

## ISSUES IN MODERN AND INDIGENOUS COMMUNICATION MEDIA SYSTEMS CONVERGENCE FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

**Inemesit Akpan Umoren**  
**MA, Mass Communication, Mass Communication Department**  
**Akwa Ibom State Polytechnic, Ikot Osurua, Nigeria**

*E-mail: [inemumoren24@gmail.com](mailto:inemumoren24@gmail.com)*

### ABSTRACT

*There is a correlation between communication and development but such is hinged on the application of the right form(s) of communication to achieve peculiar development needs. This study, therefore, investigated issues in integrating modern (online) media to complement indigenous communication media systems for community development in Nigeria. The work was anchored on three theories; the technological determinism, mediamorphosis and development media theories. The qualitative analytical method was used. The issues were discussed under the areas of availability and access, interactivity, ownership of devices, interpersonal nature of modern (online), media, elimination of geographical distance, accessibility, demassification, speed, text-video, photo-graphics combination and direct reach. The challenges are in the areas of extra-mundane nature of indigenous communication media systems, attachment to tradition, reliance on opinion leaders, cost, inability to operate, illiteracy and power supply. Issues of structure, message, content and personnel have also constituted great challenge to integration. It was concluded that it is possible to integrate modern (online) media to complement indigenous communication media systems, but there are also challenges. The challenges, though very potent, do not invalidate the possibilities for integration.*

**Key Words: Modern (Online) Media, Indigenous Media Systems, Contingencies, Mediamorphosis and Community Development.**

### INTRODUCTION

The centrality of communication to any human endeavour cannot be over emphasized as it is important even in development efforts be it rural or urban. The recognition of the importance of communication in development planning gave rise to the concept of development communication. This arose because communication scholars from the third world wanted a different approach of solving development problems of their societies. Okpoko (2010) defines development communication as making communication, especially mass communication as the focal instrument of achieving reforms in the society. Wilson (2008) cited in Okpoko (2010) defines development Communication as the form of communication which is geared towards the development of man and his society.

In the implementation of development programmes and projects, it has been noted that the role of communication as a mobilizer, catalyst and facilitator has been recognized. They are advocates for the integration of indigenous and modern means of communication in community development efforts.

Although there have been some measures of integrating the modern mass media, especially radio, and indigenous communication media systems such as town crier, drums, etc. in development communication, online or new media are yet to be integrated. This paper, therefore examines issues in integrating new (online) media to complement indigenous communication media systems for development in Nigeria.

This work, therefore, defines modern mass media as those forms of Communication systems alien to Africa nay Nigeria and they include; radio, television magazines, books, films as well as new and online media. Emphasis here is on new and online media. It is also note worthy that indigenous

communication media systems will interchangeably be used herewith traditional modes of communication

## Literature Review

### Indigenous Communication Media Systems

Indigenous communication media have assumed wider meaning today than was previously. Contemporaneously, traditional communication, in some contexts, also refers to traditional means of mass communication which include radio, television, newspaper, magazines, books and film. However, traditional communication is also, and basically used to refer to indigenous communication media systems available in various communities in various cultural settings.

Although this is a relatively new area of study in mass communication, many African scholars over the years have defined communication in various ways. Writing on what constitutes traditional communication, Wilson (1990) notes that traditional Communication is today hybrid from other fields of study, namely, anthropology, history, sociology, linguistics, music, religion, mythology and amalgam of multifarious cultural practices which have become standard. He defines traditional communication as:

*An admixture of social conventions and practices which become sharpened and blended into variable communication modes and systems and indent which have almost become standard practices for society. When viewed from this perspective, traditional communication involves all the social conventions whose chief concerns may not be with communication but with other activities. Traditional communication is perhaps the most important way by which ruralities communicate among themselves and in effect with others (p.280).*

Citing Dobb (1961), Finegan (1970), and Emenegu (1966), Ellah (2013) defines African indigenous communication system as means by which African people Communicated with one another in the primitive era which are passed from one Generation to another. Such communication systems are derived from society's experience and thought over a long period of years. Such communication systems, Ellah, notes, are not substitutes for archaic, barbaric or rudimentary communication systems, rather, they represent traditional and ancient communication system.

