THE IMPACT OF DIGITAL DOCUMENTATION OF NIGERIAN CULTURAL ARTIFACTS THROUGH MUSEUM PRACTICE IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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Abstract

The paper, "the impact of Digital Documentation of Nigerian Cultural Artifacts through Museum Practice in the 21st Century" conveys how digital technologies can foster the preservation, accessibility and management of Nigerian Cultural Artifacts. The aim of this paper is to create a digital platform for documenting Nigerian Cultural Artifacts as a means of preserving, enhancing accessibility and to promote Nigerian Cultural Artifacts. The method used was to conduct interviews with museum curators, digital archivists and scholars. Findings reveals that the impact of digital documentation on Nigerian Cultural Artifacts through museum practices is profound and far-reaching. While it presents challenges, its potential to preserve, promote, and study Nigeria's cultural heritage is immense. This paper provides a comprehensive overview of the transformative role of digitization in preserving and celebrating Nigeria's cultural treasures in the 21st century. This study concludes that digital documentation of Nigerian cultural Artifacts through museum practice help in saving the artifacts from decaying, damaging and sustaining the lifespan of artifacts. This paper recommends a training and capacity building for museum staff, including conservators, curators, and educators and continue to prioritize digital documentation efforts, making museum collections accessible online. It has also contributed to a resurgence of interest in Nigerian cultural identity and heritage, fostering connections between communities and their traditions.

Keywords: Digital documentation, Nigerian Cultural Artifacts, Museum.

Introduction

In the 21st century, the digital revolution has ushered in a new era in the preservation, accessibility, and dissemination of cultural heritage worldwide. This transformation has been particularly profound in the context of Nigerian cultural artifacts, where digital documentation through innovative museum practices has played a pivotal role. Bosworth (2009) posits that the advent of digital culture has introduced novel strategies for preserving and showcasing cultural heritage, offering a powerful means to safeguard fragile artifacts while making them more accessible to a global audience. The importance of this digital shift in preserving and promoting Nigerian cultural heritage cannot be overstated. Jones (2017) underscores the significance of digital documentation in enhancing access to Nigerian cultural artifacts. Through online databases and digital catalogs, these artifacts have become readily available for individuals around the world, fostering cross-cultural understanding and exchange. This accessibility, as argued by Jones, has the potential to bridge geographical and cultural gaps, enabling a broader audience to engage with and appreciate Nigeria's rich cultural history.

Beyond accessibility, digital documentation has fundamentally transformed research and education in the realm of Nigerian cultural artifacts. Ogbonna and Ugwuanyi (2015) emphasize, that scholars now have the advantage of remote access to artifacts and related information, facilitating in-depth research and analysis. This digital accessibility has democratized knowledge and scholarly engagement with Nigeria’s cultural heritage.

Furthermore, digital documentation has played a vital role in the revival of Nigerian cultural identity, as discussed by Ogunleye (2016). By preserving and showcasing traditional practices and artifacts, digital initiatives have contributed to a renewed interest in and appreciation for Nigeria’s diverse cultural heritage, both within and outside the country.

In addition to its cultural impact, digital documentation has economic implications, as highlighted by Ekine (2018). By offering virtual previews and immersive experiences, it has the potential to boost cultural tourism, contributing to Nigeria's economy while preserving its cultural treasures.

However, this digital transformation is not without its challenges, including copyright issues and ethical considerations, as pointed out by Oyedemi (2021). These challenges underscore the need for careful navigation and collaboration between Nigerian museums and international institutions, as emphasized by Ilozue (2019), to ensure that digital documentation serves its intended purpose while respecting cultural sensitivities and rights.

The aim of studying the impact of digital documentation of Nigerian cultural artifacts through museum practice in the 21st century is to: Assess how digital technologies can influence the preservation, accessibility, and management of Nigerian cultural artifacts. Explore digital documentation in enhancing cultural exchange, collaboration, and representation of Nigerian cultural heritage. Provide recommendations for improving digital documentation practices in Nigerian museums to better preserve and promote cultural artifacts.

