

THE IMPACT OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES ON AFRICAN INDIGENOUS RELIGION AND EDUCATION

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Abstract

The digital technologies are the modern technologies which bring the world religions and cultures into close contact in the contemporary society. The world including African continent is digitally expanding. The changes are seen in all aspects of the society. As a result, the study was designed to ascertain the impacts of digital technologies on African indigenous religion and education. The study made use of postmodern theory and secondary source of data collection in reviewing the key words and identifying the effects of digital technologies on African indigenous religion and education. The findings showed that digital technologies have made information on African indigenous Religion and traditional education available on the internet. The digital technologies threaten the character formation goal of African indigenous religious education by exposing youths to social vices and encouraging religious syncretism. The digital technologies weaken interpersonal communication and good human relations essential in sustaining African Indigenous Religion and traditional education. It is therefore recommended that Africans should embrace African indigenous technology to ensure the survival of African indigenous education which is the education rooted in African traditional religion and cultural values.

Keywords: Digital technologies, African indigenous Religion, Education, Postmodern, Impact.

Introduction

Digital technology is one of the prominent features of the digital era or the post industrial society. In other words, as a society advances or moves from one era to another, so does its use of technology. In eighteenth century, Europe experienced a dramatic rise in technological invention that influenced the world today. The technological invention ushered in a period known as the industrial era which triggered the production of material goods. The industrial period paved way for the post-industrial period or the information age. The information age also known as the digital era hinges on the production of information and services. Digital technology enhances business transactions and communication, useful in education and skill acquisition. It brings world religions and cultures into close contact. On the other hand, it has been observed that people especially children and young adults spend much time playing games and watching immoral movies using the digital technologies such as mobile phones. The culture of lies, laziness,

indecent dressing and desire for quick money as seen among children and young adults in Nigeria today is anti African cultural ethics and values.

However, it is a well known fact that the society is not static but changes, and as the society changes, the culture of the people will equally change if it will continue to be relevant. Thus the presence of digital technology and various electronic devices have the capacity to interfere with African cultural values since religion and culture belong to the society. This is also applicable to African traditional education since the homestead and community is the context of the traditional education. No doubt African nations need to embrace the developmental activity of the digital era otherwise they will be pushed aside. But it is important to understand that while embracing the digital technology, African indigenous religion, traditional education and cultural values must be preserved if Africa must retain her identity. Hence this paper focuses its discourse on the impact of digital technologies on African indigenous religion and traditional education in Nigeria. The postmodern theory was adopted with the aim of identifying the effects of digital technologies on African indigenous religion and education. The researchers are optimistic that the study would be useful in sanitizing the society. The study would help other researchers in faculties of Arts, social sciences and education in the study of African indigenous education and cultural values in the information age.

Conceptual Review

This section of the study covers the keywords of the study. It is essential to briefly explain some of the keywords that are germane to the study.

Digital Technology

The digital era is the period known for its extensive use of digital technologies in all sectors of the society. It is the era characterized by advanced technologies which increase the speed and breadth of knowledge turnover in the society. Thus, digital technology includes devices that can be more compact, faster, lighter, and more versatile. All electronic automated systems, technical equipments and resources that produce process or store information are included in the description of digital technology. Hence digital technologies are not just artefacts or technological objects; rather constitute a body of knowledge. They are electronic tools, devices, system and resources that generate, store, or process data, examples social media, mobile phone, television, desktops, laptops, Automated Teller Machine and digital cameras. Onyejegbu (2021) noted that the digital computer systems use databases, algorithms, to store and deliver digital information on a vast array of applications. He added that networks, most notably the internet, interconnect these computer systems across the world enabling the exchange of data and information in the society. Indeed, the process of social media connection is facilitated through the technology of the internet. Social media connects half of the entire global population. The internet does not observe national boundaries in language, culture and social media.

According to Jimada (2020) Internet is a seamless web of digital information flows that are weightless. It represents no boundaries in social, cultural, political and economic transmission or connectivity. The internet is a global phenomenon having instantaneous

capability of providing immense online amount of information relating to education, sports, commerce, entertainment, religion and other areas of the society. Digital technologies are transforming every aspect of the society. It enables immense amounts of information to be compressed on storage devices that can be easily preserved and transported. It transformed the communication system, education and political system. In fact starting from online church, online business solutions, digital learning, social networking, through the detrimental results of cybercrime and examination malpractice the digital technologies move the society forward and on the other hand enhance social vices in the society.

