

Globalization and Libraries: The Need for Paradigm Shift in Nigerian Library and Information Environment

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ABSTRACT

Effectiveness of a library in the present digital age depends largely upon the application of information and communication technology, and integration in to global information infrastructure. This paper attempts to explore the impact of globalization on library and information services and information environment globally. It also analyzes the Nigerian libraries in the era of globalization and concludes by recommending steps towards launching Nigerian information environment in the global system.

KEY WORDS

ICTs, Globalization; Nigerian Libraries; Information Environment; Global Information Infrastructure; Information Superhighway; Digital Library

PAPER TYPE *Conceptual*

INTRODUCTION

As the world becomes global village due to advances in information and communication technologies (ICTs), so also the profession and practice of library and librarianship. This shift has resulted in coining various terms and nomenclatures for the practitioners and services provided by the practitioners. Services such as Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI); Current Awareness Services (CAS); Information and Knowledge Management (I&KM) etc. were common, introduced and further enhanced using ICTs by the practitioners in the profession who are often called digital librarians, system librarians or information managers. These unprecedented changes had impacted positively on the quality and quantity of services provided by libraries and also transformed their environment in to "borderless" and completely "inter accessible" thereby creating high level of utilization and maximizes their (libraries) potentials for development and increase in information resources to cater for the dynamic information need of their clientele. The continuous adoption and adaption of sophisticated and High Definition (HD) equipment and facilities in libraries by developed nations of the world has made it possible and easier to create a highly responsive

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and virile library system and environment in order to supplement and complement their knowledge-based and information driven economy.

GLOBALIZATION: CONCEPT AND PRACTICE

In today's world no nation would afford to live in island, as such co-operation, collaboration and sharing are the norms of the society. The process of economic development and political leadership involving significant industrialization lead to a new, much more diverse, complex, and interrelated economy, which becomes increasingly difficult for a single country to contend with. The foreign influence and pressure for democratization in many countries also helped to open up such countries to international presence and involvement, and instruments such as political, economic, diplomatic, and military were used by western powers to promote democracy and democratization across the globe. Indeed, by the late 1980s the major sources of power and influence in the world – the Vatican, the United States, the European Community, and the Soviet Union were actively promoting liberalization and democratization **(Huntington, 1991)**.

The concept of "globalization" is currently a fashionable term used in the social sciences, amongst management experts, journalist and politicians. There is growing notion that today we live in a period where much of social life is determined by global process **(Institute of International Education, 2001)**.

Globalization, as a present international order, is synonymous to harmonization, unification, free entry and exit, abrogation of trade barriers, common market, give and take, internationalization, common currency, tariff waver, transfer of technology, indigenization, economic integration, inclusiveness etc., as against the old notion of individualism and self- sufficiency. The era of globalization is seeing as an end to national cultures, national economies and national borders. Economically, globalization is more than international exchange of goods and services, interaction of separate domestic economies, and extensive reach of capital. It is a unified global economy.

For example, the economic liberalization that started during the 1970s, cheaper transports and IT (Information technology) development made globalization processes accelerated **(Institute of International Education, 2001)**. According to Oman **(as cited in Institute of International Education, 2001)**, four phenomena reflected upon the perception of globalization today: (i) the end of U.S. domination of trade and leadership; (ii) the rapid expansion of financial markets world- wide; (iii) the globalization of corporate activity; and (iv) the rise of public concern towards environmental threats.

However, the critics of globalization have persistently argued on the attainability and reality of the system. One of their points was that large geographical areas and populations are not involved in the processes termed globalization especially third world countries that do not have any economic advantage.

GLOBALIZATION OF LIBRARY SERVICES

The expansion and growth in scientific and technical innovations has posed serious challenges to libraries and information centers globally coupled with the exponential growth of research and development (R&D) in the developed nations which recognize information as a vital national resource that determine the direction of any nation. Information is an essential part of a nation's resources, and access to it, is one of the basic human right; it is not only a national resource vital for scientific and economic progress but also seen as a medium for social communication **(UNESCO, 1978)** as cited by **Nkiko (2005)**.

Based on the recognition that libraries generate, organize, store and disseminate information necessary for social, economic, and industrial development, the United States and the British Governments placed premium on libraries as a critical agent for educational and national development. British council as well as the United States Information Service (USIS) establishes sophisticated and well- stocked libraries across the globe **(Adebayo, 1997)**.

In recent years, information and communication technologies (ICTs) have grown quite rapidly and the practice in the library and information environment is toward inter-accessibility, internetworking, exchange and resource sharing, digitization and virtualization, open access, Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC), library consortia, information superhighway, etc. All these underscore the transformations brought to bear by ICTs to the library and information environment world-wide which necessitated libraries to open up their frontiers for others as against the old notion of self-sufficiency and restricted or closed access.