Conducting interviews with museum curators, digital archivists, scholars, and other relevant stakeholders to explore their perspectives on the impact of digital documentation on Nigerian cultural artifacts is the method used.

Meaning of Digital Documentation

Digital documentation refers to the process of creating, storing, and managing documents and information in a digital or electronic format. It involves the conversion of physical documents, such as paper records, photographs, or artifacts, into digital files that can be stored, accessed, and manipulated electronically. Digital documentation also encompasses the creation of born-digital

content, where documents and data are initially generated in digital form. Digital documentation has become increasingly important in various fields and industries, including archives, libraries, museums, business, healthcare, and government, due to its numerous advantages. These advantages include easy storage, retrieval, sharing, and preservation of information, as well as the ability to search and analyze digital content efficiently.

In the context of cultural heritage and museums, digital documentation plays an essential role in preserving and sharing cultural artifacts, artworks, historical documents, and other heritage items. It allows institutions to create digital replicas or records of physical objects, making them accessible to a global audience through online collections, virtual exhibitions, and research databases. Digital documentation can take various forms, including digital images, audio recordings, video footage, 3D models, and structured data. These digital representations not only help safeguard valuable cultural heritage but also facilitate research, education, and public engagement by enabling remote access to these treasures.

Meaning of Museum

A museum is a curated and organized institution or space dedicated to the collection, preservation, exhibition, and interpretation of objects and artifacts that have cultural, historical, scientific, and artistic significance. Museums serve as repositories of knowledge, allowing visitors to explore and learn about various aspects of human history, art, culture, and the natural world. A museum in Nigeria, like museums worldwide, is an institution or space dedicated to the collection, preservation, exhibition, and interpretation of objects, artifacts, and materials of cultural, historical, scientific, and artistic significance. Museums in Nigeria serve as repositories of knowledge,

allowing visitors to explore and learn about various aspects of Nigerian history, art, culture, and the natural world. (Aina, 2011).

The National Museum Lagos is one of Nigeria's prominent museums, featuring a diverse collection of artifacts, artworks, and historical items that showcase the cultural heritage and history of Nigeria. The Jos Museum Complex in Plateau State is known for its archaeological and ethnographic exhibits, including Nok terracotta sculptures, traditional Nigerian clothing, and historical artifacts. The National Gallery of Art in Lagos is dedicated to Nigerian visual arts, showcasing contemporary and traditional artworks from various regions and artists.

The National Museum in Benin City, Edo State, focuses on the rich cultural heritage of the Benin Kingdom, featuring royal art, artifacts, and historical relics. The Ogbunike Caves Museum is associated with the Ogbunike Caves in Anambra State and showcases cultural and historical aspects related to the caves and their significance.

The Calabar Museum and Cultural Center in Cross River State offers insights into the history, culture, and traditions of the region. These museums in Nigeria play a vital role in preserving Nigeria's cultural and historical heritage, as well as in educating both local and international visitors about the country's diverse cultural traditions, history, and natural beauty. They are essential institutions for promoting cultural understanding and appreciation in Nigeria.



Artistic: **Jonathan Philemon**

Title: **Lagos museum**

Medium: **Photography**

Year: **2023**

Source: **Google**

The Historical Background of Museums in Nigeria

The historical background of museums in Nigeria is marked by a rich cultural heritage, colonial influences, and a growing appreciation for preserving the country's history and artifacts. Before the colonial era, Nigeria had a rich history of cultural practices, traditions, and artifacts. Communities and kingdoms in Nigeria, such as the Benin Kingdom, the Igbo-Ukwu culture, and the Nok civilization, produced exquisite artworks and artifacts that would later become central to Nigerian museums (Ezeh, 2012). During the colonial period, Nigeria came under British rule, and this had a significant impact on the collection and preservation of cultural artifacts. Colonial administrators and scholars began to collect and document Nigerian artifacts, often with a focus on ethnographic and anthropological studies (Ugboh, 2017).

