

The Effectiveness of Rural Communication Modes on Modern Mass Media

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Abstract

This paper seeks to examine the current place of rural communication modes in existing mass media practices. It was discernable in the introduction that African communication systems are renowned before the invasion of the Europeans who colonized several African nations including Nigeria in the 16th – 17th centuries. The brief literature under which the position of media scholars and researchers were heard showed that several traditional means of communication in Africa, Nigeria in particular subsisted. These modes of communication were identified and the meanings of such patterns of communications revealed that such interactions were not only mass in nature, but they were also very relevant to the present day African societies. Thus, there is the problem of extinction, recognition of their existence and functionality and the foundation or background of their usage in the mass media. The analysis and discussion segments of the paper painted a number of ways in which these traditional modes of mass communication have impacted, or influenced current programme contents in our current mass media. The summary and conclusion advance the relevance of rural **communication modes in today's contemporary mass media production and how they can further be applied in the 21st century radio, television, news papers and social media operations.**

Key Words: Rural Communication Modes, Modern Mass Media,

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Introduction

Rural Nigeria communication is rooted from an African perspective and determined by the communication strategies or patterns that subsist before the African society came in contact with alien entities. Communication is a process by which a source of sender passes information to the receiver. Communication is a process of sharing ideas, information from or between individuals groups and communities. Okunna (1999, p.6) asserts that communication is a complex procedure where the communication process involves an exchange or sharing of information or a message. Communication requires certain basic elements which include the source that must be available to initiate a message. There must be a medium through which the message can be conveyed; the audience who receive **and act upon the message and feedback which is the outcome of the receiver's** response to the message.

This communication process is prevalence to all forms and modes of communication including traditional communication the is admixture of social conventions and practices that have become sharpened and blended into veritable communication modes and systems which almost become standard practices for society (Olulade 1998, p.15). According to Olulade, African rural communication modes whether personal, interpersonal or mass communication involves complex system of interactions, and they pervade all aspects of rural African life (p.16). African rural communication patterns are seen as the most important means by which people in the rural areas communicate among themselves and with others. Such communication systems are dynamics and characterised by multi-channel systems and are multimedia oriented. This explains why their reliance within the context of modern mass media becomes important as a subject of discourse. This paper is determined to prove that despite the advent of the modern mass media in Africa and indeed Nigeria, the use of traditional cues and materials for communication is still very effective,

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common, adaptable, acceptable and recognisable by the audience within the context of modern mass media.

The problem statement therefore, is to determine how this study can unravel the rural communication modes as well as to identify the relevance of these indigenous means of communication to modern mass media contents and programme productions. The modern mass media which include newspapers, radio, television, bill boards, films, sound recordings, photography and the internet are on a daily bases engaged in programming and content productions which serve as messages that are disseminated to the African audiences. It is in the position of this paper to determine if African communication systems are used as part of the programme contents of these modern mass media, and how effective is their usage in the current mass media? These are the research questions that this work attempts to unearth.

Literature Review

The concept of African communication modes can be depicted to mean all forms of traditional or indigenous communication which are rooted and closely knitted with the culture and tradition of the people. This concept is best appreciated if the features of such communication are examined.

African communication systems are easily understood by members of the community who share that mode of communication. As reiterates by Wilson (1982):

Traditional communication modes readily appeal and connect **with the people's language, cultures,** beliefs, myths, legends and customs which enhance effectiveness of communication. They relate to values, norms ethos and culture (Wilson 1982, p.13).

Traditional communication modes are characterised by the use of symbols, values and indigenous institutions, which enhance **messages' effectiveness** just as they augment Nigeria and Africa history and tradition. Studies have also shown

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that traditional communication modes are derived from the cultures, beliefs and the way of life of the African people. Ibagere (1994), thinks along same path when **he assert that** “African communication modes are rooted among the local people and respected by the people, especially in the rural settlements” (p.27). The implication here is that the communication patterns that thrive during the ages in Nigeria and in most African countries heavily rely on indigenous technology. Those crude technologies were used to employ values and symbols that the people identify with, and meanings interpreted from them. It therefore holds that, a review of the concept of African communication modes cannot be exhausted without a review of the concept of culture, since the communication patterns are embedded in the culture, tradition and way of life of the people

Culture

Culture is the totality of the way of life of a people through which they associate and relate with their environment. Culture is a necessity for a healthy society and it is usually established from enlightenment, acquired through education, observation and exposure to the environment. As state by James and Soola (1990): “culture is the belief, custom, tradition, practice and social behaviour of a particular nation or its people” (p.71).

