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Converging the Old and Modern Communication Systems for African Development

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Abstract

The need to convey development messages in Africa makes it necessary to integrate indigenous, traditional and modern systems of communication. The study examines the role of traditional media in message dissemination and development communication, highlight the areas of strength for modern media as opposed to traditional media, and examine the effectiveness in the convergence of the traditional media and the modern media towards achieving development in Africa. The paper argues that neither the structure and function of traditional and modern communication systems can alone yield effective communication and the much-desired societal development in Africa. It further contends that the information needs of the African continent has become too enormous and complex that an integrated approach using both traditional and modern communication systems has become imperative. To this end, the paper recommends that both the traditional media systems and the modern systems of communication should be blended to generate a hybrid communication system that can facilitate effective communication in the African milieu, as well as innovate more practical ways through which the interface of the two media systems can enhance development communication in Africa.

Introduction

The media serves as interacting tools for community development through their choices of language, genre, channels and communication processes that facilitates accessibility, intelligibility and acceptability of development in Africa.

Convergence is a term used by various academic disciplines to describe and analyze manifold processes of change toward uniformity. Its application in the communication sector is often referred to as media convergence. The quest for a viable medium to convey sustainable development messages in Nigeria propels the need to promote convergence between traditional media and modern communication systems. The traditional and modern media have proved to be useful interacting agents that are utilized through their styles of information production, processing and presentation which makes development messages easily comprehensible and accessible to rural and urban communities in Africa. The integration of traditional and new media platforms also enables the simultaneous and instantaneous spread of information to all African populations, irrespective of their sociocultural and economic background. The strategic implication of media convergence approach facilitates exposure as well as the adoption of innovative ideas for improved human knowledge, attitude and practice.

Interestingly, the operations of modern mass media are currently structured to serve all populations irrespective of age, sex, education, income, religion, residence, race, and language, among others. They have become more inclusive, participatory and consumer-friendly as some are structured to also accommodate less literate, less-privileged and vulnerable members of the society. While modern media platforms disseminate innovative ideas and values using internet-based channels, the messages are transferred to the grassroots though interpersonal channels or traditional media systems like radio, television, newspapers, magazines and books.

Statement of the problem

The media has changed the way humans interact with each other and it has also evolved tremendously over the years. The world is gradually switching from traditional media to new media which is evident in the quality amount of time we spend on social media birthed by technology. Whether it is to communicate through mobile phones or delivering of work through e-mails or enjoying entertainment such as watching television and so on, our lives now seem to revolve around technology.

Every media has its areas of strength and weaknesses. The old media though superior in terms of high response rate, high level of sensorship and quality control, is less intimate, comes with slow feedback mechanisms, not cost effective, requires special training to make programmes, and lacks the sense of community that the modern media offers. The modern media on the other hand is interactive, data-driven, cost-effective, accurate, enjoys global reach, has the quality of virality, mobility and adaptability. However, the modern media lacks the level of trust, credibility and believability that the old media enjoys.

As a result of the inefficiencies that accrues from both the traditional media and the modern media, there is need for the convergence of both media in order to achieve a hybrid communication system capable of fostering development in the African continent.

Objectives of the study
This study seeks to:

- Examine the role of traditional media in message dissemination and development communication.
- Highlight the areas of strength for modern media as opposed to traditional media.
- Examine the effectiveness in the convergence of the traditional media and the modern media towards achieving development in Africa.

Definition of terms
Communication: The exchange of meanings between individuals through a channel, using a common system of symbols.

Media: The communication channels through which messages are disseminated to an individual or mass audience.

Communication Technology: All equipment and programmes that are used to process and communicate information.

Convergence: The coming together of two different entities, or the integration of two or more different technologies in a single device or system.

Modern Media: Channels or content that is easily accessible via many different forms of digital media or internet-based technologies that aids in dissemination and processing of information.

Traditional/Old Media: Any form of mass communication available before the advent of digital media. This includes television, radio, newspapers, books, and magazines.

Development: A state of advancement or growth.

Communication System: A system which describes the information exchange between two points and the processes involved. It includes the sender, message, channel, and receiver.

Review of concepts
The concept of communication is central to all forms of human interactions and endeavours. It is a two-way interactive process, between the sender and receiver which involves the sharing of ideas and experiences (Nwodu, 2007;38). According to Oso (2002:198), communication is an important resource for every society. This is true given that communication, irrespective of the level or setting, carries with it meaningful messages that could lead to healthy exchange of ideas, knowledge, feedings, experience and other factual information (Nwodu, 2007:38).

Communication relates to exchange of facts, opinions or emotions by two or more persons and in organization, it could be words, letters, symbols or messages, in a way that one organization member shares meaning and understanding with another (Akpala, 1990). Koontz and O' Donell (1968) agree that communication is a transfer of information from one person to another but only if the information is understandable by the receiver. It creates a common pool of ideas, strengthens the feeling of togetherness through exchange of messages and translates thought into action. It integrates knowledge, organization and power and runs as a thread, linking the earliest memory of man to his noblest aspiration through constant striving for a better life (Umueri and Galadima, 2008;40).

