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THE ROLE OF A NEWS MEDIA INFORMATION RESOURCE CENTRE IN PRESERVING NATIONAL HERITAGE

THE CASE OF THE NATION MEDIA GROUP LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES

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Abstract

The Nation Media Group Information has a Library-cum-Archive serving the company and the Kenyan public. It holds back issues of newspapers since 1959 when the first paper was published to current. Bulky print copies have been scanned and are now available in easily-accessible and retrievable digital format. The process is still ongoing to also digitise the photographic content available. As a media resource centre, it captures the nation's heartbeat in both images, text, audio and audiovisual format. From the resources available books, documentaries, publications and advertorials have been published. This helps current and future generations relate with the journey the nation has taken in the past. It therefore forms an important part of our cultural heritage which should be preserved for posterity. Loss or damage to this resource would bankrupt the national memory. A multimedia content management system is in place to manage these resources and make searching and retrieval more user-friendly. It also stocks relevant books and has access to online resources necessary to train and keep the staff informed for efficient practice. A library management system is also in place to enable library processes.

Keywords: Cultural heritage, Digitisation, Indexing, Modern technology, National memory

Introduction

The Nation Media Group (NMG) is a news media company started in 1959 by Michael Curtis and Charles Hayes who were both newspapermen in London and Nairobi, respectively. It started with a Kiswahili publication aptly named Taifa (Nation) to cater for the local African population. Other publications were available then with limited circulation as they were mainly in vernacular languages. The English language The East African Standard newspaper was in existence but it catered more for the colonial readership (Mbeke, 2010). His Highness the Aga Khan, the spiritual leader of the Ismaili, acquired the establishment in 1960. Shortly thereafter the English version of the paper, *The Nation*, was published. With the coming of independence *The Nation* quickly gained traction with the masses as it gave them a voice and edged out other publications in terms of circulation.

Today it remains the largest independent multi-media house in East and Central Africa having print, electronic media and the Internet presence. Its print publications have the widest circulation in the region, and so are its digital editions and online resources (Allen and Gagliardone, 2011). It also has subsidiaries in Uganda, Tanzania and Rwanda.

Currently, the group publishes Taifa Leo, The Daily Nation and The Business Daily in Kenya; Daily Monitor in Uganda; The Citizen and Mwananchi in Tanzania –through its subsidiary, Mwananchi Publications; and Rwanda Today. It also publishes The *EastAfrican*, which is a weekly regional paper, among other publications. In 1999 NMG started an English radio station since rebranded *Easy FM* to cater for the urban youth and also the Nation Television Station News channel. In 2008, it started a Kiswahili radio station QFM (*Kiu FM* in Kiswahili, meaning “thirst” which it aimed at quenching). In 2012 it extended the ‘Q’ brand with a second television channel, QTV broadcasting mainly in Kiswahili. It has NTV Uganda and is developing other stations in the region. It also has a vibrant web presence with its digital and online editions and audiences. It is active on social media too with its “Breaking News” on Facebook and Twitter.

The Nation Media Group Print Library

For the effective and efficient publication and dissemination of news content the Nation Media Group has a library, which also carries out archival roles, developed alongside the original newspapers. The Library is the custodian of both the information collected in the field for news making and also the final publications that are sent out for public consumption. This collection was chiefly in forms of images (pictures and negatives) captured during news gathering and once the reporters put together the newspaper articles and the full paper was published, a copy of each publication was stored in the library. The monthly accumulation of the daily publications was then bound together into

a single volume for more effective storage. Cuttings were also made so as to bring related articles and subjects together, a form of indexing.

This was done when publications were only available in print. Over time, the storage was becoming cumbersome and space-consuming. Proper indexing was also a problem and so was searching and retrieval of needed information. More storage space was sought alongside the expansion of the media house from its two-storey building along Tom Mboya Street to the current modern building on Kimathi Street and a printing plant on Mombasa Road. Modern technology was therefore sought to mitigate this challenge.