Thus, culture is the pattern of behaviour and thinking that people living in a social group learn, create and share, consequently, the communication value. As assert by Wang and Dissanayake:

Culture distinguishes one human group from another.
People’s culture includes their rules of behaviour,
language, rituals, and arts, style of dress, religion and
economic system which are used in packaging
information or messages to, and among the people
(Wang and Dissanayake 1984, p.11).

Cultures are norms and values of distinctive group, and are highly influenced by the environment which such cultures thrive. Accordingly, traditional or African

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communication modes can be described as those modes of communication that have their roots in the African society. They are unique or original to the African localities as well as to the people. African communication modes or systems have the nomenclature of being referred to rural communication, traditional communication and indigenous communication by various communication scholars. The African communication systems which occupy key aspect of the socio-cultural heritage of the African people, Nigeria as the case may be, have been neglected since the emergence of the modern media. Even when modern media producers and programme executives apply the traditional communication modes in to their programme production or general media programming, the necessary recognition and accolade is not given to them. Hence, the indigenous communication which form major part of contemporary media production is relegated to the background. It is necessary to examine the reason(s) for this neglect.

The Disregard of African Communication Modes

African communication modes are integral part of the socio-cultural heritage of Africans. Every activity of the African people and culture is cantered around one form of communication mode or the other which disseminate information about society, events and people to the inhabitants. But the advent of modern mass media seems to have changed this spectrum. As avows by Ibagere (1994, p.81), civilization, which has brought about modernisation is what has compelled some of the African communication modes to be cannibalized. Ibagere declares that:

The direction of modernization which has tilted strongly in favour of westernization has dislocated almost all the modes in the urban areas and supplanted them with the modern mass media (Ibagere 1994, p. 82).

In agreement with Ibagere, this study has observed that the socio-economic environment has made it difficult to relate to the established modes of communication in traditional African societies, especially in the urban towns and

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cities. For instance, it is no longer possible or very difficult as it may be to use smoke as a means of attracting attention in African cities. Certainly, the kind of attention that smoke could attract in the cities will connote indifferent interpretation. But, because the use of smoke is still very relevant in the rural areas, such modes of communication and many more become of important to this study, particularly when the rural populace still remain the majority in African and for the economic, socio-political and political development of the society to take place, there must be a deliberate way for the modern mass media to communicate to the rural people for the people in the rural areas to decipher such messages that can bring about total development and positive change. The communication modes have continued to be relevant due to the slow pace of development of the African societies, especially in communication and media operations. As a matter of fact the slow pace of development has also impeded the spread of the modern mass media in all ramifications. Thus, where the modern mass media have failed to satisfy the rural people, the traditional modes of communication now, still become the only means of sustaining the information needs of the people.

It suffices to say that Africa is a vast continent that comprises diverse people. These people existed for ages before they came in contact with the Europeans that colonized them. From time immemorial, each African society has its own distinct language and cultural patterns. Within this cultural setting, however, existed well organized systems for sharing information, opinion formation and cultural values. Standing on this position, Moenuka (2008) states that:

A far flung network of communication existed in the under developing African countries before the introduction of print or broadcast media (Moemeka 2008, p. 27).

This study stands to posit that although a rich network of communication channels existed in traditional or in indigenous African societies before the introduction of modern media of communication. This is in tandem with the fact

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that research into local channels of communication is quite recent as African scholars in the past and even up till now have concentrated much of their studies on the Western media of communication such as radio, television, newspapers, and magazines. As a result, literature and studies into the traditional modes of communication in Africa are sketchy. This notwithstanding, the current study is determined to bring to focus various aspects of an indigenous communication modes in Africa and aimed to look at how they still become very relevant to modern mass media and particularly, appreciating the fact that, the slow pace of development has made them the only alternative way of sharing information in the rural areas for both the rural people and modern mass media executives who must communicate positive change and development to the rural people that still account for the majority of the population of Africa.

