
**Historical Study of Indigenous Communication Systems among
the Ibadan People of Oyo State Prior To the Emergence of Mass
Mediated Channels of Communication**

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Abstract

This study sought to expose the indigenous communication media used by the Ibadan people of Yoruba land, in the South Western part of Nigeria, before the emergence of the technology-assisted or mass media of communication. With the use of the historiographical method of mass communication research, it was gathered in the study that a number of traditional and indigenous media of information dissemination and exchanging ideas, for mutual understanding, were formed and used by the Ibadan people effectively, thereby necessitating a renewed call for an integrated use of indigenous communication systems with the modern mass media, in every attempt to utilize the process of communication for bringing about rural development specifically, and national development at large.

Introduction

No society can exist without communication. Communication is life and life is indeed communication. People interact with one another for survival and these interactions are made possible by communication. MacBride and others (1981) buttress this invaluable role of communication by contending that:

Communication maintains and animates life. It is also the motor and expression of social activity and socialialisation...it creates a common pool of ideas, strengthens the feeling of togetherness through exchange of

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messages and translates thought into action, reflecting every emotion and need from the humblest tasks of human survival to supreme manifestations of creativity or destruction.

This reality must have motivated Akpan, as quoted by Udejaja (1998), to describe communication as the most important human survival skill and, thereafter, he warned "Communicate or perish". No wonder then why primitive societies devised various ways of passing information, beliefs, attitudes, messages and perceptions so that there could be meaningful coexistence and creation of a symbolic environment needed for survival. It would be patently absurd to deny the fact communication is as old as humanity and its origin traceable to creations and evolution of man.

Regardless of the primitive and rudimentary forms they might have taken, some peculiar forms of communication were designed and conceptualized by different people before the advent of modern mass media. The purpose of this paper is to make enquiries into the indigenous communication systems of the Ibadan people, and also an examination of the systems' characteristics, attributions as well as the purposes they served. For now, it would be necessary to take a brief look at the literature including an overview of various conceptualizations about indigenous communication systems.

Literature Review

Ansu-Kweremeh (1998) opines that any study on indigenous communication should begin with the meaning of the term "indigenous". Consequently, he interpreted the term as "that originating from a specific place or culture," implying that anything indigenous needs to be qualified in term of its place or culture of origin. He went further to examine the work of Wang and Dissayanake and explained how they preferred the term "indigenous communication systems" to "indigenous media", so as to avoid what they perceived as "confused usage of the terms "folk media" and "traditional media".

Arising from this, Wang and Dissayanake (1984) recalls Ranganath's categorization of folk media into ritual, historical and traditional as well as utilization believing that folk media should apply mainly to the performing arts which include puppetry, shadow plays, folk drama, folkdance, ballads and storytelling.

As Ansu-Kyeremeh (1998) writes, in the view of Wang and Dissanayake, "traditional media are interpersonal channels and networks of communication". The term indigenous communication systems thus encapsulate folk and traditional media. Jussawala and Hughes (1984) had also been quoted by Ansu-Kweremeh that "indigenous communication systems are channels that are embedded within the traditional mores of a people and contributing significantly to their history and culture". Rather than separating folk from the traditional media in the opinion of Wang and his colleague, Jussawala and Hughes, theorise indigenous communication systems as

...those systems of communication which have relied historically on informal channels to convey information and which obtain their authority from the cultural mores, traditions and customs of the people they serve.

From an African Perspective, Ugboajah (1987) uses the term "Oramedia", "Folk media" "Traditional Media" interchangeably to describe traditional communication modes as "the products of the interplay between a traditional community's customs and conflicts, harmony and strife, cultural convergencies and divergencies, culture-specific tangibles and intangibles, inter-personal relations, symbols and codes and oral traditions." Ansu-Kweremeh had also reviewed the work of another African Scholar, Hachten (1997) who refers to the indigenous types of communication as "information channels of communication".

The literature of traditional communication modes is also replete with instances of their significance and centrality to meaningful co-existence. Ugboajah (1987) believed that indigenous or "oramedia" are

functional and utilitarian and that:

Their most important purpose is to provide teaching and initiation, with the object of imparting traditional aesthetic, historical, technical, social, ethical and religious values...