The first museum in Nigeria, the Lagos Museum, was established in 1945, followed by the Jos Museum in 1952. These institutions aimed to preserve and showcase Nigeria's cultural heritage and historical artifacts. Subsequently, more museums were established across the country (Osahon, 2015). After gaining independence from colonial rule in 1960, Nigeria continued to develop its museum infrastructure. The National Commission for Museums and Monuments (NCMM) was established in 1979 to oversee the management and conservation of Nigeria's cultural heritage (Ogbokor, 2006). Nigerian museums have faced challenges such as inadequate funding, security concerns, and the repatriation of looted artifacts. However, efforts have been made to modernize and expand museum facilities, improve conservation practices, and promote cultural education (Aina, 2011).

The history of museums in Nigeria is intertwined with the country's cultural richness, colonial history, and post-independence efforts to preserve and showcase its heritage. These museums continue to play a vital role in educating the public about Nigeria's diverse cultures and history while facing various challenges in the modern era.

Nigerian Cultural Artifacts

Nigeria is renowned for its diverse and rich cultural heritage, with a wide array of cultural artifacts that reflect the country's history, traditions, and artistic achievements. These artifacts encompass a broad spectrum of objects, including sculptures, textiles, masks, pottery, jewelry, musical instruments, and much more. Here are some examples of Nigeria's cultural artifacts.

Nok Terracotta Figures:

Description: Nok terracotta figures are ancient clay sculptures dating back over 2,000 years. They are known for their intricate details and are considered some of the earliest sculptural art in sub-Saharan Africa. (Fagg, B. 1990).



Artistic:	**Eze Friday**
Title:	**Nok Art**
Medium:	**Photography**
Year:	**2023**
Source:	**Google**

Benin Bronzes:

Description: The Benin Bronzes are a collection of intricately cast bronze plaques and sculptures created by the Edo people of the Benin Kingdom. They depict historical events, court life, and religious ceremonies. (Dark, 1973).

Yoruba Gelede Masks:

Description: Gelede masks are integral part of Yoruba culture and are used in elaborate masquerade performances. They often represent women and serve to celebrate and protect the community. (Drewal, 1983).

Igbo-Ukwu Artifacts:

Description: The Igbo-Ukwu artifacts are a collection of intricate bronze and copper objects, including vessels, jewelry, and ritual items. They date back to the 9th century AD and are associated with the Igbo-Ukwu culture. (Fagg, & Pendergrast, 1982).



Artistic: **Eze Friday**
Title: **Igbo Ukwu Art**
Medium: **Photography**
Year: **2023**
Source: **Google**

Adire Textiles:

Description: Adire textiles are indigo-dyed fabrics created by the Yoruba people using resist-dyeing techniques. They feature intricate patterns and are used for clothing and ceremonial purposes. (Barbour, 2018).

Ife Head Sculptures:

Description: Ife head sculptures are lifelike bronze and terracotta sculptures created by the Ife people. They are known for their naturalistic and realistic portrayal of human faces.

Significance: Ife head sculptures are considered some of the finest examples of African art and provide insights into the advanced artistic skills of the Ife civilization.

These cultural artifacts are not only significant for their artistic and historical value but also for their role in preserving and celebrating Nigeria's diverse cultures and traditions. They continue to be the focus of research, preservation efforts, and cultural pride in Nigeria and around the world

Preservation and Conservation Practices in Nigerian Museums

Preservation and conservation are essential aspects of museum practice in Nigeria, aimed at safeguarding the country's rich cultural heritage and historical artifacts. These processes involve a range of activities designed to extend the longevity of artifacts, maintain their physical integrity, and protect them from deterioration over time.

