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The Igorot Peoples of the Philippines: Preservation of Culture Through Social Media
Platforms

Introduction

The issue of disappearing cultural diversity has been overwhelming with recent globalization trends. The Igorot Indigenous groups of the Philippines have been particularly impacted by this progression. The Igorot people have displayed an unlikely solution to aid in preservation of their Indigenous culture in a social media platform: Facebook. Through utilizing Facebook groups, the Igorot have shown that social media can serve as an advantageous tool for perpetuating their traditional values. Though social media is potentially seen as incongruent with traditional Indigenous cultures, it offers opportunity for Igorot cultural preservation through platforms that are interactive and relatable to all tribal members.

Background

The term “Igorot” refers to the various indigenous groups who live in the mountainous areas of northern Luzon in the Philippines, shown below.



Map of the Philippines". *Mad Bookings*. Web. 25 Feb 2017.

The seven Tribes that consider themselves consider themselves Igorot include the Tinggian, Isneg, Kalinga, Kankanaey, Ibaloy, Ifugao, and Bontok (Villanueva 2013). “Igorot” is an umbrella term referring to the various indigenous groups in the mountainous areas of northern Luzon in the Philippines. These tribes consider themselves bonded through sharing similar cultural traditions and values, an outcome of being geographically isolated from the rest of the Philippines by the mountainous region of Northern Luzon. With 1.8 million hectares, this Cordillera region is home to 1.3 million Indigenous Igorot people (Tartlet 2001). Most Igorot people live in high alpine zones with pine forests or live in the tropical foothills. During the Spanish Conquest, the Igorot fought assimilation, attempting to foster their rich and diverse culture. (The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica 2015). Spanish missionaries introduced reading and writing to

Filipino people, including the Igorot, in the 19th century. Furthermore, in the early 1900s during America's occupation of the Philippines, the American Bureau of Education had several schools established which taught Western science and ideals (Abayao 2003).

Today, the Philippine Department of Education considers the presence of Western ideals and perspectives in their formal education system as a measure of progress. In 1901, the Philippine Commission created a public school system that brought 600 teachers from the United States. The dominating US influence throughout the Philippines has been prevalent in the last century (Abayao 2003). Contrasting these ideals, the Igorot have been able to conserve some of their own learning systems. At a young age, children are taught woodcarving, weaving, and genealogy mapping. Local literature and oral tradition also are meant to play a large role in a child's life.

Many Igorot say that the formal education system impairs indigenous tradition. Siaka Kroma, an Igorot who specializes in Indigenous learning systems, explains, "First, [the Philippine formal education system] fails to put forward indigenous knowledge as worthwhile subject matter for the learning process. Second, it limits the exposure of children to the local knowledge of their communities. Third, it creates attitudes in children that militate against the acquisition of local knowledge" (Abayao 2003).

The Igorot are also taught a special dependence on the environment. A spiritual connection and respect is present in the mountainous regions of Luzon. Their dependence on their surrounding environment is also clear through wet rice farming for their sustenance (Revelle 1992). Surrounded by steep mountain slopes, they have created a sustainable agricultural system through terraces on the slopes of Luzon. An important social system has been constructed surrounding different slopes. Different villages have

been established to build new terraces, plow and harvest the crops, as well as install irrigation canals (Revelle 1992).

Other ideals of the Igorot people is explained by Serfain L. Ngohayon, president of Ifugao State University of Luzon as well as a member of the Igorot peoples. During a keynote speech he gave to a graduating class in 2011, he was able to describe Igorot values through the acronym I-G-O-R-O-T. “I” stands for Ingenuity. “G” stands for Goodness. “O” stands for Open-mindedness. “R” stands for Resilience. “O” stands for Originality. “T” stands for Truthfulness (Ngohayon 2011).

Though the Igorot people are resilient, all citizens of the globe are susceptible to the impacts of globalization. Many non-Indigenous citizens think of Indigenous cultures or Native Americans as simply a thing of the past and no longer relevant in today’s modern societies. Though this is blatantly incorrect, Indigenous Knowledge is challenged to survive in today’s societies, fighting assimilation and oppression. Ngohayon relays this apprehension regarding his culture’s resiliency and perseverance. He is concerned today’s Igorot children lack hardships he experienced in his life, such as hiking, walking miles for water, manual of pounding rice, etc. These activities taught his generation as well as those before him independence and resiliency (Ngohayon 2011). He fears Igorot children lack these valuable lessons because of modern technology and privileges. He concludes with the notion that good cultural education is key for Igorot children. Ngohayon elaborates as he says that education of Igorot values is “definitely important this time when the young Igorots, our children, are embracing the world of hi-technology. Hi-technology can either build or break them” (Ngohayon 2011).

A large part of modern technology, social media, has revealed itself to be a “builder” in Igorot education while being able to raise awareness of Igorot culture in several cases.

Policies affecting Igorot Facebook Group and Social Media

Preservation of culture, value of tradition, and education of Igorot Indigenous Knowledge is highly important in today’s globalized world. For example, foreign countries are vying to mine the Igorot Cordillera Region, which sits on a rich mineral belt including gold, copper, and manganese. The Philippine government encourages foreign investment and hopes to exploit the wealth in these natural resources through the Mining Act of 1995. The Mining Act of 1995 gives transnational corporation one hundred percent foreign ownership which translates to full water, lumber, *and* eviction rights on the land they are utilizing.