African Indigenous Religion

African indigenous religion encompasses all African beliefs and practices that are considered religious before the advent of foreign religions in Africa. It is the belief system that has been handed down from one generation to another in Africa. It is the religion that is indigenous to Africans. According to Onyeidu (2000), it is the primal way of life in the traditional African society that is based on the time honoured customs and traditions handed down from one generation to generation. He added that African indigenous Religion is the heritage of primal African society whose forebears could be regarded as the collective founding fathers of the religion. The people of Africa were born, nurtured and grew in it. Onwubiko (1991) described it as a religion that permeates every facet of the people's life. It has no founder. It is the religion that has no written scripture like Christianity and Islam yet it is written everywhere for Africans to see and read. The tenets of the religion are written on the songs, myths and Africans ways of life. Ekwunife (cited by Ibenwa 2014) noted that

Those institutionalized beliefs and practices of indigenous religion of African which are rooted in the past African religious culture, transmitted to the present votaries by successive African forebears mainly through oral traditions (myths and folktales, songs and dances, liturgies, rituals, proverbs, pithy sayings and names), sacred specialists and persons, sacred space and objects and religious work of art, a religion which is slowly but constantly updated by each generation in the light of new experiences through the dialectical process of continuities and discontinuities.(p.150).

Ekwunife's view on the nature of indigenous religion suggests that the religion could be preserved in each generation in different ways. This implies that as the society moves from the simple hunters and gatherers period to the complex period of digital era that each generation constantly updates the method of transmitting these indigenous beliefs and practices handed down by our forefathers. It also implies that though the culture and society change, religious beliefs and traditions are resistant to change; where they change they change very slowly.

African Indigenous Education

African indigenous education is an educational system which is rooted in African traditional religion and cultural values. It is a process of preserving and transmitting the

rich African cultural heritage from one generation to another. Udechukwu (2012) noted that it is a continuous process through which the basic skills, attitudes and African cultural values are transmitted to the children and young adults for the good of man and survival of African cultures and identities. Adamu and Rotshak (2023) observed that African traditional education is the system of education used in handling down the rich African cultural values before the intervention of the colonialists or introduction of western education. Its method of teaching allowed knowledge, skills and attitudes to be passed from older generation to its younger generation, mostly through oral communication and actionable practices such as learning by doing, demonstration and recitation. The homestead and community is the context of African traditional education and the teaching and learning methods involve materials gathered from the learners' environment.

According to Ushe (2014), African indigenous education is not something different from life and society, but it is in fact, the process of learning to live as a useful and acceptable member of the community. He added that African traditional or indigenous education is a functional education which covers physical, psychological, socio-economic training, character formation and intellectual development. African indigenous education helps to produce educated persons in the three domains of education namely, cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains. The cognitive domain houses the ability to think and recall things easily. It is intellectual training that makes use of proverbs, folktales and riddles to enable learners to recall thing without much difficulties. The affective domain involves character formation and moral education. The psychomotor is concerned with bodily movements and manipulative skills which the students have naturally or have acquired. It is achieved through vocational and physical education. On the other hand, African traditional education did not develop in a vacuum. Its principles or bases are preparationism, communalism, multiple-learning and perennialism.

African Religious Cultural Values and Indigenous Education

According to Ogbujah (2014) cultural values reflect the totality of what a people stand for, their aspirations and their decisions as to what should be judged as good or bad, right or wrong. He went further to say that different cultures reflect different values. African cultural values pertain to those social ideals indigenous to African people. This does not mean that there is homogeneity of cultures among African nations rather; it means that among the multiplicity of cultures within the continent there are seminally consistent principles that are common to Africans. Onwubiko (1991), observed that the common African values are sense of community life, sense of good human relations, sense of the sacredness of life, sense of hospitality, sense of the sacred and of religion, sense of time, sense of respect for authority and the elder, and among others. Precisely, this section is concerned with the study of the relationship between the African religious cultural values and indigenous education

African Indigenous Education and Community-living

Africans are known for communal life system. The communal life system is reflected in everything one does. In fact, African individualism is rooted in community solidarity.

