

The Role of Social Media in Creating Visibility for National Museums in West Africa

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Abstract

Social media have made communication in museums faster and more accessible. National museums are known for preserving culture and promoting national identity. The system is sustained by engaging visitors to invest in museums, visit or buy objects. For museums to engage visitors means to create visibility which attracts visitors and social media have the capacity to achieve this. How can visibility be enhanced for museums in West Africa through the social media? This is the primary concern of this paper. The study used content analysis which was anchored on diffusion of innovation theory. Population was the national museums in 18 West African countries, but 10 national museums were randomly selected for sampling. The study revealed that 10 (100%) national museums in West Africa have web presence (can be seen online). Unfortunately, 30% have their own websites while 70% are seen in other private business organisations' websites for commercial purposes. Results showed that social media are vital in creating visibility and generating revenue, but the national museums in West Africa use them to create visibility to a very small extent. It recommended that the museums should solicit for internet facilities and funds from the government, private organisations and individuals to improve on the delivery of their services.

Keywords: National museums, Social media, Visibility, Web 2.0, West Africa.

Introduction

The Importance of Social Media in Business Communication

The internet, especially web 2.0, has revolutionised how companies communicate with stakeholders (Richardson & Laville, 2010). Engaging with stakeholders through interactive websites generates feedback and consumer contributions that may influence their brand choices (Richardson & Laville, 2010). Websites are not like 'brochures' anymore; they engage and constantly ensure that visitors are kept interested. Their reach and ability to be personalised means that those who have recognised the potential are busy engaging with global communities (Richardson & Laville, 2010). Web 2.0 allows discussion, adding and sharing of information and provides users with the ability to create content (known as user generated content), connect with people (that is social networking), collaborate and interact with people (IMARK, 2009). "These are often called 'social media' because they go beyond content, to our connection to that content and to each other" IMARK (2009, p. 3).

Communication in business is now faster, more convenient and more accessible with more technological channels available to carry messages than ever before (Angell, 2004). These technological channels include the social media. Museums and galleries use social media as means to communicate, promote their activities, interact and engage with their visitors (Villaespesa, 2013). According to Nzewuwa, museums stimulate national interest, protect national heritage and promote national identity (Okpoko & Okpoko, 2002). This is a vital topic because museums now operate in a rapidly changing environment and changing communication technology requires new management approaches, new policies and new working practices to increase their contributions to economic growth and development in society. Change is always different and in museums we need to grasp and shape this difference to help us develop new ways to understand our communicative potential (Hooper-Greenhill, 2003). Therefore, we need to develop our knowledge, understanding and skill in several areas (Hooper-Greenhill, 2003). One of such areas is the use of social media.

Social media have made the world a global village where information is disseminated with the speed of light. Many museums in the developed countries use social media to advertise and sell their products, and payments are made online. Unfortunately, museums are faced with the challenges of development and adaption of social media which require substantial resources and a sustained effort (Villaespesa, 2013). Therefore, the problem is that we do not know the social media that national museums in West Africa use to create visibility in order to generate revenue that will sustain the museums and improve the economy. The purpose of this study is to discover social media that will create visibility for museums to engage visitors, generate revenue and place museums on a global art scene. Consequently, the objectives of the study are as follows:

- 1) To determine the national museums in West Africa that have web presence.
- 2) To examine the social media tools that are used by national museums in West Africa to create visibility.
- 3) To discover the extent social media are used to create visibility for national museums in West Africa.
- 4) To ascertain the extent national museums in West Africa use the social media to generate revenue.

The study will enlighten curators on social media tools that could be used to promote their products and services. It will aid the government to make favourable policies that will increase internet access especially in

national museums. If the advocacy of this paper is implemented, the public can visit national museums virtually and may invest in them.

The Opportunities of Social Media and the Challenges of Museums

The Internet has become a place for participation and collaboration in recent years (López, Margapoti, Maragliano & Bove, 2010). Museum websites are incorporating social media to involve audiences in ways that reach beyond the physical museum visit (López, et al. 2010). Virtual or physical visit to museums could generate revenue. Virtual visit could make the visitors buy products online or visit physically at a fee. A survey conducted among small business owners in the States showed a statistically significant relationship between business revenue and the length of time the business has had an online presence (Barnes, Hood, & Gallardo, 2014).

