

Use of Traditional Modes of Communication in Socio-Political Mobilization of Youths in Khana Local Government Area, Rivers State

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Abstract

This study examined the use of traditional modes of communication for socio-political mobilization of youths in Khana Local Government Area, Rivers State. The study is rooted on the problem that, the use of modern means of communication in Khana to mobilize and sensitize the youths to participate in political activities has not been easy as it has generated youth restiveness and violent killings in Khana. The study therefore aimed to examine the effectiveness of traditional communication for socio-political youth mobilization in Khana. Symbolic interaction and mass mobilization theories were used to anchor the study. The survey research design was adopted while population of the study was 443,102 (derived from 2006 population census using 3.2% projection rate). The sample size of 400 was determined from the populations using Taro Yamane statistical formula and purposive sampling technique was adopted in selecting the respondents. Questionnaire and oral interview were used as instruments for data collection and data were analysed using frequency distribution tables, percentage and charts. Findings from the research showed that Khana Local Government has traditional media of communication that can be used for socio-political mobilization of the youth but these traditional modes of communication have not been effectively used when it comes to the issue of youth socio-political mobilization. Concluding that there are benefits in using traditional modes of communication for socio-political mobilization, the researcher recommended that the traditional media of communication should be elevated by the government rather than neglecting it in favour of the modern media and that the role of town crying which serves as the major source of information dissemination in Khana should not be assigned to only illiterate persons but rather should be extended to enlightened persons in the society to avoid distortion of information. In addition, it was recommended that the town crier should be remunerated by government to encourage effective dissemination of information and mass mobilization among the youths.

Key Words: *Youths, Traditional communication, Socio-political mobilization, Khana, Political participation*

Introduction

There is often an argument, conceptual misperception and misinterpretation surrounding what constitutes traditional communication, arising from the use of traditional as a qualifier in discussing communication systems in Khana. The general notion or implication, also arising from the mix-up is often that of out-dated or perhaps primitive systems of communication. Before the emergence of modern means of communication, people that lived together as families and as clans in villages and towns exhibited some methods of communication among themselves. Chiovolini (2004) affirms this assertion by arguing that before the introduction of the modern means of

communication in Africa, Africans had a solid communication structure known as traditional communication. These methods of communication which were used prior to the advent of the modern means of communication aided cohabitation and socio-political relationship among people in the rural areas. Social relationship and political activism can be attained through effective application of traditional modes of communication which create room for vigorous youths' participation in the political affairs of their geographical territory. This local method of communication is referred to as traditional Communication.

Prior to this modern era of communication, the youths were persuasively mobilized to participate freely in the political activities of their areas without any form of chaos or violence as compared to what is obtainable today. As stated above, the word 'tradition' entails the handing down of information, beliefs or customs from one generation to another. Information passed down from ancient people to the younger generations involves a lot of symbolic meanings the origins of which are linked to the past. Studies have shown that all existing forms of communication originated from the traditional means of communication.

In Khana, it is clear that old traditions are usually displaced by changes yet traditional and modern forms of culture are always in conflict especially in terms of communication systems. This is because the traditional systems of communication in Khana are still in existence. Conflicts often arise in social contexts not just because one form is old and the other new but because, human beings often resist change of any kind that is not in line with their belief system. The fact remains that traditional communication in Khana is a continuous process of information dissemination, entertainment and education used in societies which have not been seriously dislocated by Western culture or any other external influence as in the case of many parts of the world.

In Khana, the socio-political mobilization of the youths cannot be effectively achieved without proper application of effective traditional modes of communication. Several attempts have been used by politicians to factor the youths into their political ambitions but these attempts have often ended up in chaos, blood-shed and innocent killing of people because there has been no proper application of the traditional methods of communication. Ugboajah (1972) states that the traditional modes of communication existed primarily to serve the economic, social, religious and political functions as determined by the leaders at a given time.

According to Nwiedorbu (2011), Kana (as a language) is one of the four languages spoken in Ogoni, particularly in Khana Local Government Area of Rivers State. Khana Local Government Area is situated in Rivers State, South-East Senatorial District. It has its administrative seat in the town of Bori with an area of 560 km² and a population of 443,102 (NPOC 2019 using 3.2% Projection of 2006 census population).

