



Information Society and Literacy: The Plight of the Non-Digital Migrants

Boma B. Obi

Department of Library and Information Science
Ignatius Ajuru University of Education Nigeria

Abstract

The development of any society has to do with the extent to which that society evolves and uses its information. Usage of information and its literacy are very essential resource forms in the development of Information Society. A society devoid of information, means of managing it and information literate citizens is forever stagnant and the citizens increasingly alienated. The more society changes, the more its people need not remain the same.

Keywords: Digital Citizens, Non-Digital Migrants, Information Society, Information Literacy.

Reference to this paper should be made as follows:

Obi, B. B. (2021). Information Society and Literacy: The Plight of the Non-Digital Migrants. *International Journal of Scientific Research in Education*, 14(2), 250-256.

Copyright © 2021 IJSRE

INTRODUCTION

Our society has no doubt experienced much transformation starting from the agricultural society through the industrial society to the information society where it is at present. The society started with conservative attitude to information issues which treated information very causally. The transformation has brought the society to a point where information and the way of acquiring it have become very critical and imperative in every aspect of human activities. This transformation according to Servas and Carpenter (2003) makes information invaluable and the use crucial. With the transformation, the cultural values of information have been recognised.

Socially, information is seen as an enhancer of the quality of life when one is able to access and use easily and quickly the exact information one desires. Information is qualitative and it affects lives of the users. Martins (1988) strongly agrees that information and its usage have value in the economy of a society because it is seen as a commodity itself. This fact is very glaring in our present-day society where every information is for sale. One has to own information by being knowledgeable on how to locate and access it for meaningful utility. With the enhancement of the information value and the transformation of the society into an

information-centred one, methods, means and procedures of managing information for improved quality of life among other things emerged. These indices are collectively referred to as Information and Communications Technology (ICT).

Information and Communications Technology (ICT)

The development of ICT over the decades in the Western world has generated overwhelming interest and activity in the third world countries. It has diverse and profound impact on the society which is apparent in our education and service sectors. ICT refers to systems for producing, storing, sending and retrieving digital files (Uhegbu, 2007). The files can contain texts, sounds and images, both still and motion. The impact is felt in the intellectual work and also in the social and entertainment world. Rapid changes are occurring in the types and uses of the ICT in every activity in our society. ICT is technically the enabling force for the output of information in the offices, industries, educational institutions, market places, homes or business houses to make an Information Society (Edom, 2010). It is the keeping up with techniques and procedures involved in this enabling force and changes that is daunting tasks for the citizens.

Information Society

Technology and information revolution started in the early 70s in the Western world and it gave rise to what now can be described as Information Society. An Information Society itself is where there are no barriers to information. It is that society with all kinds of ICT devices with which it is able to address its political, economics, market regulations, cultural and social issues among others. Gurnsay (1997) sees Information Society as where the majority of people are engaged in one way or the other in creating, gathering, storing, processing or distributing information digitally. A member of such society is expected to be active and the quality of life as well as social change and economic development depends increasingly on information and its exploitation by the citizens (Etim, 2007). The handmaid to live effectively in this type of society is Information and Communications Technology. This is referred to as the range of technologies that are applied in the processes of collecting, storing editing, retrieving, transferring and using information in various formats. These technologies are basically made up of electronic gadgets used to facilitate the afore-mentioned processes in issues. Those who have the means to partake in this form of society are called Digital Citizens (Mossberger, 2019). These are people who use the electronic information gadgets and internet regularly and effectively.

The process of utilizing the gadgets is learnt through formal or informal teaching. It comes through group orientation, individual teaching or “watch as I do it”, formal classroom lecture, on the job-training or mentorship. Some people born in the 70s in Nigeria have no difficulties in adapting to the use of the gadgets - namely computers, cell phones, twitter, Instagram, Internet and every other social media in the society. They are the digital citizens, they are not migrating from the agricultural or industrial society, they are born into the Information Society. In this society, citizens’ living standards, patterns of work and leisure and education system are all influenced markedly by advances in information. The citizens are satisfied with the enormous flow of information. Socially information enhances the quality of life arising from widespread user access to relevant information and most basically through the ICT via internet which is the enabling force for information.