For Ugboajah (1972) cited in Ellah (2013), indigenous communication could be called "oral media" which include: mythology, oral literature, proverbs, masquerades, rite of passage and other rituals expressed through oracy, music, dance and drama, use of costume, and material symbol which accompany people from womb to tom and beyond. Another definition of traditional communication is that of Wilson (1987) cited in Onah 2004, p.283) which states that it is "... continuous and persistent process of information dissemination, entertainment and education (and even advertising) used in societies which have been seriously dislocated by Western culture or any other external influence".

Based on the foregoing, one therefore sees indigenous communication media Systems as forms of communication in African (Nigerian) communities before colonization by Western countries, and the emergence of modern media of communication, which are still used for communication in such communities for the purposes of interaction, education and development.

Nwabueze and Nwabueze (2008) define traditional media as "communication channels which reflect a people's culture" (p.247). They note that these media may not be introduced to the people like the modern mass media but are part of the people's culture and contribute greatly in shaping their existence in the society. Further, Uboajah cited in Nwabueze and Nwabueze (2008, p.247) defines traditional media thus:

*The products of interplay between a traditional community's custom and conflicts, harmony and strife, culture specific, tangibles and intangibles interpersonal relations which include mythology, oral literature (poetry, storytelling, proverbs), masquerade, witchcrafts, rite, rituals, music, dance, drama, costumes and similar abstractions and artifacts which encompass a people's factual, symbolic and cosmological existence from birth to death and even beyond.*

Nkala (1990) cited in Nwabueze and Nwabueze (2008) describes traditional Media that exist in any traditional society as conducive systems for mobilizing and directing development efforts of the grassroots. Askitikpe (2008) sees traditional Communication system as a centralized form with the message originating from a center and spreading out like ripples to other wider members of the society. He describes the centre as a very important element in many African philosophies with the belief that it is at the center that very important concepts are developed, ranging from politics to economies.

To Kur (2009), traditional systems of communication refer to admixture of social conventions and practices which have become sharpened and blended in to veritable communication modes and systems. Ansu-Kyeremch (1998) in Kur (2009, p. 21) articulates the various nuances of conception about traditional communication as follows:

*Any form of endogenous communication system, which by virtue of its origin and integration in to a specific culture, serves as a channel for messages in a way and manner that requires the utilization of the values, symbols, institutions, and ethos and the host culture through its unique qualities and attributes.*

Traditional Modes of communication or indigenous communication in Africa are as many as the different African communities. In Nigeria, there are several indigenous communication media systems. Some are used across various communities and ethnic groups while some are peculiar to some communities.

Wilson and Unoh (1991) give a clear picture of the diversity of traditional media in Africa in their description of traditional media in old Calabar. They note that in the old Calabar area as in all other states of the country, there existed several traditional media of communication for several centuries. The only difficulty or problem, as they highlighted, has been the documentation of historical facts and determining exactly when the people started using the different media and from which community a particular medium originated. This lack of knowledge due to what Wilson calls the recency of our historical documentation has led to a lot of half-truths and conjective from both communication histories and pure histories. He asserts that the Cross River and Akwa Ibom States people especially those residents in the Old Calabar Province developed various mass media technologies which today are seen to be common also in other Nigerian cultures, eliciting identical symbols and meaning even if the languages are different.

Wilson and Unoh (1991) identified and classified traditional communication system in old Calabar as instrumental media of communication, iconographic, extra- mundane media of communication, visual and institutional media of communication.

The instrumental media of communication include: idiophones, earphones and membranophones. The instruments under this category are such that when beaten, blown or scratched, produce diverse sounds and messages. Specifically, they include wooden drum, woodblocks, rituals rattle, bell, metal gong, xylophone, handshakes, pot drums, skin drums, whistle, deer horn, ivory tusk and reed pipe.