Mbiti (cited by Ejizu 2014) states that in Africa, the individual can only say : I am because we are , and since we are. Therefore, I am”. The above stipulations points out that Africans value communal life and that an individual is a community-culture bearer. Everyone derives his life and sustenance from the community, and in consequence, must maintain a vital relationship with members of the community. Onwubiko (1991) explains the African sense of community in the proverb “Go the way that many people go, if you go alone you will have reason to lament” (p.13). The implication of this is that communal life is the secret of security and success in everything an individual is doing. It also suggests that one needs others to make it in life and that everybody is his brother's keeper. In fact for Africans, individualism is rooted in community solidarity.

In other words, Africans share much of their life in common. The indigenous system of education is rooted in communal life. It is a system of education where every responsible adult member of the society serves as a teacher. Ogbalu (as cited in Nzomiwu, 1999), noted that training of children is every body's responsibility and every responsible person is expected to correct a child whether they are related or not. Ekeopara (2012) expatiates that the extended family performs the function of educating and teaching the members of its unit the correct customs and tradition of society. They help in shaping the behaviour of a child to become good and obedient citizen of the society. Thus African sense of community promotes indigenous education since the community serves as an agent of education by utilizing every incident and ceremonies in training the young ones..

African Indigenous Education and Human Relations

Human relations in Africa centered on the interpersonal and intra-communal relationships. African sense of Human relations is communal in nature. It is a value which encourages people to discuss their problems and look for suggestions and solutions together. Ifemesia (cited by Onwubiko (1991) described human living among African people as a way of life emphatically centered upon human interests and values, a mode of living evidently characterized by empathy, and consideration and compassion for human being. It involves recognizing the worth of individuals as human beings and not only what they possess or what they can do for the good of each person. It involves dialogue and conversation necessary for human existence. It makes people freely discuss their problems and reasoning together for solutions. Onwubiko (1991) added that Africans believe that he who discusses his affair with others hardly runs into difficulties or makes mistakes in the execution of his plans. Therefore sound human relations are means of imparting knowledge and cultural values in African traditional education.

African Indigenous Education and Sacredness of Life; and Community

Africans value life and sources of life. Okobia, Okafor and Osajie (2016) noted that the respect for human life and dignity accorded human life cannot be over-emphasized in the study of African cultural values. African indigenous education helps to create the awareness that respect for humanity spreads beyond the confine of nuclear family. Members of extended family, community or tribe are regarded as brothers' whose lives must be preserved and protected “(p.158). Onwubiko(1991) confirmed that killing can

only occur on the condition that it is better for one man to die than for all the community to perish. Murder was not encouraged especially within the clan. If a man conscientiously killed another man within the community, he would be killed, but when it was carried out unintentionally the person would be exiled for a long period..

Madu (1997) explains that man relies on the patronage of the deities for his existence and he must live a life of balance with the spiritual beings in order to survive. The spirit beings and man are in continuous and intimate relationship. He added that the spirit beings provide security and fortunes to man and society and man dare not annoy them without appropriate punishment from the deities. This suggests that life and community in African worldview is sacred and must be protected at all cost. Hence there is a need to enlighten members of the society on the essence of promoting the sacredness of human life and community through indigenous system of education.

African Indigenous Religion and traditional Education

Africans are religious people. They do not know how to live without religion. Africans use religion to interpret everything they do. Onwubiko (1991) noted that in traditional African societies there were no atheists. This is because religion is an inseparable part of culture. Religion permeates every aspect of life and the idea of the sacred filled Africans as they approach religious elements and issues. Onyeidu (2000) noted that occupation such as farming; hunting, fishing which are parts of the scope of indigenous education has their patron deities. For instance, in Igboland, *Ahajioku* or *ifejioku* takes care of farming and farm crops while *Amadioha*, is the god of Thunderstorm. The same function is performed by *Orishaoko* among Yoruba people, where *Ogun* is known as the god of iron and metals and *Shango* the god of Thunderstorm in Yorubaland. Thus Africans are religious people. They use religion to interpret everything they do. Thus African indigenous education is the education that is rooted in African culture and worldview. It is the education regulated by African religion. Both African indigenous religion and education are inseparable. Ekwunife (as cited in Ibenwa 2014) observed that the institutionalized beliefs and practices of indigenous religion of Africa which are rooted in the culture are transmitted to the present votaries by successive African forbearers mainly through traditional education.