Serota and MacGregor projected that in the next 10 to 15 years (2019 - 2024), there will be a limited number of people working in galleries, and more will be working effectively online (Haggins, 2009). They believe that museums would become more like multimedia organisations because the relationship between institutions and their audiences would be transformed by the internet (Haggins, 2009). When this happens, a discrepancy will arise between those institutions that grasp these opportunities and those that do not (Haggins, 2009). Serota added that there has been an imperfect communication between visitors and curators in the past, and the possibility for a greater level of communication between curators and visitors is the challenge now (Haggins, 2009). This challenge is not in the past anymore, it is still a challenge presently.

In Catalonia, for instance, despite the fact that 60% of Catalan museums have social media profile and use same to communicate with their visitors, Badell (2015) discovered that most of them are significantly lacking regarding feedback from their followers. Calling into question their communication strategies and plans, and suggesting how museums can communicate more effectively with their followers or visitors (Badell, 2015). Capriotti and González-Herrero (2013) analysed museum's online press rooms developed by museums on their corporate websites to communicate with the media. Results suggest that the museums do not use the advantages of online pressrooms to communicate more frequently and better with journalists (Capriotti & González-Herrero, 2013). Instead, they merely reproduce the one-way, passive forms of traditional offline media relations (Capriotti & González-Herrero, 2013). Implying that some museums have internet access, yet they communicate offline, thereby not making effective use of the social media available to them. It shows that some museums do

not use social media while some use it to a small extent. This could be as a result of lack of mental access (that is lack of basic digital experience), or lack of skill access (lack of digital skills), or lack of usage access (lack of meaningful usage of the system), since the material access (computers or network connections) is provided (Fuchs and Horak, 2008).

A research carried out by Morse (2000) on “The Impact of the Internet on three New Zealand Cultural Institutions: the National Archives, the National Library and the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa” revealed that policy regarding the internet has been most extensively developed at the National Library. Also, research revealed that the internet is not currently as central to the delivery of core services at the National Archives or the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa as it is at the National Library (Morse, 2000). It implies that organisations where internet policy is developed could use it effectively in service delivery if they have the network, digital skill, digital experience and capacity for meaningful usage of the system.

It is believed that Africa as a continent lacks good internet facilities and lags behind in adopting and maximising social media. In Nigeria for example, the National ICT Policy (2012, p. 9) on vision 20:2020 acknowledges the following:

In respect of knowledge and digital divide, the situation remains worrisome. This is in terms of knowledge generation, penetration of ICT, access to and usage of internet and telephone penetration (fixed and mobile) and physical infrastructure. The knowledge and digital divide cuts across geographical gender and cultural dimensions. It exists among the 36 states of the Federation plus the Federal Capital Territory, the 774 Local Government, rural and urban areas, men and women, rich and poor, young and old, able bodies and disabled, illiterate and educated.

Surprisingly, in developed nations like Italy, France, Spain, England, and the USA that have adopted Web 2.0., López, et al. (2010) analysed 240 museum websites belonging to four categories (arts, natural sciences, social sciences, and specialised) and the results showed a low overall presence of Web 2.0 on museum websites as well as significant differences in the use of Web 2.0 among countries and categories. Also, Fletcher and Lee (2012) investigated how American museums are currently using social media to determine museums that use social media to increase participant engagement toward relationship maintenance. They discovered that museums are still mostly involved with one-way communication strategies

by using Facebook and Twitter to focus on event listing, reminders, and reaching larger or newer audiences to increase their fans (Fletcher & Lee, 2012).

