Archival Responsibility, Access and Technological Issues in Contemporary Society

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Abstract: **The current convergence of interest in archives has generated issues for the archival community and archival practice. These issues- access and preservation, digitization and copyright, user expectations, and global economic realities- are topical and are a determinant in dispensing quality archival services to individuals, and researchers, and a tool for a common understanding and tackling of national and global issues. This paper therefore takes a critical look at them, with a view to proffering possible way out. The paper observed that the 'slow and steady moving' archival field will continue to evolve as the world is in a state of constant flux. The paper therefore calls for the need to open up the archives more, through a corresponding increased research attention to keep pace with the continual evolving archival issues; building collaboration and partnerships among archival stakeholders; archival marketing; and entrepreneurial archiving.**

Keywords: **Archives, archival access, archival profession, archival technology, archives use, contemporary archives, archival digitization, archival preservation**

I. INTRODUCTION

Interest in archives has ceased to be rested on librarians or archivists but has extended to scholars in various humanities and social science disciplines like anthropology, classics, history, literature, and technology. The centrality of archives in both the scholarly community and in the existence of democratic society has been increasingly muted by researchers (Vatelarr, 2001; Manoff, 2004; Society of American Archivists, 2016). Development in technology- a major feature in the 21st century- is altering the way archival services used to be in relation to service methods, access and preservation. User expectation has also impacted on archival traditions. Degenerating resources caused by global economic downturn has had its toll on projects funding. For instance, archival project for young institutions and libraries may be delayed or denied by the sponsors of those institutions. Another rising area of call for a change in the archives of today, is a change in the concept of archival audience. Archives are traditionally meant to serve an organization, institution, or nation. Gilliland in Harmon (2014) observe that archives are shifting from a national information infrastructure to a global one, and as such there is need for archives in nations- developed and developing- to wake up to this responsibility and operate in that direction. Archives in developed countries are often behind their western counterparts because these archives are of a recent history- coming into existence only after colonial disentanglement. So, archives appear less popular than libraries in developing nations. Zazzue (2007) corroborated that even discussions around archives especially current activities are scarce for these reasons and so are taken up more by developed countries' writers. Zazzau (2007) feared a resultant effect of loss of indigenous collection and histories.

Much as these dynamics are expected in our world of constant flux, they have however informed and generated some concerns in the archival community. In order to avoid unintentional consequences of improper perception and management of our archives, archives need to be responsive to societal changes. Archives have been known to serve dual opposing purposes- a liberating tool and a controlling/suppressing tool. The issues that will be raised in this discourse to an extent align with these two elemental forces, directly or indirectly. Some of the issues arising from this transformation in archives are: which professional possess the archival discipline: Is it libraries/librarians, archivists exclusively, or historians, political scientists, computer scientists, information and technology experts or a partnership of all records and information stakeholders? What about access, preservation, as well as archive collection processing issues? In the same vein, digital archive and archiving have generated economic, legal and copyright concerns. Lastly, in the face of global economic downturn which has left many organizations including archives with fewer resources to manage archival resources, and the need not to compromise quality, how will donors' requests be balanced with researchers' needs? Thus, the aim of this paper is to take a cursory look at these issues with a view to providing an innovative perspective that will address them for a better archival practice and service.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Psychoanalysis theory propounded by Sigmund Freud (1920) is used as a basis for this work. It is a theory of two conflicting forces. One is the death drive and the other is conservative drive that is linked to the pleasure principle. Freudian psychoanalytic theory suggests that the death drive is the drive towards death, self-destruction and the return to the inorganic chemistry: "the hypothesis of a *death instinct*, the task of which is to lead organic life back into the inanimate state. The death drive opposes Eros, the tendency toward survival, propagation, sex, and other creative, life-producing drives [Manoff, 2004; Wikipedia 2022].