In 2008, digitisation of the publications was initiated as new technology became available. The system adopted for this process is called SCC MediaServer from The Software Construction Company. A digitization company was contracted to carry out this process. The project involved scanning each page of all the copies of the printed newspapers and storing them in Portable Document Format (.pdf) within the central library server. Indexing was also done to ensure interactive search and retrieval. Once the project was completed it became possible to access all the past publications online making it easier and more convenient. The old print newspapers were then transferred to the Mombasa Road plant, where they are archived in a secure warehouse as there would not be adequate storage space at Nation Centre building in the city.

As a content management and digital archive system, it also allows journalists to input their articles directly into the system and edit them so that current publications do not need to be re-scanned. It allows natural language indexing where one can search for articles and information using natural indexing language as opposed to controlled vocabulary. However, librarians are able to add other indexing terms to improve and increase accessibility and retrieval. They are also able to re-check the input by journalists and make corrections where necessary, e.g. if titles or by-lines for articles and images are missing or if articles or parts thereof are missing.

The library has an archival collection of over three hundred thousand (300,000) photographs, some in black and white and others in colour, dating as far back as the 1950s to around 2008. This was before the modern technology of digital photography was available. When need arises to use these archival photographs they are scanned at the imaging section and uploaded into the SCC MediaServer. It is stored in Joint Photographic Experts Group (.jpeg) format which enables adjustable compression allowing for minimal storage space while quality of image is not compromised. These are made available electronically and can be easily accessed and used for posterity.

Today, the use of digital cameras and other modern technologies, e.g. mobile phones, iPads and iPods ensures that the images collected from the field are already in digital

format and are uploaded directly into the Media Grid for editing and use in publications or broadcasts as need be.

The library also stocks a small collection of books relevant to journalism to assist the news writers in their trade. It has subscribed to and receives newspapers and magazines from local and international media organizations to add to its knowledge resources and make comparisons. It also acquires and ensures access government and other organisations' reports, publications and notices that are of news and historical value. This provides the media group with leverage necessary to comment and publish news relevant to the society. These are catalogued and processed using Sirs Mandarin Library system, which also enables circulation and management of the library materials.

The Nation Broadcasting Division Library

The Nation Broadcasting Division library is the 'heart of the station'. The electronic media library hosts audio backups in digital format for the radio programmes and an audiovisual collection for the television programmes. The audiovisual resources are in various tape formats, e.g. National Television System Committee (NTSC) and Phase Alternating Line (PAL) as they were availed when television programming was still in the analogue era. The electronic media libraries also receive various recordings of audiovisual materials (programmes) recorded elsewhere, e.g. entertainment programmes, movies, soap operas, documentaries, public functions, activities and events as well as music for the purposes of airplay and announcements.

Digital programming is slowly being adopted and materials in digital formats are now being stocked. The library provides reporters with Digital Video Camera (DV-CAM tapes) for their assignments. Once they cover their stories in the field, upon editing and airing the news, the tapes are surrendered to the library for storage. In case a review of the tape is needed or there is need to re-use the same footage for another story (file footage), the journalists must return to the library. All broadcasts are classified and catalogued and stored future reference and can also be accessed through the SCC Media system. Once a program has been aired, the tape is returned to the library. The main library clients include reporters, producers and non-staff individuals or organisations who wish to acquire footage relevant to their needs.

The Role of the Library

As a media resource centre, the Nation Media Library system captures the nation's heartbeat in both images, text, audio and audiovisual format. It is a reference point for individuals and organisations wanting to find out when, where, how, who and what was involved in the occurrence of an event. One can find information printed about various personalities and events as well as audiovisual content thereby bringing past history

into life. As Kenya prepares to celebrate her 50th Anniversary since independence, the media is taking up the role of chronicling the major events that have taken place.

Apart from current news, the media brings out the nation's history in various columns on a regular basis. Previously, the library used to prepare on a daily basis a column named "Today in History" where the librarian would select major national and world events that took place on the particular date. Currently, every Saturday the newspaper publishes a photograph of personalities participating in various activities in the past. The Caption is named "On this date". On Sundays, it carries a column known as "30 years ago" in which an activity and a photographic image of the actor/s is shown detailing what they did or said exactly 30 years ago to the given date. This archival information helps keep the national memory alive. On many occasions, individuals and organisations depicted in these column come to the library seeking the actual footage of the events in order for them to update their own historical records.