One key aspect of preservation and conservation is preventive care, which includes controlling environmental conditions within museums. This involves regulating temperature, humidity, and lighting to ensure that artifacts are stored in a stable environment that minimizes damage from factors like moisture, temperature fluctuations, and UV radiation. The National Commission for

Museums and Monuments (NCMM) in Nigeria, as well as individual museums and cultural institutions, have made efforts to implement climate control systems and conservation-friendly storage facilities (Onwuegbute & Onwuegbute, 2016).

Another crucial component of preservation and conservation in Nigerian museums is the documentation and cataloging of artifacts. This involves creating detailed records of each artifact, including its origin, condition, and any conservation work performed. Digital documentation, has become increasingly important for both preservation and research purposes (Ugboh, 2017). Proper documentation ensures that the history and significance of artifacts are preserved for future generations, and it aids in the planning and execution of conservation efforts.

Conservation treatments are also employed when artifacts show signs of deterioration or damage. These treatments are carried out by trained conservators and may include cleaning, repairing, or stabilizing artifacts to prevent further deterioration. Conservation activities are often guided by ethical principles to ensure that the authenticity and integrity of the artifact are maintained (Afolayan & Nwazojie, 2012). Nigerian museums have made strides in building the capacity of their conservation departments and collaborating with international experts to address complex conservation challenges.

Accessibility and Outreach in Nigerian Museums

Accessibility and outreach in Nigerian museums are crucial aspects of ensuring that the country's rich cultural heritage is available and engaging to a broad audience. These efforts involve making museum collections and resources more accessible to the public and employing various strategies to engage and educate diverse communities.

One notable initiative to enhance accessibility and outreach in Nigerian museums is the digitization of collections and the establishment of online databases. These digital platforms enable people from around the world to explore Nigerian artifacts and heritage without physically visiting museums. This approach aligns with the principles of open access, as it ensures that cultural resources are available to a wider audience (Jones, 2017).

Nigerian museums have increasingly focused on community engagement and educational programs. These programs aim to reach out to local communities and schools, offering guided tours, workshops, and exhibitions that help visitors connect with their cultural heritage. Such initiatives foster a sense of ownership and pride in Nigeria's cultural treasures and heritage (Ilozue, 2019). Accessibility and outreach efforts are instrumental in ensuring that Nigerian museums serve not only as repositories of cultural treasures but also as dynamic educational and community resources. These initiatives contribute to preserving and celebrating Nigeria's diverse cultural heritage for future generations.

Digital Documentation of Nigerian Cultural Artifacts

Digital documentation has revolutionized research and education in Nigerian museums, as highlighted by Ogbonna and Ugwuanyi (2015). The availability of digital records and online databases allows researchers to access artifacts and related information remotely, facilitating in-depth study and cross-cultural analysis. Nigerian museums actively engage in educational programs and outreach. These programs cater to both formal and informal learning experiences. Museums organize workshops, lectures, guided tours, and exhibitions that help disseminate knowledge about Nigeria's cultural diversity and history to the public. The educational role of museums aligns with the broader goal of promoting cultural awareness and appreciation among

Nigerian citizens. Museums like the National Museum Lagos and the Jos Museum Complex offer valuable educational resources that benefit students, teachers, and lifelong learners.

These efforts underscore the significance of Nigerian museums as hubs for research, education, and the preservation of the country's cultural heritage. Researchers, educators, and the public continue to benefit from these institutions as they actively contribute to the dissemination of knowledge about Nigeria's rich history and cultural diversity. One of the ways museums contribute to cultural revival is by showcasing and preserving traditional artifacts, artworks, and historical objects. Institutions like the National Museum Benin City feature exhibitions that highlight the history and cultural achievements of regions and communities, helping to rekindle interest and pride in local traditions (Ogunleye, 2016).