In using traditional modes of communication in mobilizing the youths of Khana for socio-political activities, Gibson and Oberiri (2016) state that traditional communication has been identified as a potent forum for bringing the people together to undertake a cause for the progress of the community. The youths in this respect, require to be properly sensitized in their traditional ways on the issue of how to relate with others when it comes to politics so as to avoid restiveness, chaos and destruction of life and property as it is obtainable today in Khana and other places. It is on this note of youth violence, insensate killing, unlawful destruction of life and property in the name of politics in Khana Local Government Area Rivers State that this work was carried out to see how the proper use of traditional modes of communication in our political system can help to sensitize and mobilize the youths for active participation in political affairs in such a manner as to avoid anarchy.

Statement of the Problem

It is believed that traditional modes of communication play a very significant role in the lives of the rural people. From the traditional means of communication, the modern means of communication derived its existence. In spite of this, little or no effort has been attributed to the traditional modes of communication in the issue of mobilizing the youths for socio-political activities. Worse still, the use of modern means of communication in Khana to mobilize, sensitize and galvanize the youths to participate in political activities has not been effective. The ineffectiveness of communication between traditional heads, government and the youths in the sensitization of the people in political affairs has resulted not only in political apathy but also, sometimes, in cases of violence and anarchy owing to the inadequacy of the traditional methods applied in sensitizing the youths on political participation. The youths in the rural area (Khana) are not properly communicated with using their traditional modes of communication when it comes to political issues.

Based on this lack of proper orientation through traditional methods on the matter of youth political involvement and participation, they see politics as a do-or-die affair with all forms of calamitous behaviour and unlawful use and acquisition of fire arms. This case was also evidenced in the just concluded 2019 election where lives were lost in Khana Local Government Area, other areas of Rivers State and Nigeria as a whole, all in the name of attaining power. Taking a look at all these incidents and death cases recorded in the name of election or politics, it was observed that the youths who were supposed to be properly acquainted with what true democracy entails were the same people used by these power mongers in sheep clothing to commit these atrocities. This research, therefore, sought to investigate the usefulness of traditional modes of communication in socio-politically mobilizing the youths of Khana.

Objective of the Study

The objectives of the study were to:

1. Identify the various traditional communication modes adopted in socio-political mobilization in khana Local Government Area.
2. Find out how effective the use of traditional modes of communication are in socio-political youth mobilization in Khana Local Government Area.
3. Identify the challenges faced in the use of traditional modes of communication in terms of socio-political youth mobilization in Khana Local Government.

Theoretical Framework

The Symbolic Interaction Theory

This theory is attributed to George Mead and Herbert Blummer (1969). Although there is more than one version of symbolic interactionism, in this work Mead-Blummer's perspective of symbolic interactionism is adopted (Blummer, 1969). The theory holds that, communication occurs through the creation of shared significant symbols and that mental event cannot be understood except in the context of social interaction. It further postulates that individuals developed self-concepts through social interaction and that self-concept is constructed through communication and interaction with others.

According to Kunczick (1988) in Folarin (2002), symbolic interaction is a process in the course of which people interpret the symbols used by the interaction partners, and that their actions are based on the representative interpretations and situation of definitions. According to this point of view, society consists of people interacting with one another thereby creating a human society that depends on symbols, from which emanate culture (that is based on symbolic interaction) and social realities. From such symbolic human society, knowledge is passed down to the next generation and cooperation occurs through the ongoing symbolic

communication. So, creating social reality through interactions, meaning, language, and mind creates room for a self-fulfillment which allows people to see the world and the symbols they use within it in a whole new light and create a new understanding of how objects are perceived while making sense of the people in the immediate environments.

This theory is related to the current study in the sense that, the people in the rural communities have a strong attachment to the traditional ways of their people and as such traditional communication cannot be talked about in isolation of traditional symbolism because traditional communication is largely symbolic. Based on this, it can be used to mobilize the people in the rural communities for greater participation.

Conceptual Review

Traditional Communication in African World View

Communication scholars believe that African societies would lose much of their vibrancy and tenacity were it not for the traditional (local, primitive) media and channels. Chiovolini (2004) explains that, before the introduction of the modern means of communication in Africa, Africans had a solid communication structure in place known as traditional or trado-communication. Through various media sub-systems inherent within the traditional communication system, Africans in different rural settings are mobilized to participate in the affairs of their locality.

