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Post-Independence Mutation and Changes in Media Archives Keeping in Africa: Nigeria's Perspective

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Abstract

Archives of the media provide an invaluable source of historical and cultural reference materials that could enhance deconstruction of past events in Africa. However, during the post-independent period, media archives suffered neglect and degeneration which could hamper the ability of scholars and historians to reconstruct and interpret historical events that will impact the future of the continent. The nature of media archive is rapidly being transformed by developments in digital technology in the contemporary times with little attention being paid to understanding the implication on Africa. Even though the democratisation of media content is good for democratic participation, there are still ethical questions about what becomes of the media archives in the hands of the untrained since such archives are being rapidly divested from media professionals. The concern here is on threat to the use of such archives for public good and morality since acquisition and retrieval of materials could be done by everyone in the cyber space. It is suggested that policies and institutional mechanisms should be established to manage virtual media archival materials since such materials are going to be subjected to constant changes in format and structure in the digital future.

Introduction

The mass media has always played important role in providing the archives for preservation of cultural heritages and values which has contributed to understanding the history of Africa. Apart from serving as public sphere to nurture popular participation in governance in the traditional societies (Herbamas, 1989), indigenous media and modern communication means were used to transmit and preserve

culture and to influence governance in various African communities. Indigenous communication systems, which were peculiar to various societies, were used to preserve the historical traditions that moderated indigenous governance processes in traditional societies and acted as watchdog against the excesses of the ruling class. The oral and folk media, for instance, were used in transmitting cultural heritages and norms from one generation to

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the others over centuries. Such media, even though were not physically visible, served as archives for the preservation of cultural norms and values where heritages were recalled, reprocessed and reintegrated to service and nurture traditional cultural environments.

The print media is the first of the modern mass media channels to be adopted in Africa (Omu, 1996). It came in the pre-colonial times. The electronic media followed during the colonial period. The telegraphic communication came first, followed by radio and later television, but they were subjected to control by colonial authorities for decades until independence. After independence the post-colonial authorities took over their control. The modern mass media largely complemented the indigenous media by recording landmark cultural and governance events across Africa during the pre-colonial and colonial periods. Evidences of such complementarities are obvious in the contents of the early newspaper publications and records of electronic media kept in the archives (Duyile, 1987, Omu, 1978). Initially, individual owners established and ran newspaper publications within the legal frameworks established by the state authorities. However, the electronic media were established and managed by government employees until the last two decades when ownership liberalisation commenced. Meanwhile, the consequence of the strict control of the modern mass media and prolonged monopolisation of ownership of electronic media by many African states has manifested in the loss of valuable historical and classic recordings of public events and archives of materials of cultural interests. This paper

attempts to explore the cultural consequences of this trend and how the dynamism in communication media technology in the present times can be adapted to reverse the negative trend.

Changing Faces of Media-Audience Interaction

During the pre-and post-independent era in Africa, the mass media largely determined the level of its interaction with the audience, the kind of archives the media kept and the extent of accessibility of the audience to those archives. Program production, news collections and news dissemination was strictly guarded and controlled by media professionals who served as gatekeepers into the media and agenda-setters for public discourses on the media platform (see McComb and Shaw, 1978; Iyenger and Kinder, 1987). Then, the audience only received and consumed information and programmes dished out by the media passively since they were allowed to initiate only limited feedbacks to media presentations. Presently however, the digital media has liberalised this trend. Satellite communication technology has brought varieties to media ownership and has demystified media access. Citizen journalism and the new social interactive media therefore, tend to have divested the official media and information management institutions of the custody of valuable archives of records of public events. The agenda-setting and gate-keeping responsibilities of the traditional media have in a strict sense been diluted by developments in the new media which has given more freedom to the audience to determine and contribute to media agenda and construction of contents. Availability of

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alternative media tends to have integrated more segments of the audience into public media communication network, as it used to be with indigenous media. This has enhanced more freedom of access to information, thus encouraging more participation in the construction of media contents. The upshot of this trend is that it has vested the audience with more responsibilities to determine what they view and listen to and the way they react to issues of public interests.

