians and other information professionals should skillfully prepare for the task. The digital revolution has opened up new opportunities for archivists. It is now easier to capture the actual voices of people. The oral record is being preserved and made accessible to historians and the broader public at a scale previously unimaginable. Oral history and testimony no longer needs to be transcribed to be preserved, oral histories are no longer locked away in transcripts in the special collections of libraries and archives. Despite the vast inequalities of ICT in the world today,



preservation of IK is also essential in order to prevent loss due to rapid urbanization and continuous attrition in the older population (Ebijuwa, 2015).

The global change is forcing organisations and institutions to prepare themselves to live and meet with the change in their environment. Librarians are not exception as their major function is to make information available to their clients. This was supported by IFLA (2003) that libraries and information services are vibrant institutions that connect people with global information resources and the ideas and creative works they seek. Therefore, information services made available the richness of human expression and cultural diversity in all media. Using modern technological tools in libraries according to Chisita and Abdullahi (2010) would not only organise and preserve the oral literature, but will be able to provide channels for the dissemination of indigenous knowledge of local communities to global audience thereby securing its preservation. The study of Plockey (2011) revealed that librarians do not consider indigenous knowledge to be part of information in the library that will support teaching and learning. and that except information relating to indigenous knowledge are documented and brought to the library in Ghana, they have nothing to do with it. Librarians should be a major participants and stake holders in organising databases of unpublished oral information, testimony, history and knowledge as these are good sources of information for researchers (Mabawonku, 2005).

Alemma (1995) cited in Chistita and Abdullahi (2010) noted opportunities that librarians can tap into to utilise ICT for development purposes. Information can be repackaged to meet the information need of local/rural people thereby showcasing the relevance of librarian in their communities. It was therefore suggested that collection development policy should be revised and widened so that there would be convergence of print and oral resources by exploiting the complementary nature of various formats of information. It was also pointed out by Gokhale-Shahade (2014) that public library (which is meant to provide services to all irrespective of their socio-economic characteristics) collection development guideline should indicate that majority of the collection should be in regional language and 60% of the budget should be utilised for materials for the community the library it is serving. The mutual support and knowledge sharing among indigenous groups around the globe, who face similar issues was noted by Lieberman (2003) and it was therefore stated that librarians should be computer literate so that they have access to an infinite amount of information offers by the world class libraries. Effort is geared towards the training of librarians in academic library and automation of their libraries. Information technologies are used in preserving and disseminating these cultures for researchers and the coming generation. Therefore, librarians should be equipped with skill to meet the demand of this information age, preserve and made available information reflecting multiplicity of the society so that they can sustain their function as institution of lifelong learning.

Conclusion

Africa is known to be oral cultural society, but they are people that re-invent themselves to adapt to changes around them. Since there is motivation on ICT, which has increase the ways through which individuals and even researchers use these technologies, there is therefore the need for proper documentation of these values. As the custodian of the culture and records are going into extinction, librarians and other professionals have the skill to handle information materials that are rare and valuable which can be handed down to future generation. The study recommends therefore that like developed world, librarians should collect and document these oral expressions, and collaborate with the community on publicising these values since ensuring the proper protection of their values and culture is guarantee through the recognition of intellectual property right. Effort must be geared towards regular and effective training of information professionals so that have the required skill to carry out their task and meet the challenges of global age. The government through the Ministry of Education should include oral history in the school curriculum. Also government can enact a tribal law that will protect the tradition of the people.



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