

THE RELEVANCE OF INDIGENOUS COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY SYSTEMS TO NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT: GLOBALIZED PERSPECTIVES

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ABSTRACT

Development is fundamentally a dialogic process that transcends the one-way transmission of information from development institutions to the populace. Effective development communication requires the meaningful exchange of ideas, values, and knowledge within societies. This paper examines the relevance of indigenous communication systems alongside modern information and communication technologies (ICTs) in promoting national development within a globalized context. It argues that development outcomes are significantly shaped by the nature, accessibility, and cultural compatibility of communication channels. While globalization and technological advancement have expanded communication possibilities, the uncritical adoption of externally driven communication and information technologies in many developing societies, including Nigeria, has often deepened structural dependency and weakened indigenous knowledge systems. Drawing on existing literature and contextual analysis, the paper demonstrates that indigenous communication systems such as traditional media, community-based information networks, and culturally grounded communication practices remain vital for inclusive participation, social cohesion, and sustainable development. The study advocates the strategic integration of indigenous communication systems with contemporary ICTs as a people-centered approach to achieving context-specific, sustainable national development in an increasingly globalized world.

Keywords: Indigenous communication, ICTs, national development, globalization, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

In the social existence of humankind, communication is inevitable. Berlo (1960) aptly observed that people communicate on many levels, for diverse reasons, with different people, and through multiple channels. Within the communication process, the roles of sender and receiver continually interchange depending on who is speaking and who is listening. Communication therefore serves as the medium through which information capable of stimulating social change is disseminated.

Consequently, communication and information technologies function as powerful purveyors of development-related information capable of instilling realistic goals and fostering a heightened sense of responsibility among citizens in the service of development and progress. Communication is not a one-way process; rather, it enables reciprocal interaction through which the opinions, needs, and contributions of the people on development issues are transmitted to decision-makers and governing authorities.

In this regard, Nwuneli (1986) observed that development cannot be achieved without effective communication. Andrew Mdemofka, who devoted considerable scholarly attention to this area, broadly defined development communication as “the application of the process of communication to the development process,” emphasizing the exchange of ideas to achieve development objectives. Development communication therefore constitutes a vital component of the management process in the planning and implementation of development programmes.

In a broader sense, development communication represents the art and science of applying human communication to the rapid transformation of a nation and its people through the identification and utilization of appropriate expertise that enhances grassroots participation (Mdemofka, 1991). As Weddell (1974) noted, people need to be informed, exposed to new ideas, and socially enlightened. Within this context, communication has historically served as an instrument for socio-cultural diffusion, reorientation, persuasion, and the advancement of national interests—processes that have been significantly facilitated by technological innovation.

THE MASS MEDIA AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The growth of media industries has profoundly influenced the technological and economic structures of modern societies, transforming leisure, education, politics, and marketing processes (Klapper, 1968). The mass media exert considerable influence on the attitudes and behaviours of audiences and perform critical functions that are integral to national development.

Persuasive Function

Persuasive communication refers to the strategic application of communication techniques to influence attitudes and behaviours in order to achieve desired outcomes. It involves the effective packaging of messages to ensure comprehension while simultaneously persuading audiences toward positive attitudinal and behavioural change in line with developmental objectives.

Throughout history, human societies have sought to improve their capacity to receive, process, and transmit information with greater speed, clarity, and diversity. The advancement of media technologies has significantly influenced political activities worldwide. Political propaganda facilitated by communication technologies has reinforced or altered political loyalties, while the globalization of communication has enabled political issues to be discussed and influenced across continents. International media organizations such as CNN, VOA, and the BBC exemplify this transnational reach.

In many political systems, including authoritarian and despotic regimes, opposition groups have exploited communication technologies to mobilize supporters from distant locations. While such practices may undermine national sovereignty, they simultaneously contribute to political awareness and participation often with complex and destabilizing consequences.

Information Dissemination

Communication and information technologies have significantly expanded the scope and efficiency of information dissemination, overcoming the limitations of traditional methods characterized by restricted coverage and limited audience reach. Information dissemination is a crucial factor in fostering mutual understanding within society, a prerequisite for collective action and development planning.

As Lasmoudi (1979) observed, effective information flow is indispensable for achieving mutual understanding and coordinated social action. Advanced information technologies have enabled the mass media to perform this role efficiently, comparable to the surveillance function identified in classical communication theory. Through reporting ongoing events and exposing previously concealed issues, the media transform private concerns into matters of public discourse and political engagement.

Interpretation and Social Mobilization

Beyond dissemination, the mass media interpret events, contextualize issues, and speculate about their implications (Graber, 1974). Lasswell (1967), in *The Structure and Functions of Communication in Society*, emphasized that through these interpretive processes, the media transmit values and orientations that prepare individuals to function within their cultural milieu.

Through interpretation and mobilization, communication technologies have significantly shaped socio-economic, cultural, and political systems at both national and international levels. These transformative processes would not have been possible without technological advancement.