Theoretical Underpinning

There are some theories in communication, media and development studies that are fundamental to this work. These theories have direct bearing with the work since the study is centred on rural communication and impact on the modern media. The communication value and impact of indigenous communication on television, radio, newspaper, film, etc., have inspired the building of many theories known either as Mass Communication Theories or theories of the press. Among these are theories relevant to the current study such as the Developmental Theory of the Media and the Democratic Participant Theory. What follows is a discussion of each of these theories in relation to the present study.

The Development Communication Theory

This is a theory of the press which holds that the media in developing nations should be used extensively for the development of the society. It is believed that media messages can be packaged in such a manner as to stimulate a systematic socio-economic transformation of the developing nations in the

direction of the model of the industrialized societies. Development Communication Theory of the media favours democratic and grassroots involvement and participatory communication models which give individuals in the society the right to air their views on all issues concerning their development (Daramola 2008, p. 74). This theory has been developed and so expanded to form a major part of communication study in developing countries called Development Communication. In principle, the theory is relevant to this work because the larger percentage of the people in developing society are in the rural areas, and these people need to be deliberately reached using rural media with indigenous modes of communication.

The Democratic Participant Theory

The democratic Participant Theory describes the situation in developed countries where libertarianism has led to media monopolies, where only a few people with the resources own or have access to and control the mass media. Such media monopolies make competition impossible, and therefore, deny the presentation of diverse views and interests in the media (Ndimele & Innocent 2006, p. 272).

This theory, therefore, advocates the discouragement of such monopolies in the media. Television and radio programming that would be significant to development must be pluralistic while allowing for the views and aspirations of all who will be served by such broadcast. Besides, the majority of the people in rural societies should be given a voice and should be allowed to use their traditional modes of communication for receiving and dissemination of messages. The Nigerian society under focus in this study is democratic as it reflects in most Africa countries. The media in the country are pluralistic and indeed, have a very crucial role to play in the human, political and socio-cultural development efforts of the people and society. Therefore, there is no doubt that the democratic participant theory is very relevant to this study, whereby several media organisations would be established using traditional modes of communication to

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disseminate development messages to the rural people who are more in number, largely illiterates, adopt crude technology in doing things and must be strategically reached.

Methodology

This paper was based on content analysis and observational research designs or techniques. The various traditional **means of communication in Nigeria's** local communities were observed over a period of time to identify, classify and ascertain their indigenous communication patterns, as well as meaning that are attributed to such traditional communication. In the same vein, the modern mass media contents, particularly of the broadcast media (radio and television stations) were analysed to determine the extent to which they (modern mass media) have used the traditional communication modes in their programming or programme contents.

Data Presentation and Analysis

The tables above are presented showing the result of data collected from various rural communities in the southern part of Nigeria. The data are presented on tables 1a, 1b and 1c respectively.

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TABLE 1A

RURAL COMMUNICATION APPLICATION TO MODERN MASS MEDIA

| MODES | CLASSIFICATION | STRUCTURE | CONTENT | | | USED BY | RADIO | | TELEVISION | | FILM |
|--|-------------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|--|--|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | FORM | Function | Meaning | | Ray power | Radio Rivers | A I T | N T A | |
| Wooden drum, Bell, Metal gong, Xylophone, Sheke-sheke, Pot drum | Instrument | Idiophones | Non-verbal | Information and entertainment | Death and birth announcement, dance beats for festival, burials, marriages | The Urhobos, Igboos, Yoruba and other Niger Delta ethnic groups | Form part of radio programming including commercial gingles | Used for Signature tunes, News in local languages, languages request | Major features of AIT, Programming e.g. Goge Africa | Adopted as signature tunes in most programmes for station zones: form parts of AM Express | Significant in Nollywood productions with rural setting meant to showcase Nigerian rural culture E.g. Igodo |
| Bamboo rhino, palm frond, sight of rabbit in the day, sight of owl | Symbolism and myth instrument | Symbolism and myth | Non-verbal | | Bad omen, occultist rituals, witch crafting | The Niger Delta people in Delta State Bayelsa Stare and Rivers. | | Signature tunes, News in local languages, language request | Dominant features in AIT programming | Tale by the moonlight: and other programmes on the NTA. | Nollywood films & video for African musicals |
| Songs, stories or tales and choral white calls, camp fire, smoke cannon shots, gun shots | Demonstratives | Musicals and signals | Verbal and non-verbal | Entertainment, information didactic moral lessons, distress call, etc. | Happy communal living, burial of important personality, rescue, festival, carnival | All rural communities in Nigeria and else where in Africa. | Form part of signature tune for most programs on Ray power | Form part of signature tune for most programme on Radio Rivers. Constitute programmes for rural audiences. Programmes as news in local languages, local request features and special programmes | Dominant features in TV soap opera and other tv drama, commercials. | Tales By Moon light: Nigerian Movie today: signature tunes for most programmes. | Nollywood films & video for African musicals |