The conservative drive is likened to archive drive. The archive affirms the past, present, and future. Freud's presentation of the death drive as a primal urge towards aggression and destruction may also be characterized as 'archive destroying'. According to Freud, this death drive does not only 'incite forgetfulness, amnesia, the annihilation of memory'…but also the eradication of the archive. Therefore what is at work in the theorizing and management of records is a negotiation between the death drive and the pleasure principle, that is, between archives tilting towards either responsibility and accountability or denial and extinction.

This paper is anchored on the pleasure principle because archives need not just to survive in our contemporary time but also to thrive.

Contemporary Archival Issues

A lot of factors have contributed in the generation of issues and concerns in the subject of archives. Advances in technology, users' expectations, economic climate and the convergence of interest in archives have all raised new issues for archives and archival practice. These would be discussed in details below:

The Archival Profession Mandate

Scholars in the various disciplines over the past decades have taken interest in the subject of archive. Historians, computer scientists, literary scholars, political scientists, informational professionals and so on are just few out of the many that have taken particular interest in archive. Fortunately, they all seem to share a common understanding of the importance of archives – its power in shaping societies. Of common concern among them also is the fate (future) of archives (Manoff, 2004). This means that the discussion about archives will continue to occupy the intellectual and research space of many disciplines, and that for a long time. Obviously, the discussion here agrees with the growing interest and importance of the subject of archives.

Archiving in the computing and digital technology parlance is gaining ground; however the conception of the subject as far as professional viewpoint is conceived is a far cry. An archive is conceived as a backup data in information technology literature. Manoff goes further to say concerning archives, that the digital environments has further eroded any distinctions that would have been made on archives, libraries, and museums because those institutions increasingly make their materials available online in formats that include sound, images and multimedia. Manoff also noted that the term archive has become a kind of 'loose signifier' for a desperate set of concepts. The resultant effect is the inflation of the term "archive". The archivist on the contrary advocates a narrower archival concept. This would strengthen their professionalism because archives will only apply to records created as a result of formal business transactions, not to private papers or manuscripts. Jimerson argued against this narrow concept because it would undermine the efforts of other professionals in the archival endeavour.

Similarly, the emergence of many researchers and scholars having interest in the archival discourse challenges the traditional domain of the archival discipline- Libraries and Archives. Libraries and archives share a lot in common – collection, organization, appraisal, preservation and access of documents and records. Jimerson (2005) corroborated this relationship when he asserts that 'in preserving cultural heritage, archivists share responsibility with librarians, museum curators, and other information professionals'. However, there exists a little operational difference. While archives hold more of unpublished records and are often very few that exist in the world i.e. they are the only ones of their kind (Reitz, 2010), libraries on the other hand collect more of published materials and copies of the same material may abound. Archival studies as a discipline or field of study, is domiciled in library schools in most institutions of learning of both developed and developing societies. Further, Archives most often are not stand alone institutions. In academic libraries, archives are a part of the library.

It is also important to note that no matter how the term is loosening and exploding and its movement across disciplines, the conceptual framework which provides basis for major archival responsibilities cannot be compromised (Maher, cited in SAA 2016). But should the clamour for the archival discourse in the various disciplines be dismissed or acknowledged? Certainly the body of literature that has accumulated around archival discourse is compelling. The archival subject has ceased to be an issue exclusive of the library and information world. For instance, two special issues of the Journal "History of the Human Science" were devoted to the archival discourse. Here scholars from the humanities and social science disciplines in fifteen essays, deliberated on the meaning and the role of archives in both scholarly and in political realms. The outcome of such intellectual intercourse cannot be relegated.

Now, what about the International Federation of Library Associations' (IFLA) interest in archives, has it been sufficiently compelling as to assert the archival mandate? IFLA's commitment to archives includes it being one of the five founding members of the Co-coordinating Council of Audiovisual Archives Association (CCAAA) which is tasked with preserving the world's audiovisual heritage (Wikipedia, 2022). However, a survey of IFLA conference themes of the past two decades reveals a conspicuous absence of a general theme dedicated to archives, though there have been sessions on archives and records. This situation is worrisome because improvements in the practice of archival management should proceed from a strong and concerted discussion around the problem areas. The archival discourse, practice and development need to go beyond its present low level of occupation in the minds of the library and information professionals. The paradigm shift of the archival mandate is a paramount requirement in this era of interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary research.