He further describes oramedia as "providers of legal code of sorts which rests on stories and proverbs generated through the spoken word while they are also legitimized because they are highly distinctive and credible". Also in his words.

Oramedia play roles in the village society such as mobilizing people's awareness of their own history... Thus they tend to unite people and give them cohesion by way of ideas and emotions..

Bame's (1975) study of the educational significance of indigenous media forms had also been documented by Ansu-Kweremeh. The study reflected how "concert-party play" and village discussions groups" served as the most important media source for villagers' awareness about family planning. Another complementary submission to this was given by Fiofor (1975) who according to Ansu-Kweremeh, concludes that the indigenous media deal with situations familiar to listeners through an economically inexpensive method for spreading information. Fiofor submits that the indigenous media have the capability to short-circuit the time span that could be a hindrance to the people who needed the information and provided a more convenient way of communication.

Theoretical Framework: Dependency Theory

Ball-Rakeach and DeFleur's dependency theory as documented by Mc Quail (1987), holds that people depend on the various media for various reasons and these dependencies vary from person to person,

group to group and from culture to culture. According to the propounders of this theory, the media serve a number of functions which explain the rate of societal dependency on them. They assert that media systems differ in the number and information functions they serve.

Based on the assumption of this theory, it may be hypothesized that indigenous communication systems existed to perform some basic functions for people of various cultures, perceptions and values and more importantly, those people depended on the indigenous media for diversified reasons.

Brief History Of Ibadan

According to Smith (1969), some Kingdom rose and fell during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Yoruba land. Some of the Kingdoms were: Oyo, Ijesha, Ekiti, Igbomina, Owo, Ondo, Ketu, Shabe, Ijebu, Egbe and Egbado. Most of these names still identify cultural collectivities. One of these, the Oyo Kingdom grew up to an immense size, dominating the other Kingdom both large and small and it conceived of itself as the equal of the famous historical Kingdom of Benin.

However, as Labinjo (1991) writes, the Oyo empire had no well defined boundaries and little wonder why it kept on acquiring new territories which themselves had disputable frontiers and by the early eighteenth century, it had incorporated a large part of northern Yoruba, east and west of Ogun River and had developed into a highly organized and culturally advanced empire. The acquisition of new territories made the empire too powerful and therefore unpopular-a situation that resulted in internal discussions and conspiracies which undermined the integration of the empire as it had grown too large for effective control of the Chiefs by the Alaafin.

Consequently, according to Labinjo , a revolt against the Alaafin emerged around 1815, led by his Commander-in-Chief of the Imperial

Army, the Are Onakakanfo. It was this crisis that gave birth to Ibadan, which because of its typography, had been used as military camp which attracted a large population of wandering soldiers from all over Yoruba land.

Legends, according to Labinjoh, have it that the Ibadan city was founded by a war Chief of Ife known as Lagelu and the site on which the city was found was earlier known throughout Yoruba land as Igbo Ipara (Ipara Forest) because of rare species of Ipara trees which abounded in that area. The Ipara was popular apparently because its root was valuable to the warriors as it was the principal ingredient in the preparation of a native medicine for toughness in war.

Indigenous Communication Systems Among The Ibadan People

One needs to understand that the various traditional communication techniques common among the people of Ibadan, are as old as the ancient city itself. In the words of an Octogenarian, Pa James Aboderin, "the indigenous communication forms had evolved naturally and grown with the inception of Ibadan as necessitated by the culture, value systems and worldviews of the indigenes". A historical insight into the diverse traditional communication methods prevalent among the Ibadans before the evolution of modern mass media, reveals a number of interesting media forms. A number of traditional methods existed and served as means of disseminating information, ideas, attitudes, perceptions, beliefs and aspirations. They included the following: Town Crying, Oral literature, Masquerading, Tattoling and Scarification, Drama, Drumming and symbolic sound and Non-verbal signals. Each of these methods shall be explained thus, as gathered from sources.