The media also helps put current national events in context. Whenever an important event takes place in the country, the media looks back through its archives to relate the current event to past events of similar nature or that are precursors to the current happenings. When current President Uhuru Kenyatta took over the reins of power, the media was able to provide the nation with detailed history of the President, his family including details of his father's presidency and make necessary comparisons. The library plays a major role in maintaining the information and images necessary to make this possible.

From the resources available in the media library and archives various books and documentaries continue to be published capturing 'live' the historical development of society. This helps current and future generations relate with the journey society has taken in the past. This is important in that it helps any enquirer understand why the society is the way it is, the miss-steps of the past and what needs to be corrected in order for progress to be achieved. Those who ignore history are bound to repeat its mistakes. African society was unable to capture its history due to lack of literacy in the past. With increased literacy and availability of various media and technology, even mundane events are being captured for posterity.

In celebrating its Golden Jubilee in 2010, the Nation Media Group provided various publications both in the newspaper editions and in book format which read like the microcosm of national events. "The Birth of a Nation: the story of a newspaper in Kenya" by Gerrald Loughran, himself among the first senior editors at NMG, is a good example. The very title depicts how the history of the "Nation" newspaper, the brand around which the Nation Media Group is built is closely intertwined with the history of the nation of Kenya.

The role of the media in national development and the political participation has been acclaimed in various literatures. In Nazi Germany, Adolf Hitler endeared the media to his course and used it to rally racial support against other races especially the Jews culminating in the Second World War . In Africa and other colonial territories publications that supported the independence movements emerged and helped in the advancement of this course (Mbeke, 2010). The media has also been instrumental in the democratisation processes and expansion and governance structures in many societies of the world (Barnett, 1999; Loughran, 2010 and Dyck & Zingales, 2002). The media libraries and archives are key in the harnessing, storage and availing of this and other information necessary to support these processes.

Contemporary Value

In modern society plagued more with economic issues than political processes the information resource centres will only be relevant if they address themselves to contemporary issues. The western world has over the years been adept at re-enacting the lives of their heroes (and villains) and political and/or social personalities. Few movies and dramas are acted in Africa especially of similar individuals. Notable figures who have been featured in cinemas include Nelson Mandela (e.g. *Invictus*), Idd Amin (*The rise and fall of Idd Amin*) and Steve Biko (movie by the same title). All these have been acted in Hollywood by Hollywood actors.

With the media having captured the life and times of various personalities including images and sounds (voices) it is high time that actors and movie makers researched the same from media libraries and created movies for local heroes (villains) and other notable individuals. With budding movie industries in Africa e.g. Nollywood in Nigeria and Riverwood in Kenya, it is time this industry built around local personalities and reproduced their life and times. Famous individuals like Mwalimu Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, Tom Mboya, Jomo Kenyatta, Dedan Kimathi, in Kenya, and many others deserve to be immortalised in movies. Artists and sculptors also use the images to sculpt or draw art impressions of individuals and social phenomena. This would provide employment and engage for many individuals in the movies and arts industry.

NMG Library Clientele

Availability of records is important. As the table below shows, there were about five hundred and four (504) individuals making enquiries from the NMG library over a period of six months (April – September) in 2012. Considering that the library is open for only three hours per day for five days in a week, i.e. Mondays – Fridays between 12.00 noon and 3.00 in the afternoon, this represents an average of 3 individuals per day or an individual per hour.