In summary, the level of national development in any society depends largely on the effectiveness of its communication and information systems, which are fundamentally shaped by the nature, type, and level of technology available.

COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY AND DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

Historically, Nigerian societies relied on diverse indigenous and local means of information dissemination, varying across ethnic and cultural groups. However, colonialism and the modernization paradigm introduced Western-oriented communication technologies into Nigeria. By 1987, Nigeria had 23 daily newspapers, 29 weeklies, 54 magazines, 29 radio stations, 32 television stations, and over 25,000 advertising hoardings (Momoh, 1987, cited in Wogu, 2002). In subsequent years, the media landscape expanded considerably, with over 140 newspapers, more than 70 radio stations, and numerous television networks.

Despite this proliferation, several structural challenges including unstable power supply, illiteracy, poverty, ethnic tensions, inadequate infrastructure, corruption, technological

dependency, and reliance on foreign expertise have constrained the capacity of communication technologies to mobilize society effectively for development.

Political instability and authoritarian governance since 1966 further weakened the developmental role of the Nigerian media. Nevertheless, foreign media organizations such as the BBC and VOA have exerted substantial influence on Nigerian political discourse. During the Abacha regime, opposition groups such as NADECO utilized international media platforms to mobilize domestic and international pressure, contributing to political upheaval and regime change.

From socio-economic and cultural perspectives, reliance on foreign communication channels has reinforced Nigeria's dependent status, facilitated capital flight, and intensified external influence over domestic political and economic systems. While these technologies enhanced information flow and transparency, they simultaneously undermined indigenous development alternatives rooted in local realities.

COMMUNICATION, CULTURE, AND GLOBALIZATION

Communication constitutes the lifeblood of any nation and the foundation of human relationships. Through verbal and non-verbal cues including gestures, symbols, music, and visual signs communication facilitates social interaction and collective understanding. The rise of ICTs has intensified global interdependence, reshaping social and economic interactions across national boundaries.

However, a significant proportion of populations in developing countries particularly rural dwellers remain excluded from the benefits of globalization due to poverty and illiteracy. Consequently, modern ICTs remain inaccessible to many, making indigenous communication systems essential for information exchange and participation.

Culture, as Giddens (2001) explains, encompasses learned values, norms, beliefs, and practices shared by members of a society. As culture evolves dynamically over time, indigenous communication systems remain central to sustaining cultural identity and facilitating development within diverse social contexts.

INDIGENOUS COMMUNICATION SYSTEMS

Indigenous communication has been defined by various scholars as culturally embedded systems of information exchange. Wang and Dissanayake (1984) view indigenous communication as folk-based communication deeply rooted in community culture. Similarly, Ansu-Kyeremeh (1998) defines it as an endogenous communication system integrated into specific cultural contexts and reliant on local values, symbols, institutions, and ethos.

Des Wilson identified six major modes of indigenous communication: instrumental, demonstrative, iconographic, extra-mundane, visual, and institutional modes. These include drums, gongs, rituals, symbols, proverbs, masquerades, myths, and traditional institutions that communicate meaning within cultural frameworks.

Myths, legends, names, proverbs, folktales, music, and oral traditions serve as powerful tools for education, socialization, and moral instruction. As Achebe famously stated, proverbs are “the palm oil with which words are eaten,” underscoring their communicative potency in African societies.

INDIGENOUS COMMUNICATION, NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT, AND GLOBALIZATION

Development is a participatory process involving social, economic, and cultural transformation. Rogers (1980) conceptualized development as a broadly participatory process of social change intended to achieve material and social advancement. In Nigeria, where over 70% of the population resides in rural areas (Mabogunje, 1980), excluding indigenous communication systems from development planning undermines national progress.

Globalization, while facilitating global interaction, has marginalized indigenous communication by privileging Western communication paradigms. As Wilson (1998) observed, misconceptions surrounding “traditional” communication often frame it as primitive, overlooking its relevance and adaptability.

Despite these challenges, indigenous communication remains dynamic and culturally resonant. Its integration with modern media such as the use of indigenous music in broadcast programming enhances audience engagement and reinforces cultural identity. Indigenous

communication also plays a crucial role in national integration, as seen in symbolic initiatives such as Nigeria's *WAZOBIA* linguistic concept.

CONCLUSION

This paper conceptualized national development as a people-centered process of social transformation and identified communication as a critical driver of development. While modern communication technologies have expanded information flow and political awareness, their dominance by advanced industrial societies has deepened dependency, weakened indigenous systems, and undermined culturally grounded development initiatives in Nigeria.

Sustainable national development therefore requires the revitalization and integration of indigenous communication systems alongside modern ICTs. Traditional media remain indispensable for cultural preservation, social mobilization, and inclusive participation. No meaningful national development can be achieved without a deep understanding of a people's culture, values, and communication practices.

Consequently, Nigerian development policies should prioritize culturally relevant communication strategies, promote indigenous media content, and support infrastructure that bridges traditional and modern communication systems. Such an approach will strengthen national unity, enhance participatory development, and position Nigeria for meaningful engagement in an increasingly globalized world.

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