

Digital Tourism and the Development of Nigeria's Cultural Resources

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Abstract

Culture, tourism, and the internet are inseparable today because each society wants to virtually showcase its unique customs and traditions to the world. Digital technology (including the application of diverse software) and economic opportunities abound that can be explored and activated in order to achieve this in Nigeria. The Nigerian diaspora has a sizeable population of young people who desire to establish a virtual connection with their ethnic nationalities. Lack of adequate infrastructure and security concerns have thus created the need to apply digital technology in the management of the country's rich cultural tourism assets. This paper aims to highlight some of the digital systems and electronic tools available that can expose Nigeria's cultural materials to the global community.

Basic Concepts

Digital technology generates, stores or processes information with the use of electronic devices, systems, and other resources. It is the modern means of using information techniques, materials, and methods to show still and motion pictures virtually. Internet communication skills and computers are very crucial to the application of digital technology in the management of cultural resources across the globe. Remote sensing technology which is mostly useful for management of outdoor resources or cultural landscapes is outside the scope of this discussion. Digital technology can be online (in real time) or offline (stored) in an electronic device and used at a desired time later (Drew 2013). A digital video clip, for instance, can be streamed live on a laptop with internet access or stored in a computer hard drive to be played offline even when the internet is no more available to the user.

Digital divide refers to the gap between countries with access to modern information and communication technology (ICT) such as telephones, computers, radio and television, and internet, on the one hand, and those countries that lack these resources on the other hand. It is an umbrella term encompassing the availability of various applications (software) and components (hardware) that help create, store, and distribute digitalized information (Drew 2013). Nigeria is at the lower rung of the digital divide or stratification due to issues some of which will be mentioned here.

Diverse users across the world spend a daily average of six hours in front of digital screens (smartphones, laptops, tablets, desktops, etc.) and this digital habit has led resource managers to focus on what has been termed

Digital Tourism Business. DTB is defined by Saura *et al* (2020) as businesses that are related to tourism whose main marketing model involves the internet and other digital communication tools. Apart from the speed and ease of communication, the DTB umbrella offers unlimited reach to even the remotest part of the world via the internet. The basic components of DTB include social networks, search engines, online

platforms, and mobile applications. Each of these digital tools could allow cultural resource management practitioners in Nigeria to direct their messages towards specific audiences (like undergraduates, new graduates, and young apprentice merchants) thereby making it possible to market directly to them.

To the scientist or communication engineer, digital technology is complex, time-consuming, and complicated to create, run, and maintain but it takes the average user just a few minutes to login and finish their online activity. It is like spending a whole year to plan your daughter's wedding only for your guests to arrive at the event and spend a few hours. The average digital technology user is only concerned with reaching his/her targeted audience and that is the good part for cultural tourist organizers, practitioners, and managers. Let's leave the technical aspects to the computer engineers and focus on producing your content materials.

The Case for Digital Exposure

Some peculiar situations in Nigeria hinder the proper management of cultural resources thereby creating even a more desirable need for the use of digital technology to fill the gap. The number of physical tourists coming to the country has continued to dwindle due to political instability, insecurity, mismanagement of national wealth, and lack of adequate infrastructure. Nigeria is in a situation where the political space has been hijacked by individuals and groups who use violence and suppression of the will of the majority as their ticket to power and authority. Unlike some other better organized societies where people seek political authority to serve the masses, Nigeria's political elites pursue power as a means of personal aggrandizement. Individuals who have the real interest of the masses and who Nigerians prefer are muscled out of the political arena through violent means. These same chosen leaders will then be finished off by an electoral/judicial system that is fundamentally flawed. The result is a situation where majority of our people are not able to transact normal daily activities in peace without unnecessary hardship or even fear for their lives. Basic infrastructure such as good road networks which are available in all other countries are lacking, and travelers spend days instead of hours for long-distance travels even within the country. This situation is worrisome because the socio-political institutions and policies attributable to government actions are important elements in a nation's overall global competitive ranking (Porter 1990:12). How can Nigeria leverage her cultural tourism potentials in order to benefit from globalization given the above scenario? The answer lies in the use of digital and virtual technology to interact with billions of people across the world. The situation in Nigeria is not totally hopeless. An Igbo adage tells us that "when a man/woman wakes up for the day is his/her morning". There is also the saying that "a poor person's chicken is his/her cow". Nigeria may not have all the huge airports of Japan or large turnpikes of United States big cities to travel around quickly and easily, but the country is beautiful, where every day is bright and long cold winter days of heavy snowfalls happen only in people's imagination.