Theoretical Framework

This section is concerned with the review of the postmodern theory considered expedient in analyzing the impact of digital technologies on African Indigenous religion and education in the contemporary society.

Postmodern Theory

Postmodern theory is one of the theories used in the study of the relationship between religion and society in digital age. The proponents of postmodern theory are Jean Baudrillard, Jean-francois Lyotard, Fredric Jameson, David Lyon and among others. According to Ritzer (2012) the postmodern theorists contend that the society has change

so dramatically to the extent that we are now living in a qualitatively different postmodern society. They believe that the world is so different that it requires entirely new ways of thinking. The postmodern theorists claim that the society has moved from modern to postmodern society. According to Haralambos and Holborn (2008), postmodern theorists argue that people no longer believe in the inevitability of progress, the power of science to solve all problems, the perfectibility of humanity or the possibility of running societies in a rational way. There is now a much wider variety of beliefs and most people are unwilling to accept that one set of ideas gives the absolute truth and all others are false. They see no simple recipe for solving the world's problems" (p.891). They went further to say that we have lost faith in all grand plans for the future of humanity, not just in architecture but in all areas of social life. Diversity is the order of the day. We have entered an era in which anything goes, all styles and fashions are permissible so long as none is taken too seriously. The main characteristics of postmodern theory are globalization, cultural diversity, consumerism, fragmentation and hyper-reality. The postmodern society is globalized or interconnected because of computer information technology. Consumerism deals with the idea of making a choice. It implies that postmodern society is a society where we are free to choose what to do, and are accustomed to a multitude of choices and opportunities for what we want to do in life. Another feature of post modernity is fragmentation. The fragmented society is a place where we can pick and mix different pieces of our lives. Each piece or fragment may not necessarily be linked to the other but as a whole, they make up our lives. Hyper-reality is a feature of postmodern theory that involves the merging of media and reality. Virtual reality is a good example of how the virtual world meets the physical world.

Specifically, David Lyon theory of religion and Post-modernity will be useful in the study of the impact of digital technology on African indigenous religion and education. According to Haralambos and Holborn(2008), Lyon noted that the changes in the society do not suggest that religion is declining , rather it is just relocating to different sphere, the sphere of consumption. He described the change from modern to postmodern with two main social changes. The first one is the spread of computer and information technology which allows ideas to be disseminated throughout the world as part of globalization. He noted that on internet, it is possible to gain information about almost any type of religious or spiritual beliefs. The computer and information technology and globalization reduces the extent to which people's identities are based upon local communities. Computer and information technology opens up a wider range of possible beliefs for people. Lyon made it clear that global flow of information and ideas make it harder for people to maintain fixed and unchanging of beliefs. Another social change is the consumerism. Consumer culture means that postmodern society is a society where people are free to chose on their own what to do with their time, their bodies, the products to buy, what to wear, and their gods or what to believe in. Simply put, postmodern society is a society where people's identities and way of doing things are more fluid and more open to personal choice. People are less likely to retain a job for long, less willing to accept the authority of a church or religion.

In connecting this theory to the study, it is important to note that Lyon is not contending that religion is declining, but his view of religion relocating to different spheres can affect

African indigenous education that is rooted in African traditional religion. The theory states clearly that computer and information technology enhances globalization. It connects the world and the world religions together by transmitting almost any type of religious beliefs and cultural values. The global flows of information and ideas make it harder for people such as Nigerians to maintain fixed and unchanging religious beliefs and practices, and this affects African indigenous religious education. In other words, postmodern theory shows that digital technologies have both positive and negative influences on African indigenous religion and its traditional education, since it makes people's identities not to be centered on local communities or national level, rather it connects people to international identities and values and strengthens it with consumer culture which allows people to freely choose what to do. Having reviewed the postmodern theory and how the theory is connected to the study of African indigenous religion and education, the impacts of digital technologies on African indigenous religion and education shall be highlighted in the subsequent sub-heading..

