

THE IMPORTANCE OF PRIMARY RESEARCH

By Prof. Manu Ampim

INFORMATION VIRUSES

The emergence of the internet in the 1990s has provided many people with unlimited access to the public and the opportunity to spread information, both true and false. However, most of the information on the internet is unreliable and false, and this is why most university professors do not allow their students to use the net for research projects. On the other hand, the average person in the public uses the internet without any training on how to evaluate the quality and accuracy of sources, and thus they often use the bogus information they find on various websites, or they forward some of the numerous internet hoaxes that are sent to their emails. Almost all internet users are aware of computer viruses that destroy computer systems, but they are far less cautious of the *information viruses* that destroy a person's credibility.

An *information virus* is false information that is shared as a "Did you know?" email, which usually comes from a trusted friend or family member. These scam emails include false promises of money from Bill Gates by simply forwarding the email message to 10 people; a fake poem by Maya Angelou condemning various racists; a fake interview by Serena Williams denigrating Black men; a fake speech by Camille Cosby on the end of voting rights for African Americans; and a fake speech by "Willie Lynch" claiming to have a "fool-proof method" of controlling Black slaves [See: www.TruthorFiction.com].

Many people indicate that they forward these bogus "Did you know?" emails, because they are not sure if the information is true or not, and they would rather pass it along in case the email information is actually true. These *information viruses* are so widespread that it is impossible to calculate the amount of collective time and energy spent by the public on sending and reading these messages. However, people who often send out these email messages are probably not aware that many people on their e-list simply press the 'delete' button when they receive their messages, because they know that it is probably another bogus *information virus* being sent out by the person.

BEYOND THE INTERNET

The 21st century has become the Information Age, as we are constantly bombarded with more information than we can reasonably retain, so we must constantly filter through this data to distinguish fact from fiction. On a daily basis, we have to filter through books, magazines, radio, TV, personal conversations, billboards, emails, letters, etc. Without a reliable filtering and evaluation process it is unlikely that people can determine the accuracy

of information they receive. This is where learning the tools and techniques of primary research methodology come in. Training in *primary (first-hand) research techniques* is one of the most important skill sets that students and others can learn in this Information Age, otherwise a person is doomed to believing in superstition and the widespread false information that is often promoted.

Primary Research is the greatest weapon against the distortion of African culture and history. Cheikh Anta Diop, Chancellor Williams and other pioneers used *primary research* to correct the record on African civilizations. One of the most important needs is for students to develop critical thinking skills and the ability to effectively evaluate information. The prevalence of internet myths, as well as articles and books with bogus information on African civilizations clearly indicate that a large number of people have not been trained to locate and evaluate first-hand documentation. Most people have not been trained to distinguish *first-hand information* from secondary and tertiary levels of information. Unfortunately, they generally assume that a source is reliable as long as it is “true” to them. However, this is not a reliable way to evaluate the quality of information.

The basic question that must always be asked is, “How do you know?” To answer this question requires that we get to the actual source(s) being used. A *source* is the authentic origin of the information, and first-hand research is when we go directly to the source because it is the most accurate form of information. It is well known that the further information gets away from the original source the more inaccurate it becomes.

PRIMARY RESEARCH TRAINING

Receiving training in **primary research methods** is a fundamental skill set that more students in various social science and related fields should undertake, and over the years I have had the opportunity to design and teach a popular research course (non-credit) for students and the general public to:

- Train them in the highest level of investigation: *primary research*;
- Assist them in answering their own questions about the world;
- Teach them how to evaluate the quality and value of information about any historical subject;
- Guide them through skill and capacity building exercises;
- Empower them while engaging in critical dialogue about historical or contemporary matters; and
- Give them the analytical tools to distinguish between online rumors and facts.

Once more students have learned these types of skills, then they will be able to teach and train youth and adults in first-hand research techniques. I start training in *primary research*

methods at the 6th grade level (11-12 years old), and there are elders in their 70s who I have also taught these techniques. They all now have a foundation to understand the difference between historical fact and fiction, and the real from the unreal. *Primary research methodology* training and critical thinking skills should be incorporated in all educational programs for youth, but to accomplish this task the adults must also be trained because as the African proverb instructs, “one who learns teaches.”

Lastly, for the past 29 years I have been learning and utilizing *primary research methods*, and more recently I have been training people in this approach. Not only is *primary research* a weapon against distorting African and world history, but I maintain that it would be a great day if there were a law against the spread of ignorance!

<https://advancingtheresearch.org/product/a-history-of-african-civilizations-manu-ampim-august-revised-2023/>