Frequency of visitors to the Nation Media Group Library for six months between April and September 2012

| Date | No of visitors | Date | No of visitors | Date | No of visitors | Date | No of visitors | Date | No of visitors | Date | No of visitors |
|---|----------------|-----------|----------------|-----------|----------------|-----------|----------------|-----------|----------------|------------|----------------|
| 2/4/2012 | 5 | 2/5/2012 | 4 | 4/6/2012 | 6 | 2/7/2012 | 3 | 1/8/2012 | 2 | 3/9/2012 | 5 |
| 3/4/2012 | 6 | 3/5/2012 | 4 | 5/6/2012 | 4 | 3/7/2012 | 5 | 2/8/2012 | 2 | 4/9/2012 | 4 |
| 4/4/2012 | 1 | 4/5/2012 | 5 | 6/6/2012 | 2 | 4/7/2012 | 9 | 3/8/2012 | 3 | 5/9/2012 | 6 |
| 5/4/2012 | 3 | 7/5/2012 | 2 | 7/6/2012 | 8 | 5/7/2012 | 6 | 6/8/2012 | 3 | 6/9/2012 | 5 |
| 10/4/2012 | 5 | 8/5/2012 | 3 | 8/6/2012 | 4 | 6/7/2012 | 4 | 7/8/2012 | 1 | 7/9/2012 | 2 |
| 11/4/2012 | 5 | 9/5/2012 | 4 | 11/6/2012 | 3 | 9/7/2012 | 6 | 8/8/2012 | 5 | 10/9/2012 | 6 |
| 12/4/2012 | 6 | 10/5/2012 | 5 | 12/6/2012 | 1 | 10/7/2012 | 3 | 9/8/2012 | 4 | 11/9/2012 | 2 |
| 13/4/2012 | 3 | 11/5/2012 | 10 | 13/6/2012 | 5 | 12/7/2012 | 6 | 10/8/2012 | 1 | 12/9/2012 | 4 |
| 16/4/2012 | 3 | 15/5/2012 | 5 | 14/6/2012 | 2 | 13/7/2012 | 8 | 13/8/2012 | 4 | 13/9/2012 | 3 |
| 17/4/2012 | 4 | 16/5/2012 | 7 | 15/6/2012 | 2 | 16/7/2012 | 6 | 14/8/2012 | 1 | 14/9/2012 | 7 |
| 18/4/2012 | 5 | 17/5/2012 | 5 | 18/6/2012 | 4 | 17/7/2012 | 4 | 15/8/2012 | 6 | 17/9/2012 | 3 |
| 19/4/2012 | 4 | 18/5/2012 | 3 | 19/6/2012 | 3 | 20/7/2012 | 7 | 16/8/2012 | 2 | 18/9/2012 | 4 |
| 20/4/2012 | 2 | 21/5/2012 | 5 | 20/6/2012 | 4 | 23/7/2012 | 6 | 17/8/2012 | 1 | 19/9/2012 | 4 |
| 23/4/2012 | 6 | 22/5/2012 | 3 | 21/6/2012 | 4 | 24/7/2012 | 4 | 21/8/2012 | 2 | 20/9/2012 | 3 |
| 24/4/2012 | 2 | 23/5/2012 | 7 | 22/6/2012 | 5 | 25/7/2012 | 2 | 22/8/2012 | 3 | 21/9/2012 | 6 |
| 25/4/2012 | 3 | 24/5/2012 | 5 | 25/6/2012 | 4 | 26/7/2012 | 8 | 23/8/2012 | 6 | 24/9/2012 | 3 |
| 26/4/2012 | 5 | 25/5/2012 | 8 | 26/6/2012 | 3 | 27/7/2012 | 3 | 24/8/2012 | 3 | 25/9/2012 | 3 |
| 27/4/2012 | 9 | 28/5/2012 | 1 | 27/6/2012 | 5 | 30/7/2012 | 5 | 27/8/2012 | 3 | 26/9/2012 | 4 |
| 30/4/2012 | 6 | 29/5/2012 | 4 | 28/6/2012 | 3 | 31/7/2012 | 4 | 28/8/2012 | 2 | 27/9/2012 | 5 |
| | | 30/5/2012 | 3 | 29/6/2012 | 5 | | | 29/8/2012 | 1 | 28/9/2012 | 4 |
| | | 31/5/2012 | 7 | | | | | 30/8/2012 | 7 | | |
| | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Totals | 83 | | 100 | | 77 | | 99 | | 62 | | 83 |
| Total number of visitors over the six months | | | | | | | | | | 504 | |

Other individuals may call at any time of the day and have their requests sent to them electronically (emailed) after they pay the necessary transaction fees via M-pesa to an official account number. These individuals do not include the NMG staff for whom the library is accessible from 8.00 a.m. in the morning till 9.00 p.m. in the night and who form the bulk of the enquiries made in the library in order for them to broadcast and publish relevant and properly contextualised news.