Effects of Digital Technologies on African Indigenous Religion and Education

Globalization: Globalization reduces geographical barriers thereby bringing peoples and cultures together.. Globalization has brought world religions into close contact with each other through communication technology. Robinson (cited by Maduagwu, 1999) explains that globalization is a “highly dynamic process of growing interdependence among nation states, with the implication that issue are becoming global rather than national and that they demand global rather than national attention”(p.2). This implies that digital technologies have given African indigenous religion and education global recognition by making people from other parts of the world aware of the nature of African traditional religion and education.

On the other hand, Maduagwu (1999) added that the communication technology of postmodern society has the potential of eroding national cultures and values and replacing them with the cultural values of more technologically and economically advanced countries like United States. No doubt, the forces of globalization are such that individual cultures will be unable to resist them and any local culture that fails to get integrated; will be left behind, suffer isolation and stay in its primitivism. This suggests that globalization affects African traditional religion and education by encouraging cultural ethnocentrism. Ibezim (2016) confirms that globalization encourages cultural ethnocentrism since western culture has become the standard by which other cultures including African cultures and Education must be measured, thus if care is not taken, African Traditional education which promotes African culture will be relegated to the dust bin in the contemporary society.

Availability of literature on African Traditional Religion and Education

According to Onyejebu (2021), all nations and individuals need digital technology for effective running of businesses, political affairs, educational and interpersonal communication. Simply put, through digital technologies researchers can find useful information on African culture, religion and traditional education on the internet. In fact

digital technologies have made African indigenous religion and education to move from the traditional level of no written records to the digital religion and education. This suggests that children and young adults can assess the nature of African culture and traditional education through digital technologies. Thus Lyon (cited by Haralambos and Holborn, 2008) is right by contending that on the internet, for example, it is possible to gain information about almost any type of religious or spiritual belief. Precisely, African traditional religion and education are part of the school curriculum in Nigeria and information about the African traditional religion and education can be easily retrieved from the internet nowadays. Also, researches carried out on African traditional religion and education is stored using digital technology nowadays.. Therefore, digital technologies are useful in make information on African tradition education and religion available to students and young adults in this information age.

It promotes Religious Syncretism and misrepresents African Traditional Education

Religious syncretism is one of the negative impacts of digital technologies on African traditional religion. Religious syncretism involves the blending of two or more religious belief systems into a new system or the incorporation of beliefs from unrelated traditions into a religious tradition. This type of combination affects African indigenous education that hinges on African culture and religion. Thus, the postmodernist theorists are right by stating that the global flow of information and ideas has made it difficult for people to maintain fixed and unchanging of beliefs. Consumerism's nature of postmodern society helps in choice making on which religious belief and practices to choose. The fragmentation feature of the postmodern world makes it easier for people to mix different cultural practices and religious beliefs as one thereby encouraging religious syncretism in Nigeria society. Today people who practice indigenous religion are combining it with Christian religion and other world religions, and this is a serious problem that affects African indigenous religion and traditional education in Nigeria. Similarly, Ikwubuzo (2019) noted that the digital technology contributed to the misinterpretation of African cultures especially Igbo culture and traditional education. He further stated that the corruption of Igbo culture seen in some Nollywood films is capable of creating, and indeed creates a problem of conceptualization of Igbo identity in diaspora communities and among non-Igbo consumers. Thus digital technologies create the avenue for misrepresentation of African culture, scope and nature of traditional education in contemporary society.

It hinders Human Relations Nature of African Traditional Religion and Education

Human relations is an important aspect of African cultural values that enhances interpersonal and communal relationship. Human relations are centered upon human interests and values. It is characterized by empathy, and by consideration and compassion for human beings .Human relations is recognizing the worth of individuals as human beings or what they can do for each other. Dyikuk (2017) noted that Internet threatens human interactions. Since social media communication is often private affair, the sense of real face to face communication appears endangered. This implies that digital

technologies threaten human relations and communication aspect of African culture since social media do not promote real face to face interaction necessary for the promotion of African culture and traditional education. Obiefuna (2018) expatiates that digital technology cannot do everything human beings need to promote sound human relations. Machines cannot do what humans can do. They are not affective. They are not emotional. Digital technologies cannot express appreciation. Digital technologies can never be creative outside humans. Therefore digital technologies affects African traditional education since it is education that takes place in family and community. It is educational system that makes use of sound human relations to inculcate African values to the young generation.