Creating Visibility with Social Media

Chung, Marcketti and Fiore (2014) identified three distinct marketing applications for which social media are used: building awareness, engaging with the community, and networking. A large number of museums now have a profile on social media sites to post news, promote their exhibitions, disseminate content and organise participatory projects (Villaespesa, 2013). In recent years, social media managers at institutions all over the world reach out to audiences through humorous posts on Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and Twitter. They use educated content to capture new audiences with short video gallery tours led by a curator or a guest on camera on Facebook Live, or via Instagram real-time feeds, Twitter chats and more (Hannon, 2016). While it is doubtful that visitors sincerely appreciate the art in their Instagram photos, they are certainly drawing crowds, attention and revenue for museums (Cho, 2016). A survey carried out by Marty (2008) revealed that majority of the 1200 visitors at nine different online museums that addressed questions about the role of museum websites in the lives of museum visitors have clear expectations for the interactions that take place between museums and museum websites. Therefore, the importance of taking a visitor-centered approach when developing digital museum resources cannot be overemphasised.

Setting up a facebook, twitter or any social media account is easy but using them to constantly post information that will engage people to patronise the museum is the activity that will yield the desired result and maintain online presence. The recent uptake of various forms of social media in many parts of the world calls for a reformulation of familiar opportunities and obstacles in museum debates and practices (Drotner & Schroder, 2013). The following are social media tools and their uses:

Blogs (weblogs and micro-blogs):

They are online journals that allow users to create and share brief personal comments and to see the contents posted by other users. They allow interaction between one and many users and the most popular micro-blog is Twitter (Drotner and Shroder, 2013). Museum curators host a blog to encourage visitors to engage in discussions related to featured objects (Grincheva, 2013).

Media-Sharing Sites:

Allow users to upload, rate and comment on visuals. Examples are Youtube (videos) and Flickr (still images). The audience could be invited to upload details of an object in their possessions and each object page has a comment thread where curators and online visitors could leave their opinions, ideas, and questions or add information to the object description (Grincheva, 2013). They allow virtual visit of museums, and display products for sale or acquisition.

Social Networking Sites (SNS):

These permit individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, articulate a list of other users they share a connection with and view their profile. They allow easy interaction between one and a few users. Examples are Facebook and Myspace (Drotner & Shroder, 2013).

Social media fundamentally invite museums to re-orchestrate their communicative models away from a transmission model defined from an institution perspective (what we want to impart) to a user perspective (what people may want to know) (Drotner & Shroder, 2013). Social media give museums the chance to redefine what they want to communicate, encourage public participation, allow the public to locate their objects, and to encourage research (Drotner & Shroder, 2013). They offer accessible and affordable platform interactive engagement among people from different countries to enable collaboration and discourse (Grincheva, 2013). By empowering local and international audiences to participate actively in museum activities, museums will better facilitate cross-cultural exchange of ideas (Grincheva, 2013). The social media play a very fundamental role in museums' operations and they can make museums visible through the museum web ranking lists.

From the reviewed literature, some museums in both developing and developed countries have web presence and some do not. Among those that have web presence, some museums engage their visitors with the social media while others do not. Also, some museums that engage their visitors with social media do not make it interactive; rather, they use the one-way communication system referred to as 'information dumping.' This confirms the theory of diffusion of innovation that says that it could take several years for innovation or ideas to be adopted.

Theoretical Framework

The study is anchored on diffusion of innovation theory by Everett Rogers (1971). He states that "an idea perceived as new by the receiver is traced as it spreads through a system; the innovation is usually a

technological idea” (Rogers, 1976, p. 229). Rogers further explains that diffusion of innovation is “the processes by which those ideas are conveyed and received and the extent to which those ideas are adopted or rejected” (Watson & Hill, 2006, p. 80). For instance, when an organisation introduces computers to enhance work, in most cases it brings job insecurity to some staff who believe that the computers will replace them. This may cause the staff to reject the computers or avoid acquiring skills needed to operate them, thereby, resulting to lack of mental, skill and usage access.

In the diffusion of innovation, many years may be required for an idea to spread and the purpose of diffusion research is to shorten this lag. To achieve this, the public should be properly educated on the importance and uses of social media. Unfortunately, many scholars discuss the applications of social media for creating awareness, engaging and collaborating with people, but few discuss the specific social media tools that could be used to encourage, educate and push curators to actually create awareness and engage visitors.