Under the demonstrative media are music and signal. The iconographic media include objectified and floral communication, incantatory and graphic modes of music and signal. The iconographic media include objectified and floral communication. Incantatory and graphic modes of communication make up the extra-mundane, dressing and other forms of stylization make up the visual media.

Institutional media of communication involves the use of cultural and traditional institutions to communicate symbolically and as extension of the extra-mundane mode of communication. Wilson goes on to explain that these institutions could be social or spiritual. Marriage, and chieftaincy are examples of the social institutions while the spiritual institutions include the shrine, masquerade and others. Some of the modes of communication under the broad classification of instructional media are "eyei", "nnuk enin", "obodom", "nkwong", "ntakrok", "uta obukpong" and 'nkom".

Onah (2004) citing Imoukhude (1991) identifies languages, arts and festivals, music and sounds as broad forms of traditional communication. Wilson (2009) also identifies folkways and spiritual channels. Folkways include the use of folktales, festivals, community theatre, songs and the traditional democratic consultation known as "Odu" among the Akwa Ibom people. Spiritual channels are places of worship where communities worship a supreme being. Such channels could be temples, shrines or philosophical societies.

Orji-Egwu (2012) citing Wilson (1997), Nwodu and Nwonno (2006) and Akponmnie (2010) categorizes traditional media channels into verbal and non-verbal traditional channels of communication. The verbal channels include village square, visits, town criers, age grades, church, traders association, market place and traditional leaders and non-verbal include some of those mentioned earlier as whistle, flute, flowers, leaf, smoke, etc.

Kur (2009) writing about traditional communication system in Tivland avers that these systems are not different from those of many societies in Nigeria, probably Africa.

Kur supports Wilson's (1998) assertion that similarities in traditional systems of communication cut across all over Nigeria, Cameroon, and the West East of Africa with some slight variations in East and South Africa. Thus, all the classes and sub-classes of traditional communication exist in Tivland as well as other states of Nigeria.

### **Online Media(New Media)**

According to the PC magazine, online encyclopedia cited in Asak & Ohiagu (2013), new media refer to the forms of communicating in the digital world, which include publishing on CDs, DVDs and, most significantly, over the internet. It implies that all users obtain the material via desktop and laptop computers, smart phones, tablets, etc. the concept that new method of communicating in the digital world allows smaller groups of people to congregate online and share, sell and swap goods and information. It also allows more people to have a voice in their community and in the world in general.

This last definition makes reference to social media while the first definition related specially to a digital convergence. To Asak & Ohiagu (2013), New Media Technology is digital technology applied to communication or mass communication. Internet blogs, new portals and online news; social media like Facebook, Youtube, Podcast and webcast, and even the short messaging system (SMS) are all new media.

To Amodu (2007) cited in Adedina, Adeniyi & Bolaji (2008), the new Information and Communication Technologies (ITCs) can be grouped as new media. As noted earlier, the new media which mainly refer to computes, smart phones, ordinary phones etc, make use of channels or applications combined to really make the new media new.

Most technologies described as "new media" are digital, often having characteristics of being manipulated, networkable, dense, compressible and interactive. Some examples are the internet, website, computer multimedia, video games, CD-ROMS, DVDs, and Blue rays. New media

do not include television programmes (analog broadcast) feature films, magazines, books or paper-based publications unless they contain technology that enables digital interactivity. Wikipedia, an online encyclopedia, is an example combining internet accessible digital text, images and video with web- links, creative participation of contributors, and interactive feedback of user and formation of a participant community of editors and donors for the benefit of non- community readers. Facebook is an example of social media model in which most users are also participants.

Oliseh (2011, p.130) defines new media as "advancements of old traditional media such as radio, television, newspaper, etc. transformed through technological innovations, digitalization, and convergence". They are also described as technological devices or computer enabled communications technologies used for the acquisition, processing and dissemination of information to a heterogeneous audience regardless of time, space, and distance. These include internet, mobile phones, digital satellite technologies and computers, among others.

