THE INTERNET CULTURE IN TWO NIGERIAN FIRST GENERATION UNIVERSITIES

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Abstract: The aim of the study is to identify and analyze the social and cultural factors influencing the use of internet in two Nigerian "first generation universities, University of Ibadan and University of Lagos. The study adopted multiple techniques of data collection to achieve a rich evidence of discourse on internet culture. Data collected was presented in ethnographic narrative. Internet in the two universities has had an impact on the academic culture and traditions of the universities. Internet usage is engendered by ownership, patronage and structure in these academic spaces. The ownership is observed to be the donor organizations; private business organizations and the government. The patronage is a function of access, availability and affordability, while the structure of access is purely gender specific and youth dominated.

Introduction

The present downturn in infrastructure and function of educational system in Nigeria can be reasonably linked to the poor or inadequate attention given to connection and adequate utilization of internet, particularly in universities. This has not made any of the Nigerian universities to compete favorably with their counterparts worldwide in the "world university ranking" or webometrics.

Undoubtedly, internet has emerged as the most visible component of the dynamic development of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). It is also acknowledged that higher education produces the skills and knowledge that drive industrialization process. Since universities are regarded as centers of research and diffusion of findings, they have become decisive factors in transforming

economies. Hence, right from the time of founding the universities of Bologna in 1088 and Oxford in 1096, being the oldest universities in the world, universities have come up with her "academic culture" ie. the culture of teaching, learning and scholarship which have helped her to always play pivotal role in shaping the socio-economic realities of any society and, in particular, that of the advancement of culture in the society. Whatever goes on within the academic walls speak volumes of the states of development and the sophistication of the society.

But judging from the above, the internet culture in Nigeria calls for worry. The country is the fifth largest exporter of crude oil, having about 140 million people, some of whom are academics, technocrats, and industrialists. Yet, none of the universities has a comparable standard of internet accessibility with any other developed world. Two of the oldest universities in Nigeria are selected for this study, specifically to examine the awareness, utilization and potential benefit of internet culture in Nigerian universities.

These universities are: the University of Ibadan (UI), and University of Lagos (Unilag). They are among the first five universities to be established in Nigeria and are referred to as "first generation universities".

Historically, in the Northern part of Ibadan metropolis, Oyo State of Nigeria, is situated the University of Ibadan. Established in 1948, it is the first university in Nigeria having the distinction of being one of the premier educational institutions in West Africa (Wikipedia, 2006). The university has up to 12 faculties. In the same vein situated at the heart of the Lagos metropolis in the Lagos State of Nigeria is the University of Lagos. Established in 1962, it is located on a patch of land very close to the lagoon. It has up to 13 faculties.

The two universities are located in the western part of the country, but the contributions of these universities to the history of the education system in Nigeria are immense. They are among the first five universities to be established in Nigeria and are referred to as "first generation universities".

But it is unarguable that information technology, especially internet, has not yet transformed higher education in Nigeria because the areas of teaching and scholarship, the heart of colleges' and universities' culture, have remained relatively untouched by the new technologies (Grisham, 2003; Ayers, 2004).

The study on the level of utilization of facilities on the internet and the participation of Nigerian academics on the Net cannot, therefore, be ignored. This study intends to address this problem with a desire to resolve it.

Against the backdrop of the highlighted problems raised above, the aim of this study is to identify and analyze the social and cultural factors influencing the use of internet in two Nigerian universities, the University of Ibadan and the University of Lagos. While the objectives of the study are to: examine patterns of internet usage among academic and administrative staff, as well as the students; examine available internet infrastructure; investigate the impact of internet usage on the members of the community; and determine the implication of internet use on the university academic culture in the two selected first generation universities.

This study contributes to knowledge from the perspective of media study. As such, apart from contributing to the existing literature on media cultural studies, the study will also create insights into how knowledge of culture is being used, or can be used, to solve current developmental problem. The insight this study offers will also be relevant to the educational stakeholder's capacity in a developing country like Nigeria. Most probably, it will open the eyes of university planners to the need for restructuring university courses to global standards, while it also pushes anthropological discourse beyond small scale society of family and kinship to multiculturalism, technology and globalization.

Internet as an Educational Media
Wilson and Peterson (2002) have suggested that one way to situate computing and internet practices is to compare them with previously existing media and communication technologies, as new forms of technologically mediated language and human interaction.

The use of internet facilities, definitely, has revolutionized access to information, at a large scale, for business, libraries, education and individuals. A few of the most popular ones include e-mail, world-wide-web, file transfer protocol (FTP), Usenet and internet. It has emerged, as a global link media which is now germane to teaching learning and research and can be clearly referred to as the new "vehicle" of globalization. The problem of internet infrastructure in

African tertiary institutions has posed a threat to their global competition with the universities in the rest of the world. Adeya and Oyelaran-Oyeyinka (2000) emphasized that higher education can be regarded as both the antecedent to and prerequisite for development. Naidoo and Schulte (1999) pointed out that the three different ways in which internet affects teaching and research in the universities are: provision of greater students' access to education; improvement of curriculum and quality of instruction; and increase productivity of academic publications. They stressed that it is unclear how African universities do respond to the utilization of potentials of the internet, given the great difficulties faced as a result of reduced funding and other constraints in these university..