Methodology

Content analysis was used to analyse the websites of the national museums. This is because national museums are owned and managed by the government and are known for collection of rich African artefacts. They are expected to preserve culture, history, protect national heritage and stimulate national interest. Krippendorp defines content analysis as “a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts” (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2009, p. 475). While texts are written communicative materials that are read, interpreted and understood by people other than the analyst (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2009). Categories used were the 10 countries selected, the national museums in the countries, official/unofficial websites the national museums were found, and official/unofficial social media tools used by the national museums (such as facebook, twitter, youtube, Flickr, blog). Official websites and social media tools are those created and managed by the museums, while unofficial websites and social media tools are created and managed by organisations other than the museums. The units of analysis were the names of the countries under review, the national museums in those countries, hyperlinks of the websites the museums were found, and official / unofficial social media tools used to display the museums and their artefacts.

The population was all the national museums in the 18 West African countries. The rationale is that Africa is worst hit by lack of internet facilities. Also, national museums are owned and managed by the federal government whose responsibility is to maintain the museums to preserve culture and

generate revenue. A Google search on 'lists of countries in West Africa' showed the number of countries in West Africa to be 18. Ten countries were randomly selected without replacement. They are; Benin Republic, Burkina Faso, Gambia, Liberia, Mali, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Togo, and Sou Tome & Principe. There are other museums in some of the countries, but only the national museums in those countries were selected and contents of their websites analysed. National museums that do not have official websites were 'googled' and found in other private organisations' websites. These websites are regarded as unofficial websites. Also, museums that do not have official websites but have separate official or unofficial social media tools were included in this study. The rationale is to confirm that such museums exist, they have objects to display, and they have web presence. Unofficial websites with social media (SM) tools linked to them are not included in this study.

Data Analysis

Table 1: Museums that have Official Websites

S/N	Country	Museum	Official Website
1	Benin Republic	Ouidah Museum of History	http://www.museeoudah.org/Home-Eng.htm
2	Burkina Faso	National Museum of Music	None
3	Gambia	National Museum Gambia	None
4	Mali	National Museum Mali	None
5	Nigeria	NCMM Abuja	http://www.ncmm.gov.ng/
6	Liberia	National Museum of Liberia	None
7	Senegal	IFAN Museum of Arts	None
8	Sao Tome & Principe	National Museum of Sao Tome & Principe	None
9	Sierra Leon	Sierra Leon National Railway	https://www.sierraleonerailwaymuseum.com/

		Museum	
10	Togo	National Museum of Togo	None
Total		10 (100%)	3 (30%)

Table 1 reveals that only three, representing 30%, of the museums have official websites. These are museums in Benin Republic, Nigeria and Sierra Leon. Unfortunately, and as shown in the table, none of the museums has any platform with which to make their activities, programmes or products interactive. The table also shows that an outstanding majority, that is 70% of the museums, do not have official websites. However, information about them are shown in the websites of other business outfits that use some museum objects merely to showcase and advertise their products.

Table 2: Websites of other businesses where national museums and some of their objects were displayed

S/N	Country	Museum	Unofficial Website
1	Benin Republic	Ouidah Museum of History	https://www.inspirock.com/benin/ouidah/ouidah-museum-of-history-a7187990865
2	Burkina Faso	National Museum of Music	https://www.musicinafrica.net/directory/national-museum-music-ouagadougou-burkina-faso
3	Gambia	National Museum Gambia	http://www.wow.com/wiki/Gambian_National_Museum
4	Mali	National Museum Mali	https://www.revolvy.com/topic/National%20Museum%20of%20Mali
5	Nigeria	12 Stations of NCMM	12 stations are seen in other organisations' websites

6	Liberia	National Museum of Liberia	https://www.tripadvisor.com/Attraction_Review-g293805-d2252164-Reviews-Liberian_National_Museum-Monrovia_Montserrado_County.html
7	Senegal	IFAN Museum of Arts	http://africanmuseums.blogspot.com.ng/2011/12/ifan-museum-of-african-arts-in-dakar.html
8	Sao Tome & Principe	National Museum of Sao Tome & Principe	https://www.africa.com/countries/sao-tome-and-principe/museum-guide/
9	Sierra Leon	Sierra Leon National Railway Museum	http://sierraleoneheritage.org/museum/
10	Togo	National Museum of Togo	http://www.togo-tourisme.com/culture/musees/le-musee-national
Total	10	10 (100%)	

Table 2 shows the links to the websites of other businesses that have one information or another on some of the museums under study. The websites also have dedicated platforms such as blogs, media-sharing and social networking sites and so on with which they presented the information. However, the sites are mainly devoted to the businesses concerned; they merely used the national museums or their objects as identity markers and ultimately, as a means of showcasing their products. Impliedly, information about national museums has the capacity to generate revenue.