Town Crying

According to Chief Samuel Layiwola Durosaro (Otun Olubadan), the second in command to the Olubadan of Ibadan land, the "Town Crying" method had existed as the oldest form of information dissemination among the Ibadan people basically when there was any important information to be passed across from the traditional ruler or

the indigenes. The information or news in most cases was about issues with great significance and far reaching consequence for the society as a corporate entity. By vivid description, a young lad would be mandated arbitrarily and equipped with a 'gong' which he would strike times without number to alert the people. As he moved from one destination to another, he delivered any messages he had for the community while people would listen attentively. The messages ranged from announcement about communal work for able-bodied men, curfew, war, dangers at the boundaries and people's invitation to the King's palace or square to be addressed by the King. The gong-man could be likened to the modern day programme presenter or newscaster while his gong could be seen as any of the modern media.

Oral Literature

While the modern mass media exist to educate masses among other functions, the Ibadans alike had for long, designed oral literature as a medium of educating the young ones. Through its forms of poetry, storytelling and tales by moonlight, oral literature had been used to teach the young about the value systems, customs and artifacts which basically were similar to those of the other towns and villages in Yoruba land. Ideally, there was a designated place for the exercise and mostly the exercise was taking place any evening the moon was sighted. The enthusiastic children would leave their respective parents' houses to learn from the teacher who was expected to be versed in the culture and customs of the land. Poetries, stories and tales had been used to depict traits and activities regarded as anti-society and alien to the growth of the land.

Masquerading

This was also another form of communication that existed among the people of Ibadan, Masquerades were paraded as "ara orun" (the dead) to convey messages and information from the dead and ancestors to the people. Their messages were treated with sacredness and regarded as voices from the ancestral and supernatural world to mankind. According to Chief Durosaro, the masquerades were also being employed to unveil evil deeds and their perpetrators in the land.

Punishments ranging from severe flogging and even death had been meted to offenders and criminals by the enraged masquerades. Also, there were instances of occasional masquerade outings meant to portray and uphold the beliefs and culture of the land. Some particular families and households were known for masquerading and even till today, a two-week period is being observed for masquerade outings in Ibadan land.

Tattooing and Scarification

The Ibadan people had disseminated information among themselves and most especially to outsiders through tattoo and scarified faces and bodies. Marks on foreskin and face were used to depict commonality of identity, beliefs and ideologies. For remembrance of birthdays, and other important events, dates were inscribed on foreskin as tattoo to make retrieval of what was termed "important information" possible a function being served by the newspaper medium today. Also, scarification of people's faces by making marks was widely used to indicate bonafide membership of the land.

Drama

This was another prevalent traditional medium among the Ibadan people. It was widely used to inform, educate and entertain as similar functions being performed today by the modern mass media. Usually taking place at a centre, the ideals and highly cherished principles and customs were embraced, while unwanted and culturally-alien acts, were portrayed as evils through acting. This medium was attracting a large number of audience because of the humour created by the actors.

Drumming and Symbolic Sounds

The use of talking drums was widely accepted as a means of communication by the Ibadan people. The 'Ayan' (drummer) used to be very skillful while beating the drum and he was not merely making sound with the drum but importantly conveying messages of praises, satire, condemnation, complements and ridicule to people. Interestingly, a symbolic beating of a sacred drum was used as a

method of informing people about the death of the king or any eminent chief in the land. Another important form of announcing a death likened to the modern day newspaper obituary, was 'gunshooting'. A number of symbolic gunshots had been used to signify the death of the king. What would follow was a deep sense of mourning and sorrow. Till the present day, the use of drums is still of paramount importance to the entire Yoruba land.

Non-Verbal Signals

Gestures and eye signals also existed as means of communication especially when for some reasons people did not want to talk. Through gestures and eye signals, messages and information were passed across to the targets who decoded the meaning with no difficulty.

Conclusion

Indeed, it could be inferred from this study that the analysed communication forms are rooted in the social fabrics of every indigenous community. It is clear that the identified communication systems had certain physical attributes and intrinsic qualities which had satisfied the communication needs of the people. Unfortunately in Nigeria, minimal efforts had been made into understanding the application of indigenous communication systems to the achievement of rural and national development objectives. These systems, according to Nwosu (1990), "are conducive systems for mobilizing and directing developmental efforts of the grassroots". It is on this backdrop, policy makers and implementers are enjoined to integrate these systems into their communication strategies directed at heralding the national development needed for enrichment and success.

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