This new trend has serious implications on the revival and governance of mass media archives and democratisation processes in many African states. It also raises the question of the capacity of media audience and how well they could manage, use or misuse the new found freedom and flexibility offered by the social media, since they are at the same time being transformed into heavy contributors into media contents. Using Nigeria as a case study, this paper attempts to explore the consequences of liberalisation of ownership and access into the media, on media archive acquisition and management after state monopolisation became unsustainable. It explores how traditional media are using the new media to enhance their profiles and how they could exploit the interactive media to short circuit attempts to control by state authorities. It will, in addition, raise a number of questions, which include whether the new media could be a better custodian of public archives and whether the mutations that transmuted the traditional media from public platform into realm of commercialisation would not eventually consume the new social media in its pursuit of public interests and in the service of protecting valuable media archival records and materials.

Historical Exploration of Media Archival Mutation in Africa

The modern mass media has always played the role of recorders of historical and cultural events on the continent of Africa. In the pre-colonial period, the early newspapers published in Africa and edited mainly by European missionaries and freed slaves catalogued the various events of the period. They recorded and commented on the various inter-ethnic civil wars, the unfair trading practices between European companies and the local traders, the illicit slave trading activities that were still discreetly practiced against existing international conventions opposing it, the various shades of racial discriminations that were in existence in the interactions between Africans and Europeans in pre-colonial and colonial days, among others (Omu, 1996). The media helped in identifying and exposing some key historical structures that sustained illicit slave trading and repressive cultural practices during that era and emphasised the historical essence of preserving such monuments. Such structures later turned to become economic benefits to various post-colonial societies who turned them into tourist centres and leisure spots, thus exploiting their historical essence.¹ All of these tendencies became very useful reference points during independent struggles and in interactions between Africans and people from other continents. It also became good reference points among post-independent African modern states by providing the justification for the struggles for self-governance in many countries where the newspaper press had already established itself as credible tool for advocacy and mobilisation of internal support

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for the efforts of the nationalists in fighting for independence from the colonialists.

The arrival of telegraphic communications and radio broadcasting revolutionised the mass communication processes in Africa during the colonial days. Coming at the twilight of colonialism, electronic communication provided the colonialists with instruments of support during the World War II to mobilise soldiers and supporters from the colonies and to provide valuable information that was critical to the victory of the allied countries over the Germans. After the World War, the electronic media moved beyond being an instrument for merely providing information to becoming a means of mass mobilisation for development purposes. In many parts of Africa, both the electronic and print media were used to prosecute the struggle for independence and to transmit and remind the continent of their cultural legacies. Many of the historical cultural components on the continent were used actively as symbolisms in transmitting the dreams and visions of the independent leaders for a prosperous continent which could actively occupy its rightful place in the global affairs, to the massive citizens of colonial states. Many of the critical events that accompanied the struggles for independence and those that occurred during independent celebrations were recorded and stored in the archives of the media, where constant references were made to them after independence.

At independence however, the story of media development of its archives changed in many African countries. Media ownerships began to follow ethno-political patterns in many African countries where archival

collections now began to lean on geo-ethnic politics. Post-independent Media Archives became the victim of the sectional pattern of ownership of the media in that selective storage of socio-political and cultural materials, based on ethnic and political divisions became the norm. Materials that emerged from opposition groups and regions were discriminately selected and were not preserved in the same way as those that emerged from the sections of the ruling parties and extant governments. This trend deprived the media archives of valuable primary and secondary resources, which could have served as good references for academic and intellectual analysis of events that followed after independence.

Establishment of media organisations by the government and members of the political and economic class to promote their private interests became fashionable after independence in many African nations. Consequently, media employees and professionals shifted allegiance from issues of public interests to promoting governmental interests and ambitions of politicians and individual media owners. Gradually, the media was turned into a platform for settling primordial scores among people with diverse political and other underlying interests that are dictated by personal rather than public service motivations. This trend negatively affected professionalism and at a point led to the degeneration of audience patronage of the media. Ordinarily the media should rely on audience patronages to survive, but partisanship and emphasis on individual rather than public interests in editorial contents formation cumulatively led to the marginalisation of large members of the audience -ho

shared different political ideologies from those of the managers of the existing media. The resulting loss of patronage of valuable media audience meant that economic survival became a big issue for many media organisations, especially during the economic austerity years. They had to contend only with the sponsorship and stipends from governments in power and from few patronising political elites. As soon as such sponsorship and support ceased or reduced, many media organisations went under because they could not sustain their operations. In the process of managing the difficulties and their incapability to survive the economic challenges without external supports, many of the valuable content materials created, acquired and kept by media organisations during their years of operation as expected of reliable custodians of archives, were lost due to inability to preserve and maintain them. In the broadcast sector, many film and audio recordings of valuable socio-cultural events that were taken during festivals and public occasions were deleted from tapes to create space for other recordings since the broadcast organisations were not able to procure fresh tapes, films and other recording materials.