Kaduna and Daniel (2009), in examining African traditional forms of communication in other spheres of human endeavour, are of the view that existing literature has shown that to influence behavioural change, the art of story-telling serves as a medium to influence young people and cause them to imbibe the moral lesson embedded therein, thereby influencing them to conform to the norms of society. Nissi and Ibrahim (2017) contend that:

African traditional forms of communication (are) conceptualized as a socially constructed and historically transmitted pattern of meanings, representation and interpretations arising from symbols, premises, values, norms, institutions, events, ethos, rules and arts of African ancestors observed, practiced and perpetuated by successors from generation to generations. For instance, observers might get much from the action of people's way of dressing, physical appearance, and body language. So, the receiver must decode the incoming information against the backdrop of their culture and match it with existing knowledge. Always, culture and existing knowledge have impact on encoding, decoding and matching processes. (p.2). It is complex webs of shared meanings...African traditional forms of communication are dynamic and complex as well as the humans that engage in the communication. (p. 6).

In African traditional communication system, meanings in language are specific, indigenous and locally based. It involves a whole lot of storytelling, folksongs, dance, etc. According to Kur (2012), such an art of storytelling is still relevant and vital in the communication framework of African societies. This type of communication is symbolically and culturally bound. Wilson (2005) also discloses that African music is a form of communication in the African societies. Dietz and Olatunji (1965) cited in Wilson (2005), disclose that African music is part of everyday work, religion and ceremonies of all sorts which are an avenue for many tribes.

In such communication systems, meanings in language are specific and local. As a result, communities are closely knit and members are highly dependent on each other for all aspects of life. Moreover, knowledge is passed on orally in which people are shown and told how to

do things. More to that, memory serves as a repository of cultural norms, customs and traditions. Udomisor, Ekpe and Inyang (2014) explain that traditional communication occurs in both verbal and non-verbal forms and takes place at various levels such as intrapersonal, interpersonal, groups and within mass individuals. Traditional communication which is also referred to as indigenous community communication or trado-communication has a unique feature and plays a very significant role in the mobilization of the youths. Some of these roles as identified by the *International Journal of Philosophy and Theology* (2015), Ayoo (2007) and Ikenga-Metuh, (1981) include the following:

1. the power to pave way for socialization which is itself a process and experience that help individuals to become sensitive to the expectations of others and to accept the values of one's family and culture.
2. Provision of common front of knowledge which helps people to operate and interact freely since they are sub-groups that exist in each community, thereby enhancing quick acceptance and development.
3. A good method of traditional communication that creates a fertile ground for the emergence of good and people -oriented development.
4. It is through precise traditional communication methods that the intentions and directions of society programmes can be understood.
5. The traditional methods of communication also help to store up and promote cultural heritage of the people. These cultural futures mobilize and motivate people by disseminating and propagating ideas which promote society pride, solidarity and unity.
6. Through the concrete feedback system, traditional modes of communication promote a debate and discussion forum where the rural dwellers interact with their agents, age grades, chiefs, among others.

Ilo (2011), also states that traditional communication functions transcend the ordinary oracular postulations of Western theorists. That its functions are more diverse and far-reaching than is often admitted. Since the system functions as part of the larger sociopolitical organization, reporting on and criticizing organs within the system, issuing directives from the legitimate, or in some cases titular, head, and providing education in the areas of the norms and mores of the society, stimulating the emotions and generally providing the light to innovations and helping their diffusion, its functions are more diverse and far-reaching than is often admitted. Nevertheless, He also identifies some key functions and characteristics of the traditional communication system stating that traditional communication system helps to mobilize the people at the grassroots level towards community development and national consciousness and that no serious mass-oriented programme ever succeeds without the active involvement of the practitioners within the traditional system. Much of the failure that attends government mass-oriented programmes is traceable to the fact that policy makers at the national level fail to utilize this powerful and credible system.