Museums also actively engage in community outreach and cultural programs. They collaborate with indigenous communities to host events, workshops, and performances that promote and celebrate traditional practices. These activities not only preserve cultural identity but also foster intergenerational knowledge transfer (Adepegba, 2020). Museums contribute to cultural revival by supporting the documentation of oral histories, rituals, music, and dance. These intangible cultural heritage elements are vital components of Nigeria's cultural identity, and their preservation is essential for maintaining a connection to the past (Oyedemi, 2021).

Digital documentation and online access to museum collections have expanded the reach of Nigerian museums, allowing potential tourists to explore the country's cultural heritage remotely. Virtual tours, online exhibitions, and digital resources attract global interest and serve as promotional tools for cultural tourism (Ekine, 2018). Nigerian museums actively engage in the documentation and preservation of oral histories and traditional practices. They collaborate with indigenous communities to record and archive narratives, folk tales, and oral traditions that are

passed down through generations. These efforts ensure that valuable cultural knowledge is preserved and made accessible to researchers, scholars, and future generations (Adepegba, 2020).

Museums play a pivotal role in the documentation and archiving of intangible cultural heritage. They create digital records, audiovisual materials, and written documentation of traditional practices and rituals. These archives serve as valuable resources for researchers, anthropologists, and community members interested in safeguarding their heritage (Oyedemi, 2021).

International Collaboration with Nigerian Artifacts

Nigerian museums often collaborate with international institutions, cultural organizations, and museums. These collaborations involve the exchange of artifacts, expertise, and curatorial practices. International partnerships contribute to the enrichment of collections and foster cross-cultural understanding. Such collaborations also facilitate traveling exhibitions and cultural exchanges, showcasing Nigerian cultural heritage to a global audience (Ilozue, 2019).

Museums within Nigeria frequently collaborate to share resources and knowledge. They may engage in joint exhibitions, research projects, and educational initiatives. Inter-museum networks and alliances aim to strengthen the museum sector as a whole and promote the collective preservation and promotion of cultural heritage.

One of the primary challenges faced by Nigerian museums is inadequate funding and resources. Many museums struggle with limited budgets, which affect their ability to adequately conserve artifacts, maintain facilities, and develop educational programs. This funding gap hampers their capacity to provide the necessary care and preservation for the cultural treasures in their collections, ultimately jeopardizing the long-term preservation of Nigeria's heritage (Aina, 2011).

Conclusion

Digital Documentation of Nigerian cultural Artifacts through museum practice helps in saving the artifacts from decaying, damaging, and sustaining the lifespan of artifacts, and preventing the use of chemicals as a preservative. Nigerian museums play a vital role in preserving and promoting the country's rich and diverse cultural heritage. They serve as repositories of history, art, and tradition, offering educational opportunities and cultural enrichment to both local and global audiences. However, Nigerian museums face various challenges, including funding constraints, ethical considerations, and the need for capacity building. Efforts to address these challenges are essential to secure the future of Nigerian museums and ensure the continued preservation and celebration of the nation's cultural treasures.

Recommendations

The following are the recommendations of this paper:

1. Adequate funding is necessary for the preservation and development of Nigerian museums. The government, private sector, and international organizations should increase financial support to ensure that museums have the necessary resources for collections care, infrastructure improvement, and educational programs.
2. Invest in training and capacity building for museum staff, including conservators, curators, and educators. This will enhance their skills in artifact preservation, research, and community engagement, ultimately improving the quality of museum operations.

3. Continue to prioritize digital documentation efforts, making museum collections accessible online. This not only facilitates research but also broadens the reach of Nigeria's cultural heritage, attracting both domestic and international audiences.
4. Engage in open and transparent dialogues about the ethical considerations surrounding the ownership and repatriation of cultural artifacts. Collaborate with international institutions to address restitution issues and ensure that Nigeria's cultural heritage is respected and protected.
5. Strengthen partnerships with indigenous communities and local stakeholders. Engage community members in decision-making processes, exhibitions, and educational programs to ensure that museums accurately represent and promote cultural heritage.

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