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Museums 2.0: Advancing Decolonizing and Participatory Approaches to Developing Museum Websites in the Global South

What is this research about?

Web 2.0 is a term used to describe interactive online technologies and designs. It enhances creativity, information sharing, and collaboration among users through structures of participation. Web 1.0 limits user interaction to pointing and clicking and not much more. The shift to Web 2.0 requires a re-thinking of online and museum learning methods.

Museums in the Global North (developed countries) are advancing rapidly in Web 2.0 development. Web 2.0 is used to represent themselves and educate their audiences. But more collaborative opportunities must be made available to museums in the Global South (developing countries). The Uganda National Museum (UNM) serves as a case study to consider a decolonized/anti-colonial approach for museums. Without collaboration, Web 2.0 tools can implement strategies that are specific to Global North contexts. Thus, there is a risk that digital spaces will not fit the distinct needs or resources of the Global South. How can the Global South develop an online model for museum representation and education? And how can a participation-based museum web presence bring about current and meaningful relations with its publics?

What did the researchers do?

The researchers aligned themselves with the Uganda National Culture Policy of 2006. They noted key objectives from this policy, such as:

What you need to know:

Web 2.0 and its participation-based culture offer rich possibilities for developing websites with museums in the Global South museum. It also offers spaces for virtual learning, and representing and expressing one's culture. However, technology and partnerships between the Global North and South have a recolonizing potential. Decybercolonizing viewpoints and methods are needed to create web spaces for Global South museums. They bring attention to virtual spaces that can be colonized by the ideologies of the Global North.

- Shaping the project's concepts and decision-making from Ugandan perspectives.
- Promoting a decolonized approach that facilitates and preserves Uganda's oral culture.

In 2009, the UNM invited researchers to assist in developing a pilot website for the museum. It is an opportunity to introduce Web 2.0 developments into the UNM. It will also address electronic, mobile, and social media representation and learning.

The UNM website will include Web 2.0 in culturally appropriate forms, and with sustainable technology. It will also use Web 2.0 to support the sharing of oral culture related to Ugandan history, culture, and its artifacts.

The project includes and will be led by Indigenous knowledges, languages, and customs. For example, Ugandan participants completed in-depth interviews

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on their life experiences using Web 2.0 technologies. Follow-up face-to-face interviews were also held when possible.

What did the researchers find?

The project highlights the challenge of building a Museum 2.0 in a Global South context. Many of these institutions face pragmatic challenges. For example, one issue for these museums is to sustain and fund technology for Web 2.0. They must also contend with the recolonizing potential that comes with the use of technology and relations between the Global North and South.

Web 2.0 and social media spaces can also become colonizing tools. It is important for collaborators to be aware of this as they interact in virtual spaces. Decycbercolonization may be a useful approach for Global South museums. It enables them to self-determine and develop what they envision as important for the museum, their patrons, and their communities.

From conceptualizing the UNM site, the researchers present 'four core principles' of the project:

1. Create a Web 2.0 social media structure that is Ugandan-based and Ugandan-directed.
2. Develop goals, methods, and alliances that decolonize.
3. Offer valuable learning opportunities to site visitors.
4. The local context of the museum will determine its possibilities.

How can you use this research?

These principles offer a model for developing a web presence for other Global South museums.

Researchers will learn:

• To engage in a participatory culture that is empowering; It connects active participants with each other to form a community of learning.
• To use a critical, anti-colonial perspective for technology and design. This is needed especially in non-Western contexts.

• To incorporate Indigenous knowledges, customs, and languages into a research framework. This may help resist recolonizing virtual spaces.

About the Researchers

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