He also adds that the traditional system serves as a source of cultural, political, health and other educational and enlightenment programmes for the masses leading them towards self-actualization and national development. He further points out that, traditional system of communication functions as a source of entertainment through arts and cultural festivals, musicals and dramatic performances by choral and masquerade groups.

By his opinion, traditional communication gives expression to cultural and other activities of the different parts of a nation. Through festivals, for example, wide aspects of a cultural system are exposed to other cultures and greater understanding and appreciation of differences taking place. Through this, cross-cultural fertilization takes place and the society and mankind in general become better off. From the above evidence, we can say that the traditional system varies from culture to culture. And for traditional communication to be

referred to as effective, the message that emanated from the source must be understood by the receiver in the same manner the source has encoded it. It must mean the same thing to both parties. The effectiveness of traditional communication includes not just words used but also covers several other non-verbal communication skills.

Empirical Review

Ilo (2011) did a study on the “Uses and Impact of Traditional Communication as Effective Tool for Grassroots Mobilization and Development in South-East Nigeria”. The objectives of the study were to:

1. Find out if traditional communication can be used as an effective tool for grassroots mobilization and development;
2. Identify trado-media tools for grassroots mobilization and development;
3. Find out if traditional media can be strategically used to reach the rural populace;
4. Ascertain the possible hindrances to effective utilization of traditional media; and
5. Determine the policies/projects that can be implemented to boost the use of trado-media in the South East Nigeria.

The study under review employed descriptive research procedure in data collection in order to test hypotheses and questions covering the study. The study also adopted survey method which made use of both primary and secondary data source to elicit the necessary information required for the study. The key finding of the study shows that traditional modes of communication can be used for effective grassroots mobilization; that the traditional media tools can as well be used to fostered development in the rural area.

According to him, traditional communication media can be strategically used to reach the rural populace and any message designed for the rural populace that does not share the same frame of reference with the majority of the masses that constitute the target audience before, and for whom the messages are meant, will surely not meet the objective of the project/program as such gesture will amount to exercise in futility. He further expressed that, Constant inclination and dominance of modern communication over traditional modes of communication will adversely affect our traditional and cultural system in such manners that our traditional values, norms and cultural heritage will gradually be erode. He also added that, there are significant hindrances to effective utilization of traditional communication media.

These hindrances include disruption of information, lack of trust on the sender, inability to understand the content of message, inability of sender to relay the message in clear terms and untrained trado-media personnel. So, lack of proper sensitization of the youths as a result of not adequately using their traditional modes of communication can leads to a political devastation and territorial conflict when it comes to socio-political issues.

Ottah and Umar (2017) on *Traditional Media of Communication as Tools for Effective Rural Development: A study of Ibaji Local Government Area of Kogi State* had its objectives as to:

1. Identify the traditional media of communication common among the Ibaji people
2. Ascertain the usefulness and limitation of those media in the community
3. Ascertain the extent to which traditional communication system in Ibaji has aided rural development in the area
4. Determine whether the traditional means of communication in Ibaji are more accessible to the people than modern means of communication.

The study under review from its findings, harmonized the usefulness of traditional media in a community which state that:

- i. The town crier serves as a link between the leaders and the led.
- ii. The traditional communication serves as a means of information, education and entertainment to the people.

- iii. The media brings about peace, unity and tranquility among the people of Ibaji as well as other neighboring communities.
- iv. Traditional media serves as a form of corrective measures.
- v. They defend and protect the community against imminent dangers from other neighboring villages/town
- vi. The traditional communication system brings about mutual understanding and relationship between the people of Ibaji as well as other communities closer to them.

Gibson and Oberiri (2016) on *Bwatiye Traditional Communication Systems*, the central objective of the study was to examine how the Bwatiye traditional communication can be used in enhancing participatory democracy among the Bwatiye rural folks. The study adopted two theories to back-up the research work. These theories includes: Participatory Communication theory and Democratic-Participant theory. The research used survey method and employed in-depth interview and observational approaches to gather data. Random and stratified sampling techniques were employed to select the sample size while descriptive analysis was adopted to analyze data.