Table 3: Museums that have Social Media Tools

S/N	Country	Museum	Official SM Tools	Unofficial SM Tools
1	Benin Republic	Ouidah Museum of History	None	Unofficial Facebook
2	Burkina Faso	National Museum of Music	None	Unofficial Facebook

3	Gambia	National Museum Gambia	None	Unofficial Facebook
4	Mali	National Museum Mali	None	Unofficial Facebook
	Nigeria	NCMM	Official Facebook and Twitter	None
5	Liberia	National Museum of Liberia	Official Facebook	Unofficial YouTube
6	Senegal	IFAN Museum of Arts	None	Unofficial Facebook
7	Sao Tome & Principe	National Museum of Sao Tome & Principe	None	None
8	Sierra Leon	Sierra Leon National Railway Museum	Official Facebook and Twitter	None
9	Togo	National Museum of Togo	None	None
10	Nigeria	NCMM	Official Facebook and Twitter	None
Total	10 (100%)	10	3 (30%)	6 (60%)

Three (30%) countries have official social media tools implying that only three countries interact with their visitors. Surprisingly, Benin Republic that has an official website does not have social media tools, but maintains one-way communication approach. Also, two representing 20% of the countries do not have official or unofficial websites, while six national museums were seen in unofficial facebook pages.

NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR MUSEUMS AND MONUMENT, NIGERIA

S/N	Museum	Unofficial Website	Official SM Tools	Unofficial SM Tools
1	Akure	http://travelhubnigeria.com/National%20Museum%20Akure.html	Official Facebook	-
2	Abubakar Tafawa Balewa Mausoleum, Bauchi	http://www.socialprefect.net/exploring-the-legacies-of-sir-tafawa-balewa-in-bauchi/	Official Facebook	-

3	Asaba	https://zodml.org/content/national-museum-asaba#.WslQdNTwbMw	-	Unofficial Facebook
4	Benin City	https://www.lonelyplanet.com/nigeria/benin-city/attractions/national-museum/a/poi-sig/1301196/1328668	Official Facebook	-
5	Enugu	http://afrotourism.com/attraction/national-museum-of-unity-3/	Official Facebook	-
6	Ilorin	https://hotels.ng/places/museum/1890-national-museum-ilorin	-	Unofficial facebook
7	Jalingo	https://zodml.org/discover-nigeria/states/taraba-state#.Wss87NTwbMw	Official Facebook	-
8	Lagos	https://www.tripadvisor.com/Attraction_Review-g304026-d7163242-Reviews-The_National_Museum-Lagos_Lagos_State.html	Official Facebook	-
9	Lafia	https://www.finelib.com/listing/National-Museum-Lafia/33572/	-	Unofficial facebook
10	Lokoja	http://www.travelhubnigeria.com/National%20Museum%20Lokoja.html	-	Unofficial facebook
11	Makurdi	None	-	Unofficial facebook
12	Ogbomoso	None	-	Unofficial facebook
13	Oron	https://zodml.org/content/national-museum-oron#.WstRINTwbMw	Official Facebook	-
14	Owerri	None	-	Unofficial facebook
15	Portharcourt	None	Official Facebook	-
16	Sokoto	none	Official Facebook	-
17	National war museum Umuahia	http://www.aviationmuseum.eu/Blogvorn/national-war-museum-umuahia/	Official Facebook	-
Total	17 (100%)	12 (70%)	10 (58%)	7 (41%)

There are 43 stations under NCMM in Nigeria, but the study analysed 17 stations that have and use social media tools. This further analysis of the stations is important because NCMM can neither display all the artefacts in the 43 stations nor interact effectively with their numerous visitors without using go outreach programmes. Therefore, there is a dire need for the stations to engage visitors via the social media.

