USEFULNESS OF TRADITIONAL NEWSMEN IN DISSEMINATING INFORMATION IN RURAL COMMUNITIES IMPLICATIONS FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract
This paper examines the usefulness of traditional newsmen in disseminating information to rural communities and its implications for rural development. Relevant literatures from mass communication and other fields of social sciences were reviewed. Among other things, the paper discusses communication for rural development; and the importance of information dissemination to rural development. The paper adopts the facilitative approach in its emphasis on communication as a sine qua non for rural growth and development. The study concludes among other things, that the traditional media are the most effective means of communication at the grass root level and as such, play a vital role in the dissemination of development information on programmes and projects. The study therefore recommends that the government should harmonize modern mass media and traditional media for creation and sustenance of a development.

Keywords: Traditional Newsmen, Rural development, Rural Communities, Information, Information Dissemination.

Introduction
Before the advent of civilization, different people had a system of communication through which they pass information either to individuals, group or mass audience. This system of communication has existed for ages and in different periods, gone through changes to meet the demand of any particular time or group. Though different nations have attained different stages of civilization and modernity, the traditional modes and channels still play important roles in modern societies,(Okunna 1999). The above assertion goes to explain that traditional communication channels (also know as Oramedia) are customized channels adopted by people in specific societies in sharing ideas, meanings, values and information. They are channels that facilitate “two-way interactional communication among people in rural and even in urban setting ” (Nwabueze, 2014, p.16.)

This is why Bittner (1989, p.132) emphasizes that “societies’ survival and growth depend on a number of things, among them is a system of communication”. Communication has prompted peaceful coexistence, understanding and self-awareness among humans; in fact, it is one of the most effective tools employed by governments, groups, organizations and individuals in achieving various goals and objectives. Being part of our everyday lives, communication is as old as humanity and involves the use of signs and symbols to represent thoughts, objects, things, people and places. Traditional channels of communication are part of a people’s culture because they are made up of unique features which identify particular groups. This is why they are regarded as the products of the interplay between a traditional community’s customs and conflicts,
harmony and strife, cultural convergences and divergences, cultures, specifics tangible, interpersonal relations, symbols and codes and moral traditions which include mythology, oral literature, masquerades, rituals, music, dance, costumes and similar abstractions. The role of traditional communication cannot be over emphasized. It is in cognizance of this fact that Agbanu (2013, p. 30) notes that modern media practitioners have in different ways adapted some of the traditional channels into the modern communication system. Agbanu notes that the news in Hausa Language on radio Nigeria is always preceded by a brief recording of a Hausa drummer, clearly highlighting the importance of traditional communication.

According to Bittner (1989), folk media have survived from the earliest of time and made an adjusted transition into the electronic age; they have equally undergone changes of their own, although, they have refined both their basic modes and significance. On how folk of native media have remained relevant even in the face of modernity, Wilson (1987) writes that the traditional media constitute a continuous process of information dissemination, entertainment and education used in societies which have been seriously dislocated by Western culture or other external influences. In Wilson’s opinion, the traditional media have defied all efforts to cannibalize and supplant them. Both the traditional and modern means of communication are quite vast and include all possible ways of attracting attention such as facial expression and gestures, touch, pictures, signs, symbols, music, dance and words both written and unwritten (Oreh, 1984).

Traditional communication can be divided into two major categories which are verbal and non-verbal communication. Under the verbal systems are market place, town crier, visits, the church and the village square while the non-verbal channels include signs, symbolic displays, idiophones, membranophones, aerophones, objectifies, colour schemes and other forms. The verbal communication known as human communication encompasses all spoken words, conversations, folk tales, proverbs, riddles and jokes, songs, town criers, etc. the crux of this study is on the town crier also known as the traditional newsmen.