The findings showed that the Bwatiye traditional communication is an effective, reliable, credible and effective means for communicating with the Bwatiye people about political issues and participation. The study also recommends that, the town crier system should be improved by adopting the modern means like the public address system where local language and songs should be used to attract the attention of the people in order to relay the information to them. The study also holds that traditional media help the people at all levels to communicate with each other and empower them to recognize important issues and find common grounds for action, and builds a sense of identity and motivation in order to implement their decision. They also identified traditional communication as a potent forum for bringing the people together to undertake a cause for the progress of the community.

METHODOLOGY

The researcher adopted the descriptive survey research design with a total population of 443,102.

The sample size was 354. The purposive sampling technique was adopted in selecting respondents from the three sections that make up Khana Local Government Area. The questionnaire and oral interview were used as instruments for data collection and data was analysed using frequency distribution tables, percentage and chart.

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Research Question 1

What are the various traditional communication modes adopted in socio-political youth mobilization in Khana Local Government Area?

Table 1: Media of traditional communication used in Khana Local Government Area

Medium	Frequency	Percentage
Town crier	209	59.0
Music and dance	10	2.8
Folktales	5	1.4
Town union meeting	56	15.8
Silt-drum and rhino's horn	7	2.1
Small group meeting	15	4.2
Gong	23	6.5
All of the above	29	8.2
Total	354	100

Table 1 shows that the town crier is the most prominent oral medium for youth mobilization in Khana Local Government Area. This means the majority of the respondents see the town crier as the major source of obtaining reliable information or messages in the rural areas.

Research Question 2

Is the use of traditional modes of communication effective in socio-political youth mobilization in Khana Local Government Area?

This question was analysed based on items structured on table 4.7 – 4.8 below:

Table 2: Effectiveness of the use of traditional modes of communication in socio-political youth mobilization in Khana Local Government

Effectiveness	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Highly Effective	27	7.6
Effective	49	13.8
Fairly effective	189	53.5
Not effective	89	25.1
Total	354	100

According to Table 2, 189 respondents representing 53.5% opined that traditional modes of communication for socio-political youth mobilization in Khana Local Government are fairly effective which implies that, it is hardly used effectively for socio-political youth mobilization in Khana Local Government Area.

Research Question 3

What challenges are faced in the use of traditional modes of communication in terms of socio-political youth mobilization in Khana Local Government Area?

Table 3: Poor mobility, language impediment and tiredness on the part of the town crier as causes of message distortion

Extent of agreement	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly agree	173	48.9
Agree	121	34.2
Disagree	37	10.5
Strongly disagree	23	6.4
Total	354	100

Table 3 above indicates that 173 (81.3%) respondents strongly agreed that poor mobility, language impediment and tiredness on the part of the town crier can cause message distortion.

Discussion of Findings

Research Question One: What are the various traditional communication modes adopted in socio-political youth mobilization in Khana Local Government Area?

Finding in this regard showed that music, dance, folktales, meetings and town crier were some of the traditional modes of communication in Khana Local Government Area. However, the town crier was the key medium through which information was disseminated among the people in Khana. The town crier serves as the major source of obtaining reliable information or messages in the rural Area. The majority of the people see the town crier as the mouthpiece of the rural communities. Ilo (2011) avers that traditional communication media like the town crier and village meeting can be used for optimal grassroots mobilization for any form of development. So, for the youths of Khana to be mobilized socio-politically, there must be proper application of the people's traditional modes of communication which are culturally based.

This is because, according to Ifeyiwa and Gideon (2016):

The immediate task of social and political mobilization is how to ensure the agitation of the minds of the citizenry towards participating in government programmes and activities and contributing meaningfully in the realization of the success of major objectives. . .ensuring the people's participation in general elections, especially where there is a growing apathy and cynicism among the electorates. This is why the current effort in Nigeria to bring about a new national awakening may suffer because of lack of mobilizing both human and material resources through existing structures for the physical and environmental challenges the nation is facing (p.77).

However, Nsereka (2013) avers that in the light of the ravages of modernism and its attendant technological invasion, there should be a blend of the traditional and modern forms of communication in order to successfully reach every facet of the society. Nsereka's proposition is in consonance with Okedi (2007) who avers that people respond favourably to those forms of communication they can identify with. Alienating any segment of society through the communication media will therefore be counter-productive to the intended outcome that warranted the initiation of the communication process in the first place.