Yarhere (2008) notes that information and communication environment has elements of both the old and the new; the conventional and the sophisticated; the analogue and the digital. The conventional or old media include analogue AM and FM radio, VHR and UHF television, the print media, video, cinema, and indigenous communication media. The digital or new cover mobile phones, personal computer, the internet, email and imaging technology, digital audio, video broadcast, and cable television.

Nwabueze and Nwabueze (2008) see the new communication technologies or new media as all forms of modern technologies which facilitate the gathering, processing storage and retrieval of communication content or message in new ways.

Okpoko (2010) points out that the internet has become a vast and growing global network that people use to converse, debate, meet, teach, learn, buy and sell, and share virtually every type of information imaginable, The internet offers opportunities for two – way and horizontal communication opening up now, non-traditional communication channels. Defining new media, Ndonye (2014, p.126) states that "new media refer to those digital media that are interactive, Incorporate two-way communication, and involve some forms of computing, it also refers to one demand access to content anytime, anywhere".

### **Theoretical Framework**

Three theories were considered relevant to this work. They are explained below: Technological Determinism; this theory was formulated by Marshal McLuhan in 1964. The basic premise of this theory is that media bring new perceptual habit while their technologies create new environment. The theory states that technology, especially, the media, decisively, shape how individuals think, feel and act, and how societies organize themselves and operate. Very importantly, the theory states also that the medium determines the content of communication. The theory postulates that the medium has the power to manipulate our perception of the world, as mass communication has become the dominant form of interaction (Asemah, 2011).

Teremayne (1997) cited in Anaeto, Onabajo and Osifeso (2008, p.190) submit that "McLuhan's central notion can be applied to the internet or to particular forms of the World Wide Web, such as online news sites". Also applicable to today's mass media environment and reality in his idea of the "global village", in which electronic communication would break down barriers such as time and distance encountered with traditional mass media.

**Mediamorphosis:** This theory was propounded by Roger Filder in 1997. Mediamorphosis according to Filder (1997) cited in Anaeto; Onabajo and Osifeso (2008) is the transformation of communication media, usually brought about by the complex interplay of perceived needs, competitive, political pleasures, as well as social and technological innovations. The major assumptions of this theory are that existing media are mixed and repurposed in to new

forms. Also, media development today is the convergence of different media industries and digital technology to produce multi media.

Additionally, new media technology has changed the flow of communication from a linear to a three dimensional form of communication. Thus, mass media grow from one way communication to incorporate interactive communication, and interactivity, according to Hoggat (1999) allows feedback to enter the system at every stage of the communication process from acquiring and processing to storing and distribution.

**Development Media Theory:** The theory was propounded by Dennis McQuail in 1987. The major postulation of this theory as summarized by Anacto, Onabajo and Osifeso (2008) are that the media must accept and carry out positive development task in line with national established policy and freedom of the press. Media should be opened to economic and development needs of the society.

Whether old, new or traditional African media, the development media theory is applicable. All forms can be used for development.

### **Issues in Modern and Indigenous Communication Media Systems Convergence for Community Development in Nigeria**

Experts have advocated the use of indigenous communication media systems in communicating development issues in Africa societies. This position is mainly due to the perceived advantage of the face-to-face and interactive nature of indigenous communication media systems.

However, as noted by Anibueze (2012), the unfolding low-political pressures of modernization on both the city and the hinterland of Africa, including Nigeria, have not allowed the conducive environment for the competence of indigenous communication media systems in development. Based on this, he believes that these systems need transformation. Other views favour the integration of other media forms into the communication process for community development in Nigeria.

According to Olise (2011) the emergence of the new media has, without doubt, brought about rapid changes and development in the life of man. This is why some notable Nigerian scholars have advocated a blend of the indigenous communication media systems and modern media in community development communication.