Non-Digital Migrants

Information Society has exposed willing persons to use the various existing media to access and effectively use information electronically. How to use the technology to access, explore and exploit information seems to be the plight of those whom the writer refers to as NON- DIGITAL Migrants. They are this group of people who were born between the forties and sixties. Most of them are well trained in their field of study. Their information seeking behaviour had already been defined, established and fixed to the orthodox way of accessing and retrieving information before the emergence of ICT brought by the Information Revolution, while their information needs keep expanding with the trend of things in the millennium.

The Non-Digital Migrants are seemingly very comfortable with only the print media of any sort, which they are used to. They feel complacent with making their notes with the nib slowly. Every needed information should be transcribed to them in the language of the manuscript or typed out clearly if possible, with the old manual typewriter or perhaps the new word processor. This group has willingly suspended their beliefs that there is a revolution in information and that technology is fast and efficient. They have also closed their minds' eyes to the new mode of managing information and the paradigm shift eloquently noticed everywhere in this millennium. Their psyches have also been schooled to rebel against information technology and they lose confidentiality in personal information.

However, this Non-Digital Migrants group enjoys the television for news, sports and other entertainment, forgetting that the television is part of the technology they abhor. They would also enjoy the land line telephones if they remained. This group seems to continue to yearn for the analogue system which is fast disappearing before them. They love the ancient typist who made very minimal mistakes on the typewriter, the stencil, the duplicator and the hard files. They are not in tune with the electronic transactions that cut across every walk of life. They seem not to be in a hurry for information, while the society is actually moving very fast with Information Technology. One does not deny the fact that the analogue information management system has its advantages, but such advantages are nothing to be compared with technology, societies do not remain stagnant.

The Non-Digital Migrants have willingly refused to know that one could book a flight to anywhere, order and purchase goods, do money transfer to anyone and many other transactions while sitting at home, in the office or any desired location. They prefer the face to face physical contacts with whatever transaction they are engaged in. Times have changed and they have refused to adapt to the changes. The new and seemly strange language register that goes with this digital era does not exist as far as they are concerned. Words like cell phones. iPad, Power Bank, Projectors, Computers, Modem, ISP, Hot Spot WIFI, etc. do not relate to this group. They have shut their minds up against the information revolution that is at their door steps. However, indirectly and discretely they enjoy the benefits thereof. They receive calls from any part of the world, receive salary alert and monetary gift from their cell phones. They read text messages quickly but do not send a reply or a feedback. One begins to wonder, why there is this seemingly reprobate attitude towards information technology by members of this group most of which are very educated and enlightened. It is worthy to note that the above described characteristics are not peculiar to only the Non-Digital Migrants they are also noticed in some supposedly digital citizens found in all walks of life.

From conversations, dialogues and observations with most of them, one was able to glean some reasons for their attitude and stance against the information revolution and its hand-maid that is technology.

They off-handily said:

- It is my choice not to migrate;
- My secretary can do it;
- I do not need any new skill now;
- My children are versatile;
- I have a Personal Assistant who knows what to do;
- It is a waste of time”

This last reason confirms the widespread ignorance and misconception about ICT use among the Non-Digital Migrants. It is a major inhibition to their use of new information and new knowledge of this era. Technology has churned and turned things around and the group seems to stand against the wind. When anything or anyone stands against the wind, and cannot withstand the force, such is blown aside. The Digital Non Migrants and some of the digital citizens have consciously or unconsciously made themselves irrelevant in this age and such digital citizens lose their citizenship by that. The target group refuses to learn to speak the language of the era, losing sight of the fact that language is a unifying force and an identity in any society. They do not understand the language and unfortunately it is artificial and seemly has no pedagogical methods.