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Nigeria has a huge vibrant population of young people who are ready to join the rest of the world in the pursuit of economic success and socio-political stability. This is the new information age where people see the world from the comfort of their homes, cars, or offices in real time and we have no other option than to be part of the new global information age.

Globalization is a process of increased interaction and interdependence that makes it difficult for any nation to isolate itself in all aspects of development (Stoner *et al* 2000). Globalization is a dynamic and fast-moving process, and we can join the rest of the world by developing our cultural tourism potentials fast and speedy with digital tools. Postulations made more than three decades ago by Ohmae (1990) and Porter (1990) are still very real in Nigeria today. While countries with stable social and political internal structures are adjusting as fast as the process advances, weak nations like Nigeria are being marginalized. To make-up for this situation, we need to aggressively pursue the part of digital technology. Digital technology has compressed space to bring the world to our computer or television screens. No resource manager can afford to relax and let his/her organization be isolated from the global arena. Efforts at cultural tourism development in Nigeria should be done in a global context in order to be relevant and joining the global digital ecosystem is key to successful cultural tourism development.

Information technology combines advancements in electronics, computing, and telecommunication to produce a solid process of storage, processing, transmission, and utilization of information. Breakthroughs in semi-conductors, transmitters, and micro-electronics useful to cultural tourism development exist today in the digital environment. Even the most remote areas of the globe are connected to the rest of the world through digital technology and physical presence is no longer necessary to appreciate and cherish the rich cultural heritage of Nigeria. The “shrinking globe” due to the information age allows people around the world to share voice, pictures, and videos in seconds (Ohmae 1990:31). Since prospective physical tourists have reduced, let us attract virtual tourists to our cultural resources.

Digital Media Components

As an integral part of digital technology, digital media is a moving target since several new platforms and improved options are added on a constant basis. Drew (2013 & 2023; Bennett 2013; and Thomas 2021) have studied some of the digital features that could be streamlined and adopted for an effective management of Nigeria’s cultural tourism resources. Websites which involve building webpages on established platforms was one of the first ways the internet was used to revolutionize media production and consumption (Thomas 2021). A website is a collection of web pages, and one website could consist of thousands of web pages. Big websites like *Amazon* and *Google* have millions of web pages while small business websites could contain just a few pages. Web pages could contain written texts and still pictures as well as audio and video clips. These are the main tools used by billions of people to interact on the internet. The internet, on the other hand, is the network of connected computers the

web uses to travel across; like an airplane travelling through the air to a destination (Bennett 2013).

Cohen & Weiner (2022) itemized different types of websites: eCommerce or business websites allow individuals to sell products from online stores; blog websites are used by regular people to share their ideology or beliefs with the world; portfolio websites are used by creative professionals like graphic designers, university lecturers, artists and writers to display their specialized areas of professionalism; personal websites are avenues to promote private interests and accomplishments; and membership websites are exclusive and require visitors to sign up or pay a fee in order to receive full access to their services, tools and resources. Museums and monument managers, cultural festival organizers, masquerade dance sponsors, and age-grade youth drama facilitators, among others, have potentials to create any of these website categories in order to showcase their cultural materials to the world for membership fees. One of the greatest advantages of digital media is the potential to allow material owners to sell their viewing membership for a fee. In the past, photos were produced manually using films but today, most cameras have digital capabilities, to store image data in a computer that can be reproduced on screen or printed using imaging software on electronic devices such as TVs, smartphones, flash drives, etc. (Drew 2013).