Understanding The Traditional Newsman
Digile in Christopher (2007) notes that “Announcer technique (traditional newsmen) is down-native both in content and approach” in disseminating messages in the village, the traditional newsmen (interchangeably called the village announcer or the village gong man) stops at the most strategic places, strikes his wooden or metal gong twice or more to draw attention to himself, then market his oral announcement as directed. The effectiveness of the village gong man is mostly realized when he makes his announcement early in the morning or late in the night. This is because some quietness is recorded at these periods. Agbanu (2013, p.41) notes that the town crier is one of the traditional modes of communication which as result of its relevance, has not been eclipsed by modern communication methods rather, it is undergoing transformation. Ugboajah (1985) says that a village gong man “typifies the model communicator who possesses both empathy and culture under-taking of his audience”

The traditional newsmen serves as a link between the leaders and the led and among the people. Because of his closeness to the people and based on his knowledge of the community, the traditional newsmen gives a personal touch to the assignment. The messages quite often achieves high fidelity and credibility (Agbanu 2013, P. 41). One of the good aspects of the traditional newsman is that the audience can stop and ask him questions on his message, an opportunity that the modern mass media cannot directly provide. Thus, Ugboajah (1985) sees the traditional newsmen as a significant village broadcaster who summons the elders for decision making and relays their decision to the village masses for implementation.

Role Of Traditional Newsman In Dissemination Of Information In Rural Communities
The traditional media especially the newsmen, remain relevant to the people even where modern mass media have penetrated the grass root especially when used to influence attitudes, instigate action, promote change (UNESCO, in Ebeze 2002).

These media remain efficacious in getting people, especially those in rural areas to adopt innovations or development related policbes. Communication for rural development also known as development communication thrives on participatory communication which entails a given group of people being part of the decision making process on any development programme being carried out in its interest, part of the execution and an integral element of its sustainability (Christopher, 2007), puts it, knowledge and information are essential for people to respond successfully to the opportunities and challenges of social, economic and technological changes. This is because people’s survival, success and preservation of developments depend largely on information and communication. Every human activity revolves primarily around communication and development is no exception thus, it is important to employ traditional
communication channels while attempting to reach rural dwellers as inability to use accessible channels could amount to noise in communication. Development initiatives cannot succeed without the full participation of those for whom such initiatives are aimed at.

As noted earlier, one of the factors which distinguish the traditional newsmen from the mass and media is its provision for one-on-one question and answer segment even while information passage is still on. Another is its ability to speak to the layman in his language and idioms.

Communication at rural level aim at bring about change and modernity not abolished pre-existing practices for newer ones. Cited in Wilson (2007), Pope Pius XII in his admonition to the Catholic clergy in his acculturation message warns: “let not the gospel on belong introduced into say land destroy or extinguished whatever its people possess that is naturally good, just or beautiful”. In the same vein, let not the advent of mass, new and social media bring an end to the traditional means and channels of communication in Africa. This is because even when information and communication technologies are more sophisticated, heterogeneous and civilized, there still is a limit to what these digital media could do (Nwammuo, 2011). The traditional newsmen can always be relied on for grassroots mobilization. This is partly because of its ability to use verbal and non-verbal means to communicate with everyone deaf, dumb, blind, cripple. Etc. traditional media-particularly the local newsmen are complex and function as part of the socio-political system and as such, their effects are more diverse and far reaching. In line with the foregoing, Ebeze, (2002) and Nwabueze (2014). Capture the following as functions of the traditional media in a democratic government:

- Grassroots mobilization for development, democracy building and national consciousness.
- Provision of news and information for mass empowerment.
- Visible sources for cultural, political, health and programmes that lead to self actualization and subsequent national development.
- Provision of inter-cultural and other communication purpose leading to peace and national unity.
- Encourage participatory democracy at grassroots level since democracy is people oriented.
- Provide entertainment through cultural festivals, music, dance, masquerade and arts that eventually attracts the more civilized world to invest
- Crises management using traditional leaders/rulers and chiefs.
- Innovation diffusion by using languages, objects and signs that natives understand better.

The underlying idea and purpose which these functions serve to fill is national peace, unity and development which start from the local government and spread to the federal level.

Information Dissemination by Traditional Newsmen as a sine qua non for rural development

Information is critical resources for people both in rural and urban areas and the language of development. Communication should portray partnership with the people rather than debase them or put them in inferior positions (Christopher, 2007). It is important that the message be well conceived and delivered in comprehensible forms that adequately involve the participants or audiences, participatory communication is crucial in the development process and in sustaining growth, socio-economic development and the environment. Shaibu in Nwammuo (2011) explains that communication is vital to human existence and it is very difficult to perceive human existence without communication. According to him, communication maintains and animates life. It is the motor and expression of social activity and civilization. Communication also makes art, science, literature and politics possible and comprehensible. Through communication, man avoids the frustrating loneliness of isolation and finds a way of satisfying his needs and wants. Inability to communicate with persons around one, according to McQuail (2005), is like living inside a glass container. One can see what other persons are doing but cannot get through to them.