Access and Preservation Issues

Should archival preservation take precedence over archival access? Materials in archival collections are unique. Archivists strive to preserve them for use today and for future generation of researchers. Archivists have specific guidelines for how people may use collection to protect the material from physical damage, loss and theft, keeping them and their content accessible for posterity. For instance, frequent lending of books to users may cause the book to eventually wear out. The library then buys a new copy of the same book, but checking out a handwritten diary of a historic figure will cause the same physical deterioration. But this diary is irreplaceable (Reitz, 2010). Aguolu and Aguolu, (2002) argue that conservation provides some guarantee to the continued availability of library materials. Nongo and Therna (2021) averred that the peculiar nature of archives has led to developing stringent security procedures.

There is a lack of consensus about whether lending special collections materials is a good practice or not, also what to lend, and to whom to lend. The funding of a 2010 OCLC sharing special collections working group survey provides statistics for a number of institutions who were not loaning special collections materials and those who were. The survey indicated that 33% checked no to whether they can permit interlibrary loan of original special collections materials, 67% indicated interest in loaning (Olivieri & Mehaffey, 2015). Jimerson opines a balance be struck between preserving these materials which are unique and irreplaceably, and at the same time ensuring their availability to a great number who are in need of them. Another dimension of the dilemma is the issue of open access (which is mainly online), and protecting the legitimate privacy concerns of individuals, the private sector and the national government. The options and choices opened to archivists for preserving digital material especially identified as at-risk collections are: refreshing, migration schedule, digital auditing and use of methods in other fields, for instance, computer forensic.

With the imminent risk of losing digital archival materials, librarians, digital archivists, curators and researchers should come together to resolving the issue – a collaborative/partnership agendum. For instance, computer forensics is a discipline that is dominated by the law enforcement community. It is based on the principles of: evidence not being altered, examination results should be accurate, and examination results should be verifiable and repeatable (Politt, 1995 cited in Olson, 2010). These same principles are operational in the archival world, where provenance or verifiable custody holds sway, and where documents, whether in analogue or digital format are verifiable (Olson, 2010). Thus to be able to solve such old issues of access and preservation in contemporary times, Banton (2012) succinctly puts it thus:

Those archivists who are willing to explore and consider new ideas, new techniques, and new methodologies will be ahead of the game. Dogmatism and a rigid allegiance to strongly held notions of the past on how to manage records seem counterproductive in the present environment characterized by rapid changes in many aspects of our professional life.

He further asserts that:

What is needed at this point in time are archivists who are willing to experiment with creative combinations of ideas, old and new; who are courageous enough to seek out and form partnerships with information specialists, auditors, and risk managers whose language and methodologies are presently foreign to them; who are motivated to learn new skills; and ultimately, who are committed to developing realistic strategies for managing electronic records, no matter where this journey may lead them.

Processing of Archives Collection– Detailed and Expedited

Processing is a highly debated topic in archives management, since there seems to be a constant problem of backlogs (Lipschuttz, 2011). The debate is whether archives should focus on creating a detailed container list for each collection, or whether to sacrifice details in order to process more collections. This debate is not unconnected with the time, resources and the user factors which are to be given critical considerations when it comes to effective and efficient services. Detail processing will mean that every single item in a collection is to be located. Expedited processing means that more collections are findable.

One of the causes of detailed processing as noted by Greene and Meissner (2005), cited in Lawrimore, (2013), in their paper titled "More Product, Less Process", was the archival processing policies of the archives surveyed which revealed unnecessary and repetitive processes such as removing all metal fasteners from acquired materials, putting records into new folders even when the original folders were perfectly fine and item - level processing as against box - level description. Lawrimore describes these tasks (aforementioned) as being tedious and may not be necessary with modern records. He therefore decried the continued practice of this method by many archivists in the name of long term preservation. In Greene and Meissner's survey of various archival institutions, they found out some archives have a backlog of more than half of their collections, some, a third of the collections were unprocessed. In this sense, therefore it is obvious that item-level arrangement and description is not feasible in an era of high information consumption even though it offers obvious advantages.