Political instability led to massive loss of valuable media archives consistently for about three decades after independence, when governments in many African countries held the monopoly of the establishment of the electronic media. The perception that the air wave was a public property reinforced the trend that allowed for issuance of electronic media licences only to two-tiers (the states and central governments), and not even to the third tier of government - the local governments.

Central and state or regional authorities were allowed to establish radio and television stations while local governments and individuals were excluded from obtaining such licences for decades. In Nigeria for instance, the protracted incursion of the military into the political arena aggravated this trend, resulting in linking media ownership to national security, or rather regime security. As a result, radio and television stations were prime targets of coup planners when 'shooting' themselves into power or when removing an incumbent government from power. This trend created the illusion that once a military junta is in possession of the premises of the media, with or without public support, such group of armed soldiers could effectively assert themselves legitimately into political power. Usually, the first instinct of armed coupists deployed to seize media organisations was to ransack media libraries and archives to seize valuable documents, including audio and visual recordings which were perceived to be too sensitive to be left in the custody of the media. In Older to re-write the histories that brought them mto power, many of such recorded materials were usually destroyed and would never found their ways back into media archives. As a result of the muzzling of the press by various military juntas, this kind of mutation and destructions which affected the media archives went on for many decades until liberalisation of media ownership came into existence in Nigeria in the 1990s. The National Broadcasting Commission was established in Nigeria and was mandated to grant commercial broadcasting licences to private individuals and organisations, which it began to do in 1992. The equivalent of this body was

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established in several other African countries to issue broadcasting licences and to manage the airwaves. Such bodies also serve as the bulwark against the excesses of broadcast media across the continent which could have been aggravated by the democratisation of that media sector.

With the liberalisation of media ownership, several commercial broadcasting stations were given licenses in Nigeria. However, the licensing processes are perceived as gruesome and still very expensive. The stringent conditions for the licence application procedures make it such that only the rich and the privileged could have access to ownership of broadcasting stations. In essence, after obtaining the license, the pre-occupation of commercial media owners is often on profit making. Since many of the radio stations are allowed to operate on the FM Band, their operations are restricted into the urban centres. Consequently, most information are collected from urban locations, processed in urban studios and disseminated into urban communities, leaving a large chunk of the rural audience, who form the bulk of the Nigerian population. The implication of this trend on media archive formation is that collections within such archives are often restricted and constrained by the geographical location and limited scope of operation of commercial broadcasting stations. Furthermore, there are more emphasis on commercial information storage in media archives by commercial broadcast stations, rather than on gathering and keeping core public affairs archival materials.

Community radio stations have been thriving in some African countries since the

liberalisation of broadcast ownership, but they are yet to be allowed in some other countries due to lack of enabling legal framework for their operations. In some Southern and Western African countries, such grassroots radios have been operational for decades, contributing to socio-economic development of the grassroots. They also constitute a veritable way of collecting massive information from the grassroots to build useful media archives for developmental purposes. In Mali and South Africa where ownerships and control of such stations had been vested in grassroots communities, hundreds of community broadcast stations have been in operation. On the other hand, in Nigeria, there is not yet a single community broadcasting station in the real sense of it because the enabling law to support them have not been promulgated in spite of years of intensive lobbying by members of the civil society to stimulate the process. However, campuses radio stations have been licensed in some educational institutions where they are allowed for training purposes and to broadcast distant learning educational programs. Such stations render immense services to local communities and institutions within their coverage areas by providing information for community utilisation and in the process keeping archives of important educational and public enlightenment events.