For higher education, the new technologies have made access easier, promote equity and improve the quality of education. It is argued that the aim of using technology in library and information centers was to enhance access and flexibility, while reducing costs and promoting quality of services and resources. According to **Ndukwe (2005)**, the digital revolution progressed to usher in the information age with computer networking of today that enables resources and information sharing even on a world-wide basis. The interconnection of computers and the Internet have brought about greater efficiency and better information sharing and management. In recent years, major developments in ICTs and the rapid growth of global infrastructure and networks such as

Internet and broadband have transformed businesses and markets and generated significant wealth and economic growth in many countries. This revolution also means that constraints of time and distance have virtually eliminated.

In the present day, capital accumulation has become more knowledge-based and knowledge intensive; those countries, firms, individuals etc. that have access to the most sophisticated knowledge and information are able to compete (**Gill, 1996**). Available knowledge at individual and collective levels has to be optimally managed, developed, and utilized and this is made possible via information and communication technologies. It is evident that, ICT is driving the new global economy. People, businesses and communities with ready access to information technologies are better equipped to participate actively in the global economy (**Ndukwe, 2005**).

The use of ICTs in libraries world-wide provides the fastest and most efficient capabilities and flexibilities for acquiring, processing, sorting, storing, retrieving, dissemination, and utilization of information. In the developed world for example, many libraries have access to computer communication such as OCLC (Online Computer Library Center) of the University of Ohio, USA. OCLC avails users to the resources of at least 38,000 libraries across the world using about 75 databases including MARC records with full text access to 7500 journals. This is no doubt a window to the world of information and users can access this gateway from their libraries or remotely from the comfort of their beds, offices, laboratories, classrooms, etc. There are also other databases accessible across the world that linked several libraries such as; MEDLARS, ERIC, AGRIS, AGRICOLA, EBSCOHOST, SABINET, etc.

In African continent, particularly with the help of UNESCO, the World Bank, the Humanities Library Project, and the Net Library, a few educational, governmental, non-governmental, and Research Institutions have been able to establish their own digital collections in their libraries. The most noteworthy and visible among them is the African Digital Library (ADL), (**Sharma, 2009**).

It is a joint venture project of Technikon SA, South Africa; the Association of African Universities and Net Library, a private US based corporation. The mission of ADL "is to provide digitized full text resources to learners in Africa via the revitalization of education and lifelong learning on the continent and alleviation of the digital divide between first and third world countries" as witnessed by Binh P. Le (**as cited in Sharma, 2009**). The ADL opened November 1, 1999 and has over 8,000 titles in over fifty subjects including agriculture, business, computer science, education, engineering, medicine, religion and technology. ADL "should serve as a

model for resource sharing for many underdeveloped regions of the world.

The availability of Global Information Infrastructure (GII) occasioned by advancement in technology had completely revolutionized the information environment in to a more responsive and dynamic. It had created information environment that is complete and fluid, connective and interactive, diverse and unpredictable, where the professional provision of information is no longer constrained by time and space **(Todd, 2000)**.

The globalization of library and information services was further enhanced with the proliferation of digital libraries which Mohammed describes as an organized collection of documented information resources (text, numeric, images, statistics, sound, software, etc) not limited by physical structure and printed format but also including electronically stored information and information resources accessed physically and remotely irrespective of the time and location of the user and/or the information resources with the assistance of information and communication technology **(as cited by Garuba & Dimowa,2005)**. **Ya'u (2003)** asserts that the virtual library has an opportunity to address the paucity of teaching and research materials in the libraries of higher institutions in Nigeria as well as giving room for sharing of research outputs with the global community amongst the institutions and the local researchers.

NIGERIAN LIBRARIES: GLOBAL COMPETITIVENESS

The world is changing in the new knowledge economy and in the digital age. Libraries of all types are also undergoing changes. In this era of knowledge and information explosion, the unprecedented growth of knowledge and information has impacted all nations, organizations, libraries and individuals. Based on the fact that knowledge and information handling, by way of collecting, processing, and dissemination is the main thrust of any library, the role of the libraries in this digital age is changing to provide the competitive advantage for their users. The ICTs are at the forefront of this dynamic and rapidly changing situation through facilitating integration and synergy between library institutions and practitioners in the profession.