Data Source: Kediehor 2018.

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TABLE 1B

| MODES | CLASSIFICATION | STRUCTURE | CONTENT | | | USED BY | RADIO | | TELEVISION | | FILM |
|--|-----------------------|-------------------|-----------------------|--|--|---|--------------------------|--|--|--|--|
| | | | FORM | Function | Meaning | | Ray power | Radio Rivers | A I T | N T A | |
| Ashes, white dove, kola nut, clay, beads, feathers, beads, flag | Objecticals | Iconographies | Non-verbal | Means of identification: sign of peace amongst the people: show of affluence or royalty and creativity | Conveying peace affluence, settlement of dispute, royalty titled personality and local art and sculpture | The Niger Delta people in Delta State Bayelsa State and Rivers | | Used for Signature tunes, News in local languages, languages request | Dominant features in TV soap opera and other tv drama, commercials | Tales by the moon light, Nigerian Movie today, signature tunes for most programmes | Nollywood films & video for African musicals |
| Foods, time & season of occurrence, edibles, market days, moon light | Symbolism | Mundane | Non-verbal | Identifications: to signify time of events, place of events and significant of event. | Special occasions, planting season, harvest season, time for folk telling, rural location | The Igbo's, the Yoruba's, the Urhobos, the Efik, the Ibibio and Bini people of Southern Nigeria. | Features of radio drama. | Used for Signature tunes, News in local languages, languages request | Dominant features in TV soap opera and other tv drama, commercials | Tales by the moon light | Nollywood films & video for African musicals |
| Ritual, libation, vision, horoscope, unopened palm frond, palm stems, shrines, altars. | Enchantory/divinatory | Super natural | Verbal & non-verbal | Witch crafting, juju, occult and traditional religion | Communication and brotherhood, solidarity | All rural communities in South-South Nigeria. | Features of radio drama. | Used for Signature tunes, News in local languages, | Dominant features in TV soap opera and other tv drama, commercials | Nigerian movie today, tales by moonlight | Nollywood films & video for African musicals |
| White cloth, red cloth, black cloth, red feather, red hat | Visual | Graphic colour | Non-verbal | Messaging | Messages of peace, war, conflicts, identity. | The Igbo's Bini's, Yoruba's, Urhobos. | | | Dominant features in TV soap opera and other tv drama, commercials | Dominant features in TV soap opera and other tv drama, commercials | Nollywood films & video for African musicals |
| Dressing, Hair-do, Marriage, Chieftaincy/coronation, Festivals, Masquerades | Institutional | Appearance/social | Verbal and Non-verbal | Status or class: feasting, mourning. | Personality, status, community, identity and authority, power | The Igbos The Yorubas The Urhobos, The Binis Itsekiris of Southern Nigeria. | | | Dominant features in TV soap opera and other tv drama, commercials | Dominant features in TV soap opera and other tv drama, commercials | Nollywood films & video for African musicals |

Data Analysis and Discussion of Findings

From the data above, it can be discerned that traditional communication in Nigeria, and indeed Africa are properly coordinated and classified according to modes of communication, classification, content form, structure, function and meaning. It is also interesting to identify the particular people that use what kind of communication mode, and for what purpose. For instance, food as a mode of communication is common among the Nigerian people to identify their origin and the mood of a special event as marriage. Among the Urhobos in Delta State, a marriage ceremony cannot be completed without the presence of Ogwoh Soup and Stanch. The market day is critical to the Igbo people and kept sacred. It defines the time for some special events.