Government ownership and control of the media for over three decades after independence also meant that the resources flowing into the media to manage and run its archives was limited. Many electronic media in many countries operated within the government budget for a long time. In Nigeria, the Federal

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Radio Corporation (FRNC) was not allowed to accept commercial advertisements from for many years until it was realised such policy was no more sustainable. The irrrlication of this policy while it lasted was :iit government news and information coverage was the priority for the network of the federal radio stations across Nigeria. Naturally, the kinds of records and audio archives that were kept by the radio corporation were about government events and activities and those public events that government considered as priorities. This process deprived the government media stations of the rich cultural archives that could have been accumulated over those periods and kept for future references.

Access to resources also determines the extent to which the archives of events in the news could be preserved in media organisations across Nigeria. Many media organisations do not have proper and well maintained libraries or archives of records in the real sense of it. The Nigeria Television Authority, Ibadan, which happens to be the oldest television station in Nigeria lost valuable recordings in its custody over the years due to lack of motivation to keep such records and non-availability of infrastructures for such archives. Fire outbreaks consumed many of such recordings kept carelessly on several occasions because of non-availability of deliberate internal policies to keep and maintain the archives of video recordings which persisted for too long in the station. The sad consequence of this trend is that in spite of the very active role the station played since its establishment in 1959 in covering landmark events such as the National

Independence in 1960, the Black and Africa Cultural Festival (FESTAC) in 1977, the All-Africa Games in 1973, the military take-over of government in 1966, the Nigeria civil war and various other political, social, economic, cultural and sporting events on the continent, many of the visual footages that were kept in the custody of the television station and other media organisations were lost. Only scanty private collections of such events are available for historical references and for scholarly analysis. Any scholar who is interested in consulting such archive will either have access to them through the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) archives in London or other private or public archives scattered all over the world except in Nigeria.

Liberalisation of media ownership that took place in many African countries at a time when the continent was witnessing economic depression further contributed to reduction in acquisitions for media archives. Private investors who dared to establish television stations, radio stations and print media were compelled into strict coverage of events that could fetch immediate gratification in order to survive the economic turbulence. Rather than providing platform for social, political and human development, consumerism and publicity for products and services became the pre-occupation of the private media. Programs were strictly commercialised and the priorities of the advertisers became the focus of most media organisations. Events of public importance were not given priority if they could not attract commercial support and funds into media organisations. This trend further depleted media archives and the extent of social responsibility of the media to the

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environments within which they are operating because many talents and creative individuals are not given opportunity to express themselves on the media except they can afford the cost.

Contemporary Media Archives and its challenges

The media scenario in Africa has been influenced by developments in information technologies. Such technology has eroded the monopoly held by the traditional media on the agenda-setting and gate-keeping functions of the media which feeds media acquisitions. The liberalisation that has followed developments in information technologies has meant that citizens can set their own agenda for public discourses, develop means to attract contributions into such discourses through social networks and determine the amount of time that are spent in dwelling on such discourses. The recent political revolution in the Arab world was fuelled by information technology, which made it difficult for the political elites in those countries affected by the revolution to sustain official repression of the media. It has encouraged public access into the media to sustain public debates about changes that are overdue in the political firmament of countries that have been pan of the Arab revolutions. Citizen journalism as a new phenomenon has expanded the scope and reach of the media. It has enriched media contents beyond what was operating in the traditional media and has expanded the pressure for accountability of the political and governance elites through increasing popular participations. The media archives will benefit immensely

from the current information explosion stimulated by ICT because it will boost the ability of the media to generate and accumulate materials for its archives. Already, materials in virtual archives have ran into trillions of bytes, which can be retrieved everywhere on the globe. This trend will however raise questions in relation to extent of responsibility in handling access, managing contents and protecting precious and sensitive archives of the media. The implication of the impact of ICT on media archives is that it cannot be localised as it used to be and the protection of those archives cannot be the sole responsibility of certain professional groups, in this case, journalists and other media practitioners, media librarians and archivists. Since access is immensely liberalised, the decision to determine what goes into the archives and how such resources will be managed has become a global responsibility without any visible governance structure. This ultimately implies that no single individual or professional group will be responsible for the upkeep of the archives of the media. The other implication of this is that valuable media archival materials may easily be lost or may not be as easy to retrieve as it is with the traditional media if an individual decide to hold its monopoly. Furthermore, the commercial values of media productions and materials may now largely determine what goes under protection in the archive and how they could be accessed and retrieved. This trend may further perpetuate the domination of some cultural elements and may lead to the gradual extinction of other cultural elements that may be dubbed 'inferior' (McBride, 1981), and those cultural elements that lack representation and visibility

in the satellite communication technology realm. Nevertheless, democratisation of the new media will enhance access to *everyone* who plans to organise and preserve an archive and develop a system of retrieval, irrespective of time, space or location of such individual. It will also boost commercial opportunities and contribute to virtual economies of the satellite communication media,