Some international organizations like the World Bank, United National Education Scientific and Cultural organization (UNESCO) and United Nations Development Programme UNDP have intervened to create more internet opportunities and more access. Thus, with the help of funding from United States Agency for International Development USAID and MacArthur Foundation grant, WiderNet project has provided consulting and coaching at eight Nigerian universities, including the University of Ibadan, since 2001. Working in partnership with the National Universities Commission in Nigeria, administrators and technical staff of the WiderNet project assist Nigerian universities to provide their staff and students with access to computer, e-mail and other internet facilities. This seems a noticeable improvement.

Theoretical Framework

Internet access is found to be limited to the elites in the society. So while communication on the internet fits Habermas ideas of parallel lines of communication, it is at a qualified level of equality, for it is equal only among the elites. But looking at the rate the internet is growing unmediated, it is becoming a worldwide ecology that will do nothing but grow or it will fade away. Liska and Grune (1995) also explained that, traditionally, if you are going to pioneer a barren and uninhabited land, you must be strong, open, tolerant, tough, self-sufficient, fertile, etc. It is glaring that there are barren and uninhabited space in the Net but it would follow that the most intelligent, most creative, most tolerant and most technically-able people will "survive".

Wallerstein (1974) also described a world-system in terms of a "world-economy" integrated through the market rather than politics. In this case, two or more regions are interdependent with respect to necessities like food, rule and protection, and two or more politics compete for domination without the emergence of one single centre forever.

Among the most important structures of the current world-system is the power hierarchy between the core and the periphery, in which the powerful and wealthy are the "core" societies. But Martinez-Vela (2001) pointed out that technology is a central factor in the positioning of a region in the core or the periphery. He explained further that advanced or developed countries are the core, and the less developed are in the periphery. Peripheral countries are structurally constrained to experience a kind of development that reproduces their subordinate states (Chase-dunn and Grimes, (1995). In this research, post modernism and the world systems theory are being used to explain the ecology and culture of internet among the academic so as to examine and determine the knowledge, available infrastructure and level of utilization of internet in two Nigeria universities and see the effect of global imperialism, hegemony and power play in the internet space.

 Research Method
This study is not a full ethnographic account of internet use in two first generation Nigerian Universities *per se*. Rather, it is more useful to see it as a sort of micro-ethnography – that is ethnography that does not take as its subject the study of an entire culture but instead grasps at smaller units of analysis. Be that as it may, the fact that it is a micro-ethnography does not lessen the necessity and intensity of fieldwork. Much of the data to be discussed in this work was elicited through fieldwork. Data was collected firsthand during the space of one year and three months. A variety of elicitation techniques was used including general and participant observation, Indepth-interview, Focus group discussion, photography, and perusal of relevant literature.

Two selected universities, the University of Ibadan and the University of Lagos are the focus of this research. The academic and administrative staff and the students are the studied population.

This research relies on qualitative tools for collecting data on the use of ICT while we employ content management for the analysis with the result being presented in an ethnographic narrative. The conclusion to be drawn is that the study draws its strength from the triangulation of research theories and methodology to come out with this rich evidence.

The selections of these two universities were based on proximity to each other, which makes for easy access. Also considered is the age of these universities, which implies that they are in a position to turn out both graduate and post-graduate students and had been doing so for quite a long time. The study population comprised academic staff, administrative staff and the entire students of the two universities. At the University of Ibadan, the academic staff population was 1,156, the non academic staff was 2,500 and the student population was about 50,000 (raw data from the University of Ibadan establishment). At the University of Lagos, the academic staff population was 959, the administrative staff population was 3,450 while the student population was about 38,106 (Raw data from the University of Lagos library). This population is considered adequate enough for the research of this nature as it cuts across all work roles while presenting a model community. Since the study is a descriptive survey, a stratified random sampling was adopted. The method was adopted in view of the fact that there is a very high degree of heterogeneity in terms of the attributes of the population being studied. Interviewees were selected based on this stratification, knowledge of the subject matter at hand and their willingness to share this knowledge or view in an interview session, targeting them at hall of residences, offices, cybercafés and classrooms after lectures, dining halls and student affair centers.

However, three Focused Group Discussions (FGDs) comprising about eight to ten students were conducted in each university. It was also difficult to find a larger number of students willing to take part in the Focused Group Discussions due to the demand of time. Staff (both academic and non-academic were also excluded from the Focused Group Discussions as nearly all of them were not willing to participate due to the constraint of time. Participants in the FGDs were selected at random based on their willingness to take part in the study

For in-depth interviewing, a total of one hundred and fifty academic and non-academic staff members were selected from each of the Universities, and a total of three hundred students were selected. Ten private cybercafé operators were selected from each university and interviewed. In all, a total of four hundred and sixty people, comprising students (undergraduates and post graduates), staff (academic and non academic) and cybercafé operators were included in the sample for in-depth interviewing. Also, trained research assistants were employed to assist the researcher in the conduction of the Focus Group Discursions.