Research Question Two: Is the use of traditional modes of communication effective in socio-political youth mobilization in Khana Local Government Area? The study found that traditional media can be used to mobilize the youths socio-politically in Khana but that they were utilized only fairly effectively. The implication of this finding tells on the myriad of communication crises that are prevalent in the area. The wrong media are probably used to

reach the people more than the supposed media that should ordinarily be deployed to achieve better results.

According to Winders (1999), the presence or absence of mass social movement (mobilization) combines to influence the degree of mobilization by political parties which is crucial to voter turnout. It therefore follows that the use of the wrong media for socio-political mobilization contributes to the people's inability to effectively participate in the political process in the society. According to Ifenyiwa and Gideon (2016), mobilization involves using good communication strategies in appealing to people in a convincing manner to adopt particular patterns of desirable behaviour. But such a strategy will only be as effective as the right media of communication makes it. In a traditional setting, the language and the medium are the message since interpretation is done on a contextual rather than textual basis alone.

Nwabueze (2005) describes mobilization as "efforts aimed at mustering informed involvement of the target public on an issue that requires their participation" (p.66). Also, Okoro (2005) states that people need to be convinced before they can willingly participate in accomplishing a task. Accordingly, they define mobilization as a term used in a most persuasive and convincing effort at getting people involved in an execution of a project or programme by equipping them with necessary knowledge and attitude required for participating. Nwosu (2003) adds that, "mobilization" increases people's participation in any social change issue or process. Social mobilization as the name implies, suggests a breaking away from old commitments to traditional ways of living, and moving into new situations where new commitments may have to be made (Imoh, 2007).

Research Question Three: What are the challenges faced in the use of traditional modes of communication in terms of socio-political youth mobilization in Khana Local Government?

The basic challenge here is that the African communication system is becoming the victim of neo-colonialism and world media imperialism. Data in this regard have shown that the youths were beginning to cling to modern communication media because the mechanistic style of communicating with the traditional modes of communication is more time-consuming compared to the allures of technological innovations. Poor mobility; language impediment and tiredness on the part of the town crier can cause message distortion.

Ilo (2011) states that traditional communication functions transcend the ordinary oracular postulations of Western theorists and that its functions are more diverse and far-reaching than it is often admitted. Since the system functions as part of the larger socio-political organization, reporting on and criticizing organs within the system, issuing directives from the legitimate, or in some cases, titular head and providing education in the areas of the norms and mores of the society, stimulating the emotions and generally providing the light to innovations and helping their diffusion, its functions are more diverse and far-reaching than are often admitted.

Conclusion

This study has identified the numerous traditional modes of communication in Khana Local Government Area used in socio-political mobilization and how some of these modes of communication are not effectively used socio-politically to mobilize the youths in Khana. It also examined the advantages and challenges faced in using traditional media for Socio-political mobilization of the youth in Khana Local Government Area.

The results of the research, the necessity and essence of using traditional media of communication for socio-political mobilization of the youth in Khana Local Government Area. This affects their level of participation on socio-political matters. It is obvious that the

effectiveness of using traditional modes of communication for socio-political mobilization of the youth can be effective when town criers in the various communities are properly sensitized to the purpose of their function, music and dancing and festivities and when union group meetings and traditional gatherings are geared towards information and education and not mere entertainment.

Recommendations

Based on the findings reached and the conclusion drawn, the researcher recommended that:

1. The traditional media of communication should not be relegated in the rural communities of Khana Local Government Area in preference for the modern media which derived from traditional communication.
2. Traditional modes of communication should be rationalized to suit our modern media of communication in socio-political mobilization by avoiding information distortion. For this reason, purveyors of traditional messages like town-criers should be literate people who can pass information with high fidelity.
3. Challenges like chaos, youth restiveness, political crises, insensate killing and unlawful acquisition of firearms by the youth in Khana Local Government Area which are the remote consequences of inadequate use of traditional modes of communication can be redressed if better attention is given to traditional communication in community mobilization.
4. The town criers which serve as a major traditional channel of information should not only be left in the hands of traditional leaders and chiefs of their respective communities for their incentive and payment but should also be placed on monthly pay roll of government, local or state or charity organizations since the town-criers' act of disseminating information is tedious and time-consuming.

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