Social media which has been described as “the means of interaction among people in which they create, share, and/or exchange information and ideas in virtual communities and networks” is another important part of digital media (Powel 2022). Originally, social media networks like *Facebook*, *Twitter*, *Instagram*, *Tik Tok*, etc. were used for communication among families and friends but they have gained widespread acceptance in recent years as management and information dissemination tools. Social media marketing, which is the use of social networks to sell products and engage prospective customers through video streaming, discussion forums, and exclusion membership platforms is prevalent in all parts of the world. It is the current vogue especially among the youths who use all forms of digital media for instant communication using software and the internet. Resource managers have found online display advertising as a new way to advertise to potential audiences in the digital era. This has the great benefit of being able to create targeted advertising since advertisers can track interested potential customers around the internet in order to re-advertise to them (Thomas 2021). Two undisputed kings of social media video sharing are *Facebook* and *YouTube* which allow people to upload recordings from their smartphones to their internet platform for the whole world to watch. This has allowed resource managers to become their own video producers with millions of “followers” or viewers. As change agents, it is important to embrace social media as a powerful community mobilizing mechanism since we use it for communication, connecting with loved ones, entertainment, consuming news, etc. The diversity or variety of social media platforms also adds to its effectiveness. For example, a person can tell a story about social injustice on *Facebook*, post a powerful image on *Instagram*, share a blog from a noted industry expert on *LinkedIn*, or retweet a video from a well-known advocate on *Twitter*. Each post is

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powerful yet unique and will reach a whole separate set of eyes to create an emotional response, and hopefully, social change (Powel 2023). With huge numbers of *Monthly Active Users* (MAUs), the six top-ranked digital media platforms control a large percentage of the world's literate population. These are: *Facebook* with 2.9 billion; *YouTube* has 2.2 billion; *WhatsApp* has 2 billion; *Instagram* has 2 billion; *WeChat* has 1.2 billion; and *TikTok* gets 1.2 billion (Collins 2023).

Like most other human endeavors, social media as an integral part of digital technology also has its shortcomings. Addiction especially to smartphones, tablets, and laptops is a major challenge particularly for young undergraduates. Compulsive use or uncontrolled dependency on digital tools to chat or watch shows has become an issue that parents and teachers must address. Cyberbullying, cyberstalking, and dissemination of fake news are also some of the setbacks to effective use of social media. We live in a technological society and social media can be used dynamically to our advantage because it allows us to think, engage and advocate globally while also acting locally (Powel 2023), but we live in a world with intense diversity and what is acceptable to one culture could be abominable to another. Social media is therefore subject to all forms of abuse and mischief especially by the youth (Cohen & Weiner 2022).

Hacking or unauthorized access to computers, systems, or networks is another major issue relating to safety and privacy in the world of digital technology. Hackers are individuals with digital technology skills who seek to compromise digital devices, such as computers, smartphones, tablets, laptops, or even entire systems and networks. The most common form of hacking is phishing, and it is an attack technique where an attacker uses fraudulent emails, texts, or copycat websites to get their victims to share valuable personal information such as account numbers, or victim's login usernames and passwords. This technique is also used to trick their victims into running malicious code on the system, so that an attacker can control the user's system and thereby get access to their sensitive data (Atkins 2021). In other words, hackers are thieves who could use their digital technology skills to break into people's digital devices to steal their personal information, or even damage their devices with digital viruses. A computer virus is a type of malicious software, or malware that infects computers. It can get into a digital system and corrupt their data and software. A simple way to be infected by these dangerous viruses is by clicking on links to malicious websites in emails, messaging apps or social network posts. This can be prevented by acquiring online protection with anti-virus from internet security outfits.

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The use of digital technology to organize, enhance, manage, and transform the entertainment and tourism industry in order to reflect current realities of the information age is referred to as digital tourism. It strives to improve the quality of tourism products and offers the cultural resource manager multiple tools that can be used to market his/her products to the world via digital platforms and social media. The growth and expansion

of internet access and the entry of smartphones into our everyday lifestyle has provided a revolutionary way for consumers to interact with businesses throughout the tourism industry. As a result, numerous companies are utilizing techniques and concepts designed to communicate directly with potential clientele all over the world (Santos & Silva 2020). For cultural resource and tourism managers, program directors, academics and students, digital tourism offers maximum content exposure to the global community via cloud computing, social media, and virtual reality.