Another challenge that may be faced in the contemporary time is constant changes in technologies, which implies that the format and modes of keeping and retrieving materials from media archives will be constantly subjected to technological changes. This trend was witnessed in the past with the traditional media when changes in audio and visual recording technologies dictated that materials had to be transferred into new recording devices and formats in radio and television broadcasting stations. Those that were unable to be converted naturally went into extinction or condemnation. Examples of this were changes from audio and video recording tapes to compact and later, laser discs, and from VHS to U-Matic tapes. Such changes are more likely to rapidly occur now with constant emergence of new compression recording devices and easy to navigate software technologies that are making communication and storage more pleasurable. The current global switch-over from analogue to digital modes in broadcasting technologies means that archival materials will have to follow the same trend in media establishments to make organisation and retrieval of such materials easier in corporate media.

As the new digital media technologies tends to have divested journalism practice from

the clutches of professionalism into the control of ordinary citizens, a number of ethical questions arises in relation to the fate of media archival resources in the hands of the untrained and (sometimes) irresponsible operators.

Individuals now establish blog sites which service the public realm with invaluable information, some of which the traditional media may be reluctant to publish. With citizen journalism, there is a minimal influence of official and state authorities on what could be published. Beyond open condemnation, it is difficult for states and dictators to prevent unfavourable publications 'that threatens security', as they say. This inherent advantage in citizen journalism is a strong point towards strengthening good and responsive governance. However, it is very difficult to hold this form of journalism practice into ethical and moral accountability, and to insist on this could be problematic. In traditional journalism practice, ethics are enforced by the conscience of the journalist, moderated by training and professional institutions. Such structures are lacking in citizen journalism world. No formal training is required to open and manage a blog site beyond the ability of the bloggerto operate the appropriate software and programs. This trend, therefore, has the potential of exposing public morale to dangers in the hands of irresponsible bloggers and contributors into social networks and websites, with the attendant risks of damaging social moral fabric and posing a visible threat to the most vulnerable in the society. This trend may ultimately influence the nature of materials selected for preservation in the media archives and the use to which such materials are made. Many of the popular web blog sites depend

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largely on proceeds from commercial advertisers for their sustenance. There is yet to be a global standard, mechanisms or framework to regulate what products and services could be advertised on the internet as it applies to the traditional news media where there are advertising regulations and professional standards to moderate advertisements. There are also no enforcement mechanisms with regard to the moderation or regulation of issues that could be regarded as being against the public interests in the practice of citizen journalism. This trend, if continued, will affect the media archives negatively and may subject the administration of such archives into manipulations in irresponsible hands.

Conclusion

Media archives are very important in cataloguing the history of any society. It is through these archives that authentic primary historical materials can be kept and made available for references without the barriers posed by legalese, time and distance in a dynamic communication world. Historical evidences of past and contemporary events, policies and actions that could shape the future of any society could be located in these archives. It is therefore the responsibility of all citizens to hold professionals, decision makers and every individual that operate in the media accountable for these archives. Such accountability could begin with evolution of policies and plans that will guide and insist on the establishment and management of media archives. Such policies will dwell on modes of access to and retrieval of materials from such archives.

Digitalisation of media archives in Africa will go a long way in preserving heritages and elements of culture. This process however requires the commitments of governments, civil society organisations and committed individuals in raising resources that will make such project a viable reality. Such digitalisation is however not the beginning and the end of preserving African culture through the media. There is a need for the evolution of legal framework to guide acquisition and retrieval of virtual media archival materials to prevent unnecessary commodification and commercialisation of materials in media archives. In essence, permanent institutions should be established to serve as guardian to media archival materials acquired in different locations and sustainable acquisition and retrieval system should be maintained to nourish such archives into the future.

Endnote

1. Examples of such monuments are the various slave trading embarkation points in West Africa, identification of various artifacts and archaeological materials that explains the past cultural events that are kept in various museums within and outside Africa.

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