However, eventhough such a blend is desirable, the issue is that, of the possibility of such a blend. The possibilities which Eshett, (2019) has identified in integrating online media to complement traditional modes of communication in rural development in Nigeria: are discussed here within the contexts of the availability and access to network, ownership and usage to online devices, demassification, elimination of geographical distance, speed, direct reach, accessibility of content and text-video-voice photograph – graphics combination features of communication context.

**Availability and access to network:** The major constraints and arguments against the use of mass media particularly, the print media, have been that of availability and access. Online media, especially telephones, are widely available in rural areas today.

**Ownership and usage of mobile phones:** Ownership and usage of mobile Phones are closely linked to availability and access. The distinguishing point is that telephone network may be available through ownership and usage of telephone. Interestingly, communities in Nigeria do have and use mobile phones extensively. This situation provides available platform for online media in development communication in Nigeria. As at March 2016, the number of GSM subscribers in Nigeria according to Nigeria Communication Commission (NCC) stood at 148,745,464 subscribers in a population of 170 million.

**Interactivity:** Online media have as one of the desirable implications the interactive nature. In terms of interactivity, new media technologies have made it possible for receivers of messages to interact with source and get clarifications on developmental issues. This interactivity brings about the correction of serious anomaly that has been plaguing development communication, which has been the inability of development agencies to interact with concerned community member to get feedback. Interactivity is now possible through online media.

**Interpersonal Nature:** It is now possible to use online media to complement community development communication because apart from being able and accessible, online media have the feature of interpersonal communication. This feature creates the face-to-face environment which is a feature of indigenous communication media system. Thus, it is possible to integrate online media to complement indigenous communication media systems for community development in Nigeria.

**Elimination of Geographical Distance:** There is no geographical structure imposed by distance any more. The rural – urban divide has been eliminated. Rural dwellers can be reached through online media just as the urban dwellers are reached.

**Demassification:** While traditional mass media emphasize the large heterogeneous mass audience, online media tilt (move) toward interpersonal even though they also have mass audience. Indigenous communication media systems make use of small "mass" groups. This small grouping feature is available on online media.

**Speed:** Speed is of essence in any form of communication. It is very important to find community dwellers complaining of not having information on time even with the availability of mass media. With online media development messages reach individual members of every community speedily.

**Text-video-voice-photographic-Graphics Combination:** Online media devices such as the mobile phones have the advantage of combining text, with video, voice, photographs and graphics. They can be classified as combination media. On online devices, like voice can be heard, video and pictures seen, and texts read. They combine features of print, electronic and face-to-face communication. These features make online media integration in to community development communication very necessary

**Direct Reach:** It is this feature of direct reach that makes meaningful the other features of interactivity and access. This means that members of a community where development is embarked upon can be reached directly by development agents through online media.

McQuail (2004) summarizes that the new electronic media or online media have so much revolutionary consequences. He notes that there is a continually decreasing sensitivity to distance as well as to cost and continually increasing speed, volume and interactivity in communication. Little John and Foss (2008, P.291) observe that "the second media herald a new period in which interactive technologies and network communication, particularly the internet would transform society."

Online media have loosened the concept of "media" from primary "mass" Communication to a variety of media ranging from very broad to quite personal in scope.

### **Challenges in Modern and Indigenous Communication Media Systems Convergence for community Development in Nigeria**

The integration of modern (online) media to complement indigenous communication media systems for development in Nigeria is not without some challenges. The challenges; Eshett (2019) names, are in the areas of extra-mundane nature of African traditional communication, attachment to tradition, reliance on opinion leaders, cost, inability to operate, illiteracy and power supply as well as content, message, structure and value orientation. These challenges are discussed below:

**Extra-Mundane Nature:** Most often, indigenous communication media system lean heavily on the extra mundane which includes incantation, invocation, libation and animal sacrifice.