Virtual Reality (VR) according to the *World Book Encyclopedia* is a computer-generated environment with scenes and objects that appear real. It uses a Virtual Reality headset to produce an environment in which users feel immersed into their surroundings. Virtual reality devices are complementary to smartphones, tablets, and other mobile tools. These digital tools have influenced our lives more than any other similar products in human history and this technological innovation is only beginning to unravel (Holton 2021). Cultural resources managers and tourism practitioners in Nigeria could join the trend or be left behind by the rest of the world. It is comforting to know that digital tourism also closely aligns with the overall goals of cultural resource management which are education, research, and leisure (Yuce 2022).

The spectacular development of new internet-related technologies has spurred many socio-economic ventures (including the cultural tourism) to adapt their business models to the new forms of marketing in the 21st century (Santos & Silva 2020). Advancements in digital technology can also be used to change the formats and characteristics of cultural tourism management with specific reference to museums. The concept of 'smart museums' is being studied (Sepe & Marzullo 2020; Santos & Silva 2020), and Nigeria can take a close look at this technology to see how it can be used to create virtual tours which can display indoor cultural materials via the web for the world to see and appreciate. With digital tourism, cultural activities are recorded and transferred into people's homes for billions to see via the web.

Video streaming is a great digital tourism tool because it is different from traditional video sharing since one can stream data live to people around the web. Users do not have to download the whole video before watching but can watch snippets of a video that has been uploaded to a streaming platform. Digital technology has also led to the gamification of learning as we now use video games to learn Igbo, English, geography and all sorts of other skills. Creation and adopting a variety of video games within the digital ecosystem has a great potential to get children deeply involved in cultural tourism in Nigeria. *Nollywood* entertainers are already using digital tourism to showcase their plays and movies through *YouTube*, *Netflix*, etc., and other video streaming services. *Webinars* which are live seminars hosted over the internet also are used for professional development sessions, training, and online tutorials. Usually, a webinar allows text chat during a presentation as well as screen sharing and having multiple presenters at once. **Really Simple Syndication** or RSS are software that allow users to access updates from their favorite websites, podcasts and other media upon release. When something new is

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published, this tool pushes it to the user's device immediately. It allows users to aggregate news and information in an up-to-date way and consume them at their own pace (Powel 2022).

Conclusion

One distinctive feature of the current globalization trend is the pivotal role of information technology as a springboard to global economic and societal engagement. The linchpin of information technology is digital technology which is spreading like wildfires across the world especially among the youth. The good news is that that digital infrastructure is simple and economically realistic. We should give the youths good smartphones, tablets, and laptops with internet access and step out of their way to connect us to the world. They can handle the rest because digital technology especially the aspect that deals with streaming cultural tourism activities is not complex. They can make cultural tourism items go viral in minutes and straight to the homes, arenas or offices of people around the world. An important role is for government to provide basic information technology education to them from childhood because computer education is a pre-condition for real participation in the global digital environment. There is need to build a mass pool of IT literate manpower in a new world order that is dominated by digital technology.

The impact of cultural tourism on Nigeria's socio-economic growth in the information age can only be felt when her rich cultural heritage is show-cased to the world through the effective use of digital technology. With digital technology, consumers can register online and pay for cultural tourism products without leaving the comfort of their homes. Every community in Nigeria has an annual music, drama, or dance festival that can be live-streamed and watched for a fee. What is needed is proper planning and inventory of these events as well as adequate exposure to the world using digital tools. For Nigeria to join the world digital environment, private involvement and active participation is key. In an inter-linked global economy, corporations and consumers are more closely connected across borders than ever, and politicians (governments) are declining in importance. The rise of digital technology has made it easier for people to watch what others are doing in real time and governments are becoming less powerful in preventing such fast flow of information (Ohmae 1995). While it is still necessary for government to provide basic infrastructure like schools, electricity, and good road networks, private ownership and control of cultural tourism is the current reality around the world. A viewer in Osaka, Japan does not need a visa or an airline ticket to enjoy and pay for a live streaming of a traditional masquerade festival happening in Nsukka, Nigeria today. Positive contributions to Nigeria's cultural tourism development can meaningfully be made by private individuals, town unions, local government councils, and corporations.

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Tribute

May I use this opportunity to pay tribute to Professor Alex Ikechukwu Okpoko. Great scholar, mentor, and astute educator. You are alive in the hearts all of us who passed through you as students. Farewell dear friend.