Consequently, the Igorot people have created the Cordillera People’s Alliance (CPA), a grassroots organization to fight the Philippine government encouragement of foreign miners to invade their ancestral lands (Tartlet 2001). They have been determined to raise awareness through public information platforms, including a Facebook group for CPA. “Cordillera People’s Alliance” Facebook group gives updates on the issue as well as the importance of uniting Igorot peoples. Social media technology can aid in uniting and revitalizing Indigenous peoples while raising awareness of relevant issues. An Igorot community member, Joan Carling, expresses her unrest regarding the mining project: “We are not against development per se. We are against a development that is being imposed on us and is not consistent with the practice of our indigenous way of life, which is more sustainable and meets the needs of the people” (Tartlet 2001). The CPA

Facebook group has raised awareness regarding the Philippine government's priorities concerning the mining project and how this project has potential to encroach on indigenous land rights and resources. Awareness through social media can lead to valid resistance and potential stoppage of the project.

Analysis

Facebook can be used to revitalize as well as preserve the culture of the Igorot peoples while being able to relate to younger generations. Younger generations can appreciate and be more drawn to their cultural history if displayed in a more "attractive" and familiar way through social media. If properly executed, today's technology can serve as an education platform as well as a tool to unite a culture, playing to the Igorot's advantage.

A study done in 2017 demonstrates this issue for the Igorot through surveying twenty Igorot member Facebook groups. The researchers wanted to see the impact of the preservation of Indigenous culture through the use of social media and see if the use of Facebook groups were effective in revitalizing and inciting participation from members of the Igorot peoples. Through communication, photos, promotion, as well as education and awareness of traditions and ceremonies, the researchers found that many Igorot peoples considered Facebook to be an effective vehicle of preservation and revitalization (Botangen 2017). An online questionnaire survey was done with Igorot migrants who claim to be members of an Igorot Facebook group. It concluded that 50% of members considered the Facebook groups to have a "high" or "very high" influence of revitalizing their personal Indigenous attributes. 57% concluded that the Facebook groups contributed to their education of their Igorot culture at a "high" or "very high" level (Botangen 2017).

The “Administrators” or creators of these Facebook groups and pages include diverse Igorot community members that have decided to adopt a leadership role in the preservation of their culture. In a group called “The Igorot Clan”, a post displayed was titled “The 6 Most Common Misconception about Igorot Culture”. This post clarified false beliefs or stereotypes regarding the Indigenous Igorot. The post incited comments from community members demonstrating a united front, whether it be pride in their culture or frustration with the stereotypes. Furthermore, Jerry Ibayan, a member of the Igorot Clan simply commented, “Look at what media can do...” (Ibayan 2014). Social media has allowed Igorots to freely communicate with one another about their culture while amplifying their cultural education.

These lessons relay the importance of preserving Indigenous culture in today’s society of rising population rates, climate change, and over-consumption. Educating younger generations as well as older generations about Indigenous Knowledge can aid in appreciation of the environment, aiding in sustainability. For example, the rice terraces employed by the Igorot as well as the relationship between their mountain slopes and watersheds all interact with each other in their culture. Their sustainable farming practices can be an example to Western societies of how to cultivate sustainable agricultural yields. Lastly, the mountainous environment surrounding the Igorot communities teach members of perseverance as well as strength of character while also serving as a place of safety (Ngohayon 2011).

Today, the world’s globalization trends seem to decrease the resiliency of diverse cultures. An indigenous state of mind highlights the value the environment while

encouraging sustainable use and protection of natural resources. These lessons from Indigenous Knowledge could benefit the globe (Wegner 2012).

Lessons Learned

The lessons learned from the use of Facebook groups in the education and communication of Igorot peoples can be applied to our collaboration concerning the Cultural Education on the Monona Park and Recreation Website with the Ho-Chunk Nation within Monona, Wisconsin. Through employing modern technology, such as social media, the Igorot peoples have been able to preserve and promote their cultural values. The Ho-Chunk could potentially benefit from creating web material in collaboration with the Parks and Recreation Department that promotes their culture, offering accurate information regarding their belief systems, traditions, and current projects.

A website offers a relatable and accessible platform for Ho-Chunk members to learn of their own tradition and culture. An interactive website that is easily navigable is also key. We can work towards relating to and engaging our diverse audience, which will include Native and non-Natives students and educators, through colorful images, video, and an accessible platform. Younger generations and students, key in the preservation of Indigenous culture and tradition, would access and be engaged in an online, attractive platform that serves as an education tool. The Cultural Education on the Monona Park and Recreation Website could potentially raise awareness of the cultural value and importance of the Mounds in Monona. Public education contributes to debunking stereotypes of the Ho-Chunk Nation and other Native Americans in Wisconsin.

Conclusions

Lessons of Igorot's experiences in relation to social media Facebook groups reveal potential benefits modern technology and website platforms can offer to preservation of Indigenous Knowledge. This is relevant due to the issue of disappearing cultural diversity that has been prevalent with recent globalization trends. Though modern technology can often be at fault for disappearing tradition, if employed properly it can offer opportunity for preservation of one's culture as well as the environment.

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