Out of 43 stations under NCMM, 17 were found in other organisations' websites. Also, only 10 stations have official social media tools (mainly facebook), while seven stations have facebook pages created by other individuals on their behalf. A cursory look at the unofficial facebook pages revealed that individuals post pictures of themselves, objects in the museums and information about the museum. Also, some of the unofficial facebook pages do not have information or pictures posted on them. This implies that curators in those museums do not handle the unofficial facebook pages. They neither interact with the visitors nor post information about the museum to the optimum. Interaction with curators would be more effective on official facebook page.

Discussion

Results show that all (100%) of the national museums in West Africa have web presence meaning that they could be seen on the internet. Sadly, only three (30%) of the national museums have their own official websites where they can interact more with visitors. The rest are seen from private organisations' websites, meaning that visitors cannot be engaged from such websites. A closer look at the content of these private organisations' websites showed that the organisations attract customers by showing museums and the objects in the museums on their websites. They advertise their hotels, airlines and other places of interest to tourists and holiday makers. These private organisations like travel agencies and hotels display the museums and their objects not necessarily to promote and preserve culture but to make profit. It supports Richardson and Laville's assertion that those who have recognised the potential are busy engaging with global communities. It also affirms Haggins' claim that a discrepancy will arise between those institutions that grasp the opportunities of social media and those that do not. One of these opportunities is to generate revenue. Fortunately, these private organisations also help to attract visitors to the museums.

Result also revealed that out of the three museums that have official websites, two do not have social media tools linked to the websites. The implication is that the museums do not engage visitors neither do they display their rich artefacts for optimum visibility. Also, the unofficial websites that display the museums' artefacts also display their hotels and cuisines to attract customers. The organisations present the museums as one of the places to visit when tourists lodge in their hotels. Furthermore, the social media tool that is mostly used by museums in West Africa is facebook, and to a very limited extent. Consequently, national museums in West Africa do not use social media to create visibility and to generate revenue. It appears that the national museums focus attention only within their local

geographical milieu, and this limits their operations greatly. The above supports the discoveries made by López, et al. that there is a low overall presence of Web 2.0 on museum websites in Italy, France, Spain, England, and the USA, indicating that national museums do not plan to generate income via the social media.

It is obvious that one of the problems national museums have is lack of funds, some museums lack funds for maintenance let alone install internet facilities. On the other hand, some museums are well equipped, yet they do not have official website and social media tools to take the museum to the next level. For instance, funding for national museum of Mali increased in 1996 and is noted to be among the best in West Africa (revolvvy.com, 2014), yet it does not have its own official website to create more visibility for itself. This could be as a result of lack of skills and capacity required to use the social media. The few museums that have official websites do not fail to connect them to social media to make the website interactive. Handlers of these museums still engage in one-way communication. This agrees with Capriotti and González-Herrero that museums reproduce the one-way, passive forms of traditional offline media relations. Also, it supports the theory of diffusion of innovation that holds that an idea or technology takes time to be adopted by everyone.

Recommendation

The British museum is already in collaboration with the staff of NCMM, Nigeria. It currently organises workshop for the staff of NCMM alone, but there is the dire need to extend same to the staff of national museums in all the states. Also, training on the use of social media should be prioritised. The government needs to be made to realise the importance of social media in museums' operations and their positive impact on the economy in order to install the needed internet facilities.

Conclusion

Though most of the national museums in 10 West African countries do not use the social media, yet they are visible online. This is because other private organisations who know the importance of the social media use the museums to advertise their products and make profit. This implies that social media are vital in creating visibility for organisations. Therefore, national museums are expected to maximise the social media to create more visibility in order to generate the revenue needed to maintain the museums. Also, if individuals and some private organisations can afford to host their websites, it is also possible for the government to do same because they all use the same internet facilities already installed in the country by the same

government. Failure to do this, national museums will continue to record low patronage, lack of funds and loss of valuable objects that need to be maintained. Also, it may refute Serota and MacGregor's projection that there will be a limited number of people working in galleries, and working effectively online by 2019 – 2024.

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