Nigeria as part of the global system with all potentials (human and material resources) for socio-economic and technological development is still far cry from reality. Today, Nigeria is rated as one of the world's fastest growing telecommunication markets and other ICT facilities in the world as acknowledged by the International Telecommunication Union in its 2010 ICT development index report **(International Telecommunication Union Report, 2010)**. According to the report, the

Nigerian IDI value increased by more than 20 per cent, jumping up 12 places to 122nd in the 2008. While the overall rank is still low, it represents a significant improvement for such a large country. This improvement is mainly due to an increase in ICT use (23 ranks up in the use sub-index), with the number of Internet users increasing from 7 per 100 inhabitants in 2007 to about 16 in 2008. While this is substantially lower than Internet penetration levels in advanced countries, it is much higher than the African average of 4 per cent in 2008. Although attempts have been made to integrate Nigerian information environment in to global system, such efforts always end at policy formulation stage because the requisite infrastructure to sustain and facilitate the integration is lacking, continued growing digital divide (the gap between “have” and “have not” technology) coupled with the problem of technical expertise for designing, development and implementation of the project. The attempt by Nigerian Federal Ministry of Education at creating National Virtual (Digital) Library to boost the quality of teaching and learning, and enhance access to national and international library and information resources is still far from actualizing. The objectives of the project include:

- to improve the quality of teaching and research in institutions of higher learning in Nigeria through the provision of current books, journals and other library resources.
- to enhance access to academic resources serving the higher education community in Nigeria to global information resources.
- to enhance scholarship, research and long-life learning through the establishment of permanent access to shared digital archival collection.
- to provide guidance for academic libraries on applying appropriate technologies used in the production of digital library resources; and
- to enhance the use and usability of globally distributed, networked information resources **(Okebukola, 2002)**.

However, in spite of the enormous benefits accruable to Nigerian library and information environment, libraries in Nigeria failed to fully embrace and harness the potentials of ICTs to serve their users or even venture in to the sophisticated global information infrastructure. Most academic and research libraries in Nigeria have not computerized any of their functions. The public card catalogue and the visible index are still finding tools for books and journals in most libraries. Likewise, indexes and abstracts are compiled manually. Library and information services in Nigeria have yet to transcend the traditional functions as visualized by Aguolu, Haruna, and Aguolu **(as cited in Sharma, 2009)**.

Finally, the above situation was largely due to the conglomeration of problems which include the following;

- Problem of infrastructural facilities
- lack of computer literacy/education
- lack of support from government, may be owing to budget constraints
- poor maintenance and update culture
- problem of record conversion

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It is obvious and evident that in spite of the transformation recorded in the global information environment where barriers to access and utilization irrespective of the location were removed, Nigerian library and information centers were still operating at individualistic and closed access levels. In Nigeria, many libraries have no e-mail, fax, telephone and computer-based services and this has a great implication for learning, teaching, research and development. This underscores the nonchalant attitude and lip service paid by the Nigerian government and other stakeholders in the business of ICT infrastructure development and implementation. As the world is moving toward globalization of its socio-economic, political and educational activities, ICTs are regarded as enablers and driving force since they are (ICTs) nervous system of the contemporary society, transmitting and distributing sensory and control information and interconnecting a myriad of interdependent units and systems.

For Nigerian library and information centers to join the global information superhighway and tap its potentialities through competitiveness, the virtual library project must be taken serious and enhanced which **Fabunmi (2009)** described as a technological way of bringing together the resources of various libraries and information services in one place, so that users can find what they need quickly and easily. A virtual library can consist of materials from a variety of separate libraries that are organized in a virtual space using computer and computer networks. **Ya'u (2003)** postulated that virtual library is an enhanced access to national and International library and information resources for teaching, learning, research and pleasure via the digital technology thereby making Nigeria a tune and active member of the global village policy. The uniqueness of the virtual library is that it is space less, since it requires the conversion of target library collection in to electronic format and placed on the Internet to be accessed by anybody and anywhere. According to **Fabunmi (2009)** content of virtual library may include, but certainly is not limited to, CD-ROM, Internet subscriptions, list of annotated web links, internal work products(such as

brief banks), propriety databases(such as LexisNexis or Westlaw) and even web spiders or push technology that deliver targeted research to the user. However, particularly, the following technologies need to be integrated in to the information environment:

- Computing technology; such as mainframe computers, mini computers, microcomputers, microchip technology, Artificial Intelligence, Software technology etc.
- Telecommunication technology; Audio technology, teletext, videotext, telephone, fax (facsimile transmission), voice mail, motion picture, E-mail, teleconference etc.
- Broadcasting technology; Broadband and Satellite technologies etc.
- Microelectronic/micrographic technology; CD-ROM, Hard Disk, Flash technologies etc.
- Reprographic technology; printers, scanners, photocopiers etc.

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