One of the things that throws the Non-Digital Migrants off-guard and puts apathy in them is the use of words in the short messages service or text message. The language and spelling of words in the texts come up very strangely to them. Most of them having spent some time in classes during their days in school to learn how to read through spelling and pronouncing words, cannot now readily and easily comprehend why the following frequently used letters or group of letters should stand for sentences and the projected meanings as follows:

ASAP =	As soon as possible
BRB =	I will be right back
BTW =	By the way
LOL =	Laughing out loud
TGIF =	Thank God it's Friday
Tnk u =	Thank you
UW =	You are welcome
Wet 4 me=	Wait for me
9ja =	Nigeria

and so many other unpopular non-standard abbreviations and acronyms used to convey information these days. The Non-Digital Migrants miss out being informed quickly and the fun associated with the process in this era. For them this is clumsy.

Their cell phones are only used to receive and make calls as opposed to the numerous transactions, operations and services embedded therein. These people have refused to load their phones with the air time credit, nor are they ready to know and learn the processes of doing so. Some have been known to lose their phones through asking some stranger to insert and save

numbers in their phones. Owning or being given an android smart phone is a reproach to them because of the operational procedures which seem magical to them and they are not ready for any magical act, touch or show. It is worthy to mention here that the Non-Digital Migrants characteristics include well educated and well qualified personnel of most professions irrespective of the age or gender.

The Information Society is replete with the social media which has transformed the world into a global village making everywhere globally visible. For the Non-Digital Migrants, the social media (Facebook, You Tube, LinkedIn, Instagram, Whatsapp, Twitter, Flickr, Digg, Blogs, etc) and utility is an anathema. Such media for transmission of information are noise pollution to their ears.

These should not be mentioned to them. If you want to send a message or give information to them through any of these media, they would prefer your writing plainly or spending enough airtime to put a call through to them. What could be the problem for this adamant behaviour of refusal to migrate to the new scene of the Information Society, and apathy to developmental processes. The problem could be lack of information literacy. For one to properly fit into an Information Society and be part of the information revolution that is on-going and being witnessed, one needs to migrate with the paradigm shift into the 'digital space' as much as one can in order to live liberally in this era. To do that one needs to acquire the basic information literacy skills which will cost nothing except devotion. Such skills and competences will aid this target audience to utilise the wide range of information services, products, materials and tools increasingly made available to solve personal problems and make some decisions without involving anybody.

INFORMATION LITERACY

Ala (1989) sees information literacy as a situation whereby a person is able to recognise when he needs information and has the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information. It is the adoption of appropriate information behaviour to identify with whatever channel or medium of information well fitted to information needs leading to wise and ethical use of it in the society (Lester & Koehler, 2007). The Non-Digital Migrants have refused to change their ways and means of seeking and getting information which, they really need. The point is not that they lack the ability to acquire the information literacy competences, it is just that they dwell with following memory verses:

- I don't know how to use computer;
- I am not into ICT;
- I am afraid of electricity;
- It is not necessary to learn now;
- I can still get what I want without it;
- My secretary can do that.

(Source: Obi & Mandah, 2012).

However, if they submit or pay a little attention to information literacy, they will be able to acquire the following basic skills required in this information-centre society:

- Build up self confidence;

- Get knowledge on how to locate and use information electronically;
- Recognise the need for information;
- Develop successful search methods;
- Evaluate information quickly and easily;
- Use information for critical thinking, problem and decision making by themselves.