Discussion of Findings

Findings revealed that African communication systems are prevalence in the modern mass media. A content analysis carried out by this study showed that radio and television stations in Nigeria used a great deal of African communication modes in their programming and programme contents. It is so obvious that the signature tunes of most programmes are sounds and beats from African communication. One of the stations surveyed has as its slogan or motor; “Sharing the African Experience”. **Everything about the modern mass media** in Africa or Nigeria is centred on African or traditional communication. Thus, this study is in agreement with Opubor that harps on the diffusion innovation theory to say that it is necessary to integrate the indigenous communication modes with the modern mass media contents to enhance effectiveness and development.

The study also revealed that African music scene and Nollywood productions which are extension of the mass media, adopt in their film and musical productions traditional communication modes. This achievement has greatly helped to propagate African culture in Europe, America and the Latin world. As a matter of **fact, Nollywood films classified as “Rural” are deeply rooted from** traditional African communication modes.

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In Nigeria today, most radio stations are imbibing culture of community radio and rural broadcasting, such that there is the presence of rural radio in most modern radio stations, as the broadcast stations investigated, **programmes such as “News in Local Languages, “Language Request” and “African Beats** are common features or programmes on radio.

The Use of Rural Communication in Modern Mass Media

From the forgoing discussion, and findings, it can be deduced that messages are received by intended audience with meaning interpretation embedded in them by the source. Messages are internalised and always in the memory of the receiver. This explains why traditional modes of communication are value oriented and culture friendly. Rural communication is also able to pressure culture. Modern mass media can seize this advantage of traditional means of communication to put together their messages that are always depended on re-enforcement before they can make impact. Modern mass media contents that are wrapped up with traditional means of communication can be easier to decipher to turn out the necessary results.

Again, rural modes of communication are ever-present because they reach many rural people who are not reached by even the most widespread exogenous channels. Traditional modes of communication must always be considered in designing modern mass media messages. Rural communication can be used effectively to convey messages to people out of the reach of exogenous channels.

Traditional modes of communication are quite credible. Messages from radio, television, newspapers, magazines, the internet, etc., are always taken with a pinch of salt. Sometimes the reports from such modern media are greeted with hostility. However, traditional channels of communication are familiar to the people, especially the rural audiences. Hence, rural communication channels are more credible.

As already mentioned, elsewhere in this paper, development programmes can utilize traditional communication channels for the collection and dissemination of development information. Data on the local situation and responses to outside

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initiatives can be gathered by attending village or social groups meetings and interviewing local people. In the same vein, participatory development and sustainable programmes can be promoted through rural communication channels. All that may be needed by exogenous media is re-enactment or vice versa. This position is in agreement with the findings of Cornwall and Welbourn, (2000) that revealed that exogenous communication transfer knowledge, while indigenous communication promote indigenous based development. Certainly, this configuration is expected to encourage a bottom-top approach to development where traditional channels of communication are employed by the rural people to communicate their problems and development challenges to the modern mass media that will in turn, take such issues to the top for policy makers and development authorities to implement.

Concluding Remarks

It is necessary to conclude with the need to emphasise that traditional communication modes are essential to modern mass media. The characteristics of the indigenous modes of communication can be examined more critically alongside the exogenous media such as television, radio and film to explore areas of common grounds and where they can interface. Any communication mode with credibility question is not valuable and therefore cannot be successful. The source of the value in African communication can easily be traced to the fact that it is mostly interpersonal and culture friendly. That explains why, through the indigenous communication cultures have been preserved. The need to continue this preservation of African or Nigerian culture through the modern mass media such as radio, television, newspapers, films and so on can only be effective with the proper synergy and usage of the indigenous communication modes side by side the modern communication modes in their programming including programme content that has to do with function and meaning, as well as programme form and structure.

Recommendation

Following the findings of this study, this work therefore recommends that:

1. The National Broadcasting Commission should through regulation encourage the use of traditional communication modes and should ensure strict compliance of sixty-four percent local content that will promote indigenous programmes which in turn will use the indigenous communication modes.
2. In a bid to win or get greater proportion of the rural audience to view or hear their programmes, modern mass media should encourage the use of traditional means of communication in their programming. Especially when statistics have shown that majority of the people in Africa or Nigeria are in the rural areas and need to be strategically and deliberately reached.

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