Cultural Heritage

An item of national heritage value is either an object or a geographical feature or landscape designated or registered by a governmental agency as being of national importance to the cultural heritage of that country. Cultural heritage values are unique to the people who create them and the time they are created and are therefore non-renewable (OMNR, 2007). Cultural heritage is the legacy of physical artifacts and intangible attributes of a group or society that are inherited from past generations, maintained in the present and bestowed for the benefit of future generations. According to Jokilehto (2005), cultural heritage includes tangible culture (such as buildings, monuments, landscapes, books, works of art, and artifacts), intangible culture (such as folklore, traditions, language, and knowledge), and natural heritage (including culturally significant landscapes, and biodiversity). National heritage is a resource that is important and significant to the nation, which if lost or not available, an important part of the nation's memory would be bankrupted.

In an interview with the company behind the series "The making of a nation" and "Kenya Heritage Series - Makers of a nation", there is evidence that media libraries and archives contain unique resources in the form of print, images (pictures) and audiovisual (radio and television broadcasts) that are of priceless historical value. In the series have serialized both on national television documentaries of individuals and events that were instrumental in shaping Kenya as the nation is today. They chronicle positive acts of valour and brilliance are depicted alongside errors and personal failings that have contributed the making of this nation.

The resources are also useful for personal references especially for individuals who wish to follow up certain issues and events that are pertinent to their lives. Some use these resources to pursue justices in courts of law and settle family, industrial and business disputes that date years back. They are also useful in developing advertorials and other information materials useful for educating society. University researchers also use them to write their term papers and dissertations in areas as wide as history, economics, business, media studies and political sciences among others

The resources are also useful in the political discourse of the nation. They assist in confronting lies and contradictions that may otherwise be passed on especially by the

political class, thereby enabling the citizenry better understand and interrogate their leaders. Where politicians may claim to be misquoted and misrepresented, recording of their words, actions and images proves otherwise. Cases of libel against media houses are rampant and without the evidence of media library and archive resources, media houses may find it hard to operate.

It is recommended therefore, that media libraries and archives be protected under national heritage laws and regulations and their materials protected for posterity. They should also be protected from external threats and damages. To achieve this, it is important to employ modern technology. Staff should keep abreast with emerging technologies to ensure both their skills and their resources remain relevant.

There is need, at NMG Library, to complete the process of digitisation especially on the old photographs to ensure that all this content is available in electronic format. Once all this content is available in electronic format various organisations and individuals interested in accessing it would be able to search retrospectively, through the archival materials. Subscribers to the digital content would have access to previous content depending on the subscription bundles, either weekly, monthly or annually. This can be used to earn more revenue for the media group. Television and radio content is already available through live media streaming over the internet for online viewers and listeners.

Conclusion

Every country has its own unique history. The media captures and stores this history as it happens and records it in an active manner. When called upon, the media helps re-live through the events just as if they are happening real-time. Future generations which come much later after these events are able to be transported back in time and shown the reality that was. Media libraries and archives constitute moveable objects in the form of images, print and non-print news resources which should be securely located in stable databases. At a time of increasing need for media freedom, governments need to recognise them for their unique qualities and resources.

Local communities, leaders and institutions should cooperate on efforts to preserve these resources as important to cultural heritage tools. This partnership approach should involve collaborative planning and encourage residents, government agencies, non-profit groups and private partners to agree on and prioritize programs and projects that recognise, preserve and celebrate the media for its role in national development and recording of history. Media archives and libraries should be viewed as cultural heritage establishments and be held in as high esteem as national archives and museums.

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