Information literacy is an essential skill in the acquisition of knowledge. It has to do with knowing when there is need for information and being able to efficiently locate and put it to use effectively using provided tools and resources. Information literacy has emerged as a distinct set of skills which is necessary for one's social and economic wellbeing in an increasingly complex Information Society where the growth rate of information is exponential. The Non-Digital Migrants have to learn to know, when and why they need what information and where and how to find it electronically. When one is information-literate, one acquires skills to translate information into knowledge that is relevant to any discipline. It is also linked to professional competency and personal life as it empowers the literate to learn for themselves, make informed personal decisions and partake in discussing topical issues. The degree to which information and its services and products is used sharpens the society. If most people in our society remain Non-Digital Migrants, our society cannot be transformed quickly into the Information Society. Negropite (1995) points out that being digital means being information literate and that makes it possible for communities of people of that class to share similar interests, find out one another and interact. Information literacy is so crucial in this millennium that it rose to national consciousness in the United States of America. It is linked with life-long learning and is seen as a basic Human Right which promotes social inclusion in all Nations. Former US President, Barack Obama quips among other things that "... Information literacy can help you separate truth from fiction and signal from noise ..." with that Obama proclaimed 1st October 2009 as National Information Literacy Awareness month. If one is information literate, one knows what to believe or accept and what to jettison.

CONCLUSION

The American Experience should be an eye-opener for anyone who finds himself among the Non-Digital Migrants. Rather than possessing only data it is good to also learn the skill necessary to process data for information for any situation. With these abilities, one would have migrated to the "digital space" which is actually in the Information Society. This society is replete with technologies, communication systems, education research and development, mass media, entertainment and other services. It is noticed that all is dove-tailing in one another and working together without barriers to reach other societies. With the ICT devices which the Non-Digital Migrants tend to persistently evade, a society is able to address its political, economic, social issues among other factors. The make-up of every society are the people. Such people should be relevant to the society. Some of the procedures for attainment of an inclusive Information Society include:

- Building Infrastructure like, library, post office, cyber café, etc.
- Getting Internet connectivity in most environment;
- Liberalizing the use of Information gadget (GSM etc.)

Most of our societies in Nigeria have all the aforementioned yet some people, high, low, young, old, educated, un-educated have determined to unlearn to re-learn by refusing to migrate digitally at even the lowest level and degree to the Information Society. Information literacy is the adoption of appropriate information behaviour to identify through available channels and media information fitted to one's needs, leading to wise and ethical use of information in the society. For one to be relevant in the Information Society is to possess the ability to use one's information without always or consistently involving anyone. The world now is based on the understanding of the information society. This cannot be wished away. In this new age of information revolution as in any other revolution, it is necessary to try as much as possible to acquire one or two basic information literacy skills because the (world) man is universally dependent on information technology for every meaningful activity, and information literacy is the skill essential for lifelong learning and for the production of an informed prosperous citizenry.

REFERENCES

- American Library Association (1989). *Presidential committee on information literacy: Final report*. <http://www.ala-org/ala/mgrps/dirs./acr/whitepapers>.
- Edom, B. O. (2010). Personal characteristics and academic staff utilization of ICT in Evan Enwerem University, Owerri. *Nigerian Libraries*, 43, 87-90.
- Etim, F. E. (2007). The evolution of information society. In F. E. Etim, & F. U. Nssien (Eds.), *Information literacy and library search* (pp. 25-30). Abaam.
- Gurnsay, J. (1997). *Information society: International encyclopedia of library and information science*. McGraw Hill
- Lester, J., & Koehler, W. C. (2007). *Fundamental of information studies*. New York: Neal Schuman Publisher.
- Martin, W. J. (1988). *The information society*. ASLIB.
- Negropite, N. (1995). *Being digital*. Knopf.
- Obi, Boma B. (2013) Transforming a developing nation to an information society: a prescriptive discourse. *International journal of educational development*, 3(2), 27-30.
- Obi, B. B., & Mandah, S. N. N. (2013). The availability and utilization of ICT gadgets among lecturers in Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Port Harcourt. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 3(2).
- Obama, B. (2009). National information literacy awareness month. <https://obamawhitehousearchives.gov>.
- Serves, J., & Carpentier N. (2003). Steps to achieve a sustainable information society www.untellectbook.co.uk.
- Uhegbu, A. N. (2007). *The information user: issues and themes*. Justman Publishers.