It hinders the Communal nature of African Traditional Religion and Education

Mbiti (cited by Ejizu 2014) noted that community living for Africans is much more than a social grouping of people bound together by the reason of natural origin and deep common interest and values, but a unity of the visible and invisible worlds. This suggests that African community and religion are communal in nature. It involves a peaceful interaction between the visible and invisible members of the society. Onyeidu (2000) confirmed that “like the indigenous religion, traditional ethics was communal in nature rather than personal.; anyone who fails to abide by the tribal mores is an offender not only against the living members of the society, but the entire community composed of both the living and the dead” (p.29).

The communal nature of African community implies that an individual does not and cannot exist alone, because whatever happens to the individual happens to the whole group and whatever happens to the group happens to the individual Nzomiwu (1999) confirms that “western sense of community suffers from a total or almost total impoverishment of the effective bond which characterized the African sense of community. What is left of European sense of community is just economic, social and political interdependence”(p.7). This suggests that African sense of community is communal while the western sense of community encourages individualistic spirit and private life style that is capable of suppressing African cultural values and traditional education. Dyikuk (2017) confirmed that social media platforms like facebook, Twitter, instagram, yahoo, Gmail, Whatsapp, are privately-oriented. It presents false sense of community through sharing information and communicating with people we may not know or have not seen. Hence digital technologies do not promote African sense of community life. Digital technology does not promote the communal and extended family system needed in African traditional education..

It Promotes Immoral behaviour and Increases in Social Vice

According to Onyejegbu (2021), the presence of information communication technology has made interaction very easy, but the use of the digital devices among the youths destabilizes African culture. Nowadays, the youths prefer the foreign music and dance styles to traditional music and way of life. Many people especially children and young adults play immoral videos and music with the digital devices. Lumun (2013) noted that

many western electronic games, movies and promote immorality and increases aggression in those who view them. Thus digital devices expose the young adults to cyber crimes which make the African traditional education and its value of hard-work unimportant in the society today. Murder, fraud and fraudulence practices prevalent in the society today are against the goal of African traditional education. The African value of honesty has been replaced with digital lies. Today lies are told with mobile phones as a normal way of life in the society. Social platforms such as Whatsapp and YouTube have engaged young adults seriously in immoral acts thereby reducing the efficacy of African traditional education in promoting character formation in the digital era. Thus digital technologies affect African traditional ethics and cultural values. It exposes children and young adults to social evils thereby creating social problem in the society.

Conclusion

Digital era is the present age of information and communication technology that bring the world together through digital technologies. Vividly, nations of the world including Nigeria have embraced the digital technologies in order to meet up with the challenges of the day. Nigeria has emulated the other developing worlds in making use of digital technology. Digital technologies influenced political, economic, religious and socio-cultural lives of the people in Nigeria today. It enhances communication system and helps in storing information in large quantity. Digital technologies are responsible for the misrepresentation of African culture, traditional education and religion as seen in some African movies. It encourages religious syncretism and promotes immoral behaviours among the youth. Hence Africans especially Nigerian people should handle digital technologies with care because it has the capacity to erode African culture and tradition. Nigerians should join hands in preserving African Cultural heritage in the digital society for African to retain her identity. Osuala (2012) states that the indigenous technologies should be revitalized and modernized in order to suit the present trend in industrial and economic growth for sustainable development in Nigeria. Traditional technology which has the capacity to promote African culture and traditional education should be made relevant in the society today. The traditional ethical values which promote character formation, and at the same time made Africa a unique nation among other nations of the world should be practiced very well in the present society despite the influence of digital technology.

Recommendations

The study of the impact of digital technologies on African indigenous religion and education pointed out that digital technologies have both positive and negative impacts on African traditional religion and education in the contemporary society. The study makes the following recommendations:

The researcher recommends that the government and the wealthy individuals in the society should help in the establishment of local industries that will promote African culture and traditional education despite the presence of digital technologies because psycho-spiritual technology will help to preserve African indigenous religion and cultural

values.

Parents and responsible adults in Nigeria should promote African traditional education in contemporary society starting from the family, social gathering and at communal level to ensure the survival of African cultural values and African identity in the digital age.

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