Findings
The development of Internet culture in the academic communities studied is examined with the antecedent of a number of factors such as pattern of internet usage, available infrastructure and accessibility, impact of internet usage and implication of internet on academic culture and constraints. What we noted is that, gradually, the ICT revolutions in the two universities have had an impact on the academic culture and traditions of the university. For example, ICT revolution has now jettison the traditional visiting times in the halls of residence. Although it was observed that internet usage in the two universities is gender specific in that more men than women use it and it is youth-dominated, the groups in the community that are highly involved with research (i.e the postgraduate students and young lecturers) use it importantly for academic networking. Computers (both desktop and laptops) and internet connectivity are available. But, still, very expensive and beyond the means of many. The fact is that they are daily becoming indispensable. Many things that were previously done manually have been computerized and digitized, including course registrations and the payment of school fees. The availability of online resource materials has begun to change the shape and complexion of scholarship, such that a lot of lecturers and research students now depend on these new media for information and citations. It is clear that the two universities will depend more on donor agencies and private business organizations for the provision of computer and internet infrastructure than the government.

The culture of internet being inaugurated therefore is structured by relationship around computer and internet technology and it is still an evolving one. Internet usage in these academic spaces is

engendered by ownership, patronage and structure. The ownership is observed to be the donor organization, private business organization and the government. The patronage is a function of access, availability and affordability. The structure of access is purely gender specific and youth dominated, that is fraught with disadvantages and advantages, both for users of computer and internet, and the society at large. Then elaboration of this complex confirms an anthropological position that any technology represents a cultural invention, in the sense that it brings forth a world it emerges out of particular cultural conditions and in turn helps to reshape the existing culture or create new ones (Escobar, 1994). The new cultural condition which the internet is helping to create in both Lagos and Ibadan will certainly reshape the existing academic culture in the two universities and will also lead to the creation of other sub-cultures that would merit further investigation.

It was also found that academics in these two first generation Universities have access to the cluster of technologies that make up the internet. However, there are differences in the speed, ease and quality of access to the Internet and this has a number of implications on teaching, learning and research, which is the core of academic culture in the universities and also for development. For instance, limited and costly access compel lecturers to transverse considerable distances to use computers and internet outside the university community including communal access, such as, cybercafés and university department sources, and the patronage of internet services provided by telecommunication companies. Access to, and ownership of, networked computers in offices or homes of lecturers is not widespread but is beginning to expand considerably. Due to the slowness of access, there is a limit to the time available to surf the internet. Most of the users limit their time to responding to e-mails and occasionally visiting websites that they have read about or have been recommended by peers. Therefore, time spent on intensive individual searching for research materials on the internet is evidently limited, except for those who have computers at home or have dedicated access at their institutions/departments. In essence, users' resources are crucial to the extent of determining access. This includes the environment in which they live and work.

Nevertheless, academic staff desire to access teaching materials and related information from the internet because this could have the spin-off effect of developing new research ideas and networking with distant colleagues working in similar areas. The findings show that the use of e-mail is predominantly for private correspondence rather than research and teaching but the respondents suggested that with faster and more cost-effective access, they would be willing to use it for academic discourse, research and teaching.

Users expressed the desire for training and/or retraining especially to familiarize themselves with new applications, such as, how to use the internet in a beneficial manner for research. The correlation between qualifications and use of the internet may result from the fact that many lecturers/researchers obtained their postgraduate qualifications in developed countries where the use of networked computers is the norm. There are many who expressed the desire to use the internet more for collaborative initiatives (both research and teaching) but these will become possible when institutions in Africa develop comparable facilities that enable them have better access to up-to-date information. In addition, local researchers in Africa need to have better access to information on local conditions in their countries and the continent as a whole. In other words, they must be the 'problem owners'. Most respondents expressed interest in academic related websites though they noted that many of these do not have a lot of research work from local researchers in Africa.

Basically, respondents were more interested in finding out more about research being conducted about Africa in websites of institutions overseas. This could be an area for further research to provide systematic evidence on this phenomenon because it may be a case of poor searching and information retrieval.

Conclusion

The study has sought to identify internet as an emerging versatile educational media but more than that present a general picture of an evolving or emerging cultural pattern triggered by the introduction of computer and internet. It has, also, sought to ground its account with interpretations taken from Wallestein's system theory and globalization perspective. On both scores, it may not claim definitive success because the study does not concern itself with the impact of computer

and internet use on other aspects of life other than academic culture. The culture presented here cannot be said to be holistic, and on that count, the study is limited. More work, therefore, needs to be done on internet culture as it relates to other aspects of life outside the domain of academics.

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