The way out is to involve the users in search of items at the box - description level. In so doing, their research capabilities are enhanced. Greene and Meissner suggested conducting conservation practices at the description levels i.e. leaving stapled, fastened, rubber-banded materials as they came inside a box, and using type of collection as a criterion to decide when to adopt each approach. This approach however, suffices for traditional/analog archives. Information

and Communication Technology has had a profound desirable effects on systems and processes, and archival processing cannot be left out. One of the conclusions arrived at by most archivists involved in electronic records management is that the archival profession needs to add some new skills to its "tool kit" in order to be effective in the world of automated records [Banton, 2012]. The application of ICT to archival management supposes the acquisition of new skills such as web skills, Internet, digitization skill, e-archiving a more detailed knowledge of data and information management principles and techniques; and so on.

Archival Digitization Issues

The National Archives (2012) defines digital archiving as all the processes associated with selecting, acquiring, describing, managing, preserving, and providing access to digital collections. Digital records can either be born digital, they can be digitized records where the physical records no longer survive, or they can be digital surrogates (a digital copy of the original item). In other words, archival digitization involves converting analogue records and documents into digital or an electronically-driven archiving platform.

Digitization also means that the materials are in electronic or digital form and only through that means will they be accessed. The newest addition is the born - digital archive concept. Born digital are archival materials that arrive and are captured in an electronic format. In today's electronic age, born digital records play a significant part in documenting the modern world. As a result, archivists are working to develop tools and best practices for acquiring, preserving, and providing access to these complicated formats in an effort to ensure that modern society does not lose a large swath of its documentary heritage. These born-digital records can range from a Word document to digital photographs to web-sites and other complex objects. Today, there exists an ever increasing mass of born digital materials as more people rely on computer and communication technologies to conduct their personal and professional lives. These include e-mails, word manuscripts with tracked changes, blog entries, text messages and tweets. All these will constitute the archives of the future (Redwine, Kirshenbaum & Olson, 2010). But as Borja (2010) noted, these materials in the virtual place have brought about 'a shifting boundary blurring the distinction between the professional writers, the amateur and even the dilettante'. This obviously raises appraisal issues. Little wonder Borja avers that archivists needed to revisit appraisal criteria and delineate criteria that can accommodate broader definitions of what belongs and what shouldn't. On the alternative, a web archiving strategy can be put in place that limits collection of more of official records than personal (Bingham, 2021).

Digital technology has brought new possibilities for archives- born-digital archives, e-archives, digital forensic, archival information system and so- while also raising a number of challenges and issues for the profession; ranging from copyright and legal issues, economic, and management issues among others.

Economic: In the traditional domain of archiving, certain guidelines exist for the preservation of records. For instance, documents may endure for about twenty years before destroying them. In this regard, the collecting institution, organization or individual bears the cost of maintaining (preserving) the archive. Concerning digital archives, scholars are of diverse opinions on how long digital or digitalized archives need to endure because of the maintenance cost. So the question is: who bears the cost of preserving digital archives for a long time, even when it entails migrating the archival material due to system change, modification or obsolesces? Do publishers have the incentive to provide this service or will it be borne by libraries?

Another economic concern arising from the management of digital archives is the choice that needs to be made on which collections get digitalized and searchable first, or which part of the collection get digitized. This is coming on the heels of the fact that digitization and metadata computation is quite costly (budget is dwindling) as well as the non-duplicative nature of archival materials. So in the era where user expectation and needs are driving information provision, how can librarians and/or archivists make an informed choice on which part of an archival collection to be digitized? It becomes imperative therefore to continuously study, explore and analyze researchers' needs and habits in order to provide relevant service for scholarly pursuits (Farr, 2010). In the face of economic downturn which has left many organizations including archives with fewer resources, donor request may however clash with researchers' needs. An equally important and current strategy to moving archives forward is commercialization of Archives. There is an opportunity for archives 'to open up' for commercial purposes. As resources and funds to sponsor archival and library development get fewer and witness budget cuts, there is need to adopt innovative approaches to archival management. Archival services can embrace innovative and value added services such that revenue can be generated from them.