The fact that a good number of Nigerians still dwell in the rural makes the traditional newsmen reliable channels for mobilizing the masses for development projects at all levels. The traditional newsmen are interpersonal and people-oriented, giving them more advantage as effective communication channels with the realities than mass media (Nwabueze, 2014).

They were not introduced to the people like the modern mass media but they are a part of the people and came into existence when the people themselves started existing as a people in a common society thus, rural dwellers would, for years to come largely depend on them as there is a limit to what the digital media can do. One of the areas which the digital media cannot easily access is grassroots mobilization. This is because such mobilization should come with special features such as a unique language, a one-on-one interactive
session, involvement of well-known and credible sources (opinion leaders) unlike the modern media which can be elitist, vicarious and urban (Ugboajah in Agbanu, 2013).

For development to take place, there has to be massive involvement especially at the individual level. It is through the traditional newsmen, that the government can make its policies known to rural dwellers who have not acquired any formal education. By so doing, they will participate in decision making that will bring about change. This is necessary because developing the society without developing the men in the society amounts to nothing. Traditional cultures demand that certain cultural practices should accompany events with deep cultural import (Wilson, 2007). For instance, announcements of a new yam festival in a typical rural setting can only be made by traditional newsmen or in the market-place. Wilson (Op.Cit), observes that traditional media are local means of communication that remain what essentially sustains the information needs of the population in the rural areas. In favour of the foregoing, Okunna (2002) writes that the best way for development agents to achieve attitude change is through close interaction with members of the target audience, sometimes on one-on-one basis. And traditional newsmen bring one-on-one interaction among rural dwellers, aid grass root mobilization for self actualization, social courses and transparency which subsequently bring about unity, growth and national development at almost no cost.

Conclusion And Recommendations
The role of the traditional newsmen in bringing about development to the community and eventually, the entire nation cannot be over emphasized. They explore their interactive nature to elicit fondness. Nwabueze (2014) underscore them as relevant in contemporary society and as virile tools for exciting, sensitizing and engaging the audiences, especially rural audience in development efforts intended to bring about social and material advancements through their gaining control over their environment. Overtime, traditional newsmen have proved to have equally been effective in bringing a number of modifications which have enhanced information dissemination. But there are constraints that limit their effectiveness. The natural voice of the traditional newsmen cannot carry his message across to everyone in the community. Even when he attempts to walk around the village with his announcement, it is still difficult for those whose homes are a bit far from major roads or paths to hear his voice after hearing the sound of his going. Thus, the advent of the modern town crier with a Public Address System (PAS) mounted on a car or motorcycle rather than the metal or wooden gong serves better. The modern town crier whistles into his PAS to draw attention to himself before spreading his message. From the foregoing, it is important that both traditional and digital mass media co-exist to complement each other and aid better communication for development purposes. Wilson’s (2007) assertion that “the success of any new technology does not really lie in its adoption but on an integrationist theory that the old and new can co-habit and co-function” suffices here. We conclude that though ancient in origin, traditional communication is neither in opposition nor detrimental in operation to modern communication. There is need therefore to adopt new communication systems and blend them into our rural societies while steadfastly holding unto and preserving our traditional communication system. Policy makers and media practitioners must therefore find a formula to preserve the relationship between traditional and modern forms of communication without damaging the traditional ways or obstructing the necessary march towards modernity. Based on this position, the study therefore makes the following recommendations:

- Hybridization which is a marriage of traditional and modern means of communication be encouraged by stakeholders in the communication industry.
- Traditional newsmen need to be incorporated in projects designed to develop rural areas and the people in them.
- Traditional media should be adopted by the government and change/development communicators as effective channels for carrying the people along.
- Development communicators should know the existing traditional media in their target areas and learn how to blend them with modern communication strategies in order to achieve sustainable development.
References