The traditional institutions shroud this extra-mundane communication in secrecy. This contrasts sharply with the open and highly accessible nature of modern online media. Thus, there are likely to be challenges in integrating modern (online) media to complement indigenous communication media systems in community development in Nigeria. The traditional elders will resist attempt to make their communication open. The extra-mundane mode of indigenous communication, according to Nwabueze (2012) has been highlighted as a mode to be pursued and maintained.

**Attachment to Tradition:** Attachment to tradition presupposes resistance to changes and innovations. Therefore, traditional elders who manage communication at the rural level will want to continue using the modes of communication best known to them through tradition.

**Reliance of Indigenous Communication Media Systems on Opinion Leaders:**

Messages that do not emanate from opinion leaders in the communities are received with a very high level of suspicion and are likely to be disregarded. This is understood because African societies rely so much on opinion leaders.

One major problem according to Wilson (1989) is that of standard technical vocabulary in the description, analysis and conceptualization of media/channels and processes of the traditional communication systems just as the absence of an appropriate language which can be universally applied in the disruption is also an issue.

**Cost:** The technological devices or online communication are relatively expensive when compared to traditional modes of communication. The community dwellers may not be able to afford the types of mobile phones and computers that give access to online messages and websites.

**Inability to Operate:** Many rural dwellers are not able to operate online media which are in forms of mobile devices or computers. Apart from making and receiving calls, sending and receiving of text messages, many mobile phones users in the rural communities do not know how to access the internet using their mobile devices. This poses a challenge in integrating online media to complement indigenous communication media systems.

**Illiteracy:** This is another major challenge in using online media. Apart from the voice communication that may be in the local language, most messages are available online in English and written forms. Thus, usage of online media requires a good level of literacy. Illiteracy, therefore, is a major challenge.

**Power Supply:** Online media depend, to a very great extent, on power supply to operate, computers require a power source and mobile phones, even though using batteries, need power to recharge the battery or go out of use. Most rural communities in Nigeria are not linked to the national power grid thereby making them depend on generating sets which they can hardly fuel. Using online media in such environment will be difficult and even impossible.

In spite of the foregoing, there still exist issues of content and the message of both, as indigenous media see news differently from the modern media so as the personnel of both. The

indigenous newsman is highly committed and his value for what he does as against the modern, who is formal and paid for his job, thus may not have value for time and other activities he is expected to do. The structures for both may make it difficult to integrate.

### **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

This paper examined issues in modern and indigenous communication media systems convergence for development in Nigeria. The possibilities could be seen in the areas of availability and access, interactivity, ownership of device, interpersonal nature of online media, elimination of geographical distance, accessibility, demassification, speed, text-video- Photographic combination and direct reach.

The challenges are in the areas of the extra-mundane nature of indigenous communication media systems attachment to tradition, reliance on opinion leaders, cost, inability to operate, illiteracy and power supply, content, structure, message, value orientation and lack of standard vocabulary.

From the foregoing, it is very obvious that it is possible to integrate modern (online) media to complement indigenous communication media systems for communication in community development in Nigeria, but there are also challenges.

These challenges, although very potent, do not invalidate the contingencies inherent in the integration.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the study, the following recommendations are made:

- Modern (online) media should be integrated to complement indigenous communication media systems in community development in Nigeria.
- The extra-mundane nature of African traditional communication should be improved by making communication open instead of the secretive and diabolical nature attached to it now.
- Indigenous communication media systems should be taken beyond the present primitive level to meet the current level of modern living. By so doing, people will be favourably disposed to using them for meaningful development.
- Online communication devices such as mobile phones, laptops and desktop computers should be made available by subsidising the cost of mobile devices for rural dwellers such a measure will increase availability and access.
- Rural communities should be linked to the national power grid to solve the problem of power in the rural areas.
- Government should integrate town criers into the information dissemination framework. This can be done by employing town criers and providing them with mobile phones to enable them receive information and communicates same to the community dwellers.
- Government should set up rural information centres manned by rural traditional information officers who should be opinion leaders appointed from the rural areas. This measure will ensure the timely dissemination of development information.

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