Libraries are steadfastly exploring fee-based potentialities of information services including archival services. In the recent past, due to the emergence and development of ICT and its deployment to library and information work, a lot of opportunities have been discovered and in fact are being harnessed for commercial purposes as well for entrepreneurship. Under this arrangement, entrepreneurial librarians or archivists can offer consultancy services to firms, business, and governments in any area of archival management for instance, organization of archives, preservation and access, training, digitization and so on. Furthermore, archives can do outright selling of their materials (especially reproduced copies).

This commercial potential of archive is enhanced by the fact that archival materials are unique. They are holdings generated in the course of routine business, organizations' and individual activities. As such their duplicate copies do not exist outside copyright consent. This increases the commercial value of any archival item that is put up for sale. A good

example is the Network Rail in Britain. Network Rail launched its virtual archive to give public access to a special selection from the collection of over five million records they hold. The collections range from architectural drawings and notable places. The online archive is designed as a holistic resource combining articles, timelines and high quality digital images. Users can buy a print of their favourite railway image or have it made into a range of items such as greeting cards (National Archives, 2012).

Copyright and Legal Issues

Copyright and Legal Issues crop up in the creation of a digital archive. These issues appear to escalate at a rate more in the digital archiving than in the analogue. They include copyright requirements for collection of digital content, preservation of digital content (including long term preservation), copyright owners and copyright users and so on. For instance, is it lawful for a user to retransmit digital copies over the Internet? Traditionally, a copyright exists in the original work of an author. Original work fulfills two conditions:

   i.   It cannot be copied from another work
   ii.   It must be creative howbeit small

A copyright provides several rights. These include the right to distribute copies of the work to the public. An exception or limitation to this right is the "first sale doctrine" which provides that the owner of a copyrighted work can sell or transfer that copy. Does this include digital materials? In general, are copyright ownership and the rights accruable to it extended to digital archival? For instance, when an author transfers his copyrights rights to a publisher, does the new ownership cover electronic archives right?

Archives and libraries have a responsibility to preserve the unique records and documents held by them. Copies of document is often necessary to preserve that work for the future, and especially when dealing with digital works created in formats, or stored on media, that are in danger of becoming obsolete. Libraries are usually given concession to make additional copies of unpublished works only for preservation/security. Where a library wants to digitize a work and is unable to identify and locate the copyright owner, what does it do? This wouldn't have been a problem if all copyright owners are mandated to register their copyrighted works, and compliance is strict. Will libraries risk violating copyright laws at the expense of satisfying their users' needs? - A choice of expediency or legality. In the same vein, when libraries receive donations of manuscripts or memoirs, they own only the physical copies and not the copyright rights and therefore do not have the right to reproduce them. Collaboration and partnership are an overhauling tool for the challenges, issues and problems orchestrated by digital technology. Collaboration and partnership is not all that a simple practice despite the exciting opportunities it offers. Most operate on a give and take principle. Librarians have been known for selective acquisition, donation, bequeath and exchange. There is therefore need to balance things, so that while protecting intellectual rights, innovative approaches to archival management is not relegated or while being receptive of attractive offers, the core principles of archival management and the practitioners are not compromised.

III. CONCLUSION

The changes that are taking places in archives are connected to ICT, increasing interdisciplinary research, growing user expectation, and dwindling budgets. There should be a reassessment of some archival management practices based on the realities of the times. This calls for a complete reorientation of the archival concept, and the professionals and in their provision of innovative archival services. Archival research is paramount whether individually or institutionally-based. The recent major shift to collaborative research, locally, nationally, and globally should be sustained. Sustainability of archives can also be achieved through building collaborative partnership to share resources, share knowledge, get funds, merge, and engage in training and research.

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