Media Convergence simply refers to the merging of different types of mass media such as traditional media, print media, broadcast media, new media and the internet, as well as portable and highly interactive technologies through digital media platforms. This results in the combination of the 3Cs, i.e., communication, computing and content as all three are integrated through technology. The most relevant example of media convergence is a smartphone which blends together various media, i.e., print media (e-books, news apps), broadcast media (streaming websites, radio, music apps) as well as new media (the internet) into a single device that performs various functions from calling and texting to photography, videography, gaming and so much more.

The concept of Modern Communications Technology or Internet Communications Technology (ICT) can be defined as anything which allows us to get information, communicate with each other, or have an effect on the environment using electronic or digital equipment. Modern Communication Technology can also refer to any communication device or application encompassing radio, television cellular phones etc, as well as the various services and applications associated with them. Examples are video conferencing and distance learning.

Development is a process that creates growth, progress, positive change or the addition of physical, economic, environmental, social and demographic components. The purpose of development is a rise in the level and quality of life of the population, and the creation or expansion of local regional income and employment opportunities, without damaging the resources of the environment. Development is visible and useful, not necessarily immediately, and includes an aspect of quality change and the creation of conditions for a continuation of that change. The concept of development also connotes improvement in a country's economic and social conditions. More specifically, it refers to improvements in the way of managing an area's natural and human resources. In order to create wealth and improve people's lives.

Theoretical framework
Media Dependency theory
This theory was propounded by Sandra Ball Rokeach and Melvin Defleur in 1976. In their paper titled "A dependency theory of media effects," they observed that in a media dominated world which has been worsened by the growth of the new media, Individuals tend to be dependent on the media that fulfils their needs. This theory according to Lane is based on the uses and gratification theory and is also linked with agenda setting theory. In this case, individuals

especially those at the grassroots will largely depend on traditional media for information as they are exposed to radio which has a wide reach and is very popular with rural dwellers. These ruralites also depend on television and newspapers more than the modern media because some of them do not have access to them, and even where they are available, they may not know how to use them as most of the rural dwellers are not literate.

Development Media Theory

The development media theory was propounded by McQuail in 1987. It holds that the media has a role to play in facilitating the process of development in the developing countries. According to the development media theory, the media are to be used to serve the general good of the nation. The media are seen as agents of economic development and social change in any community. Thus, the theory opines that the media should be used to complement government's efforts by carrying out programmes that will lead to positive behavioural change among the people. This theory finds its relevance in this study as effective dissemination of messages or information capable of fostering development is achieved through the use of potent channels like the old and modern media systems of communication.

Development Communication Theory

This study also has as its theoretical framework the development communication (DEVCOM) theory. Development Communication or Development Support Communication (DSC) is a holistic communication effort, approach or action designed to mobilize people towards active participation in programmes aimed at achieving improved physical, socio-cultural, political and economic development for the benefit of man in society (Nwodu, 2007:18). It is the use of all forms of communication in reporting, publicizing and promotion of development at all levels of a society (Edeani, 1993:30).

Quebral (1985: 27) as cited in Okunna (2002:293) defined development communication as the art and science of human communication applied to the speedy transformation of a country and the mass of its people. The views of development communication scholars show that development communication emphasizes self-reliance, participation and ability to learn (Lent, 1987 Ojobor, 2007).

Coldevin (1987) added wrote that development communication is the systematic utilization of appropriate communication channels and techniques to increase people's participation in development and to inform, motivate and train the rural population, mainly at grassroots level.

According to Nwodu (2007:18), it involves sharing development programme objectives among development agents, communicating development programme objectives to the programme targets, mobilizing development programmes, and evaluating programme strategies, before, during and after programme implementation for purpose of enhancing future programme delivery. This theory is relevant to this study as it facilitates development communication accross both the old and modern media systems for the purpose of societal development.

The role of traditional media in message dissemination and development communication

The traditional media plays an important role in development communication through circulation of knowledge, providing forum for discussion of issues, teach ideas, skills for a better life and create a base of consensus for stability.

In a continent like Africa, the strength of achieving development lies in the ability to create awareness of the developmental project. This is why there is a heavy reliance on the traditional media which is often regarded as a grass root medium. The traditional media which is made up of radio, television, newspapers, magazines and books plays a key role as an institution in the society, and serves as channels through which the media disseminates information to the society.

In addition, the traditional media serves both urban and rural dwellers. However, for the media to play its role successfully in helping to propagate development communication towards achieving sustainable development and since a larger proportion of Africans are rural dwellers, selecting effective channels for transmitting information to them in terms of language use is key. Ekwelie (1980) is of the opinion that the only yardstick for judging the media is through their contribution to national development. This is because they are social institutions which should take on the task of sensitizing and mobilizing the citizenry towards sustainable development.

D. Lerner, while discussing the role of radio as a medium of mass communication maintained that the emergence of radio in different villages and town not only help to educate people, but at the same time bring in consumerism in that place. Consumer arouse wish to own a radio, due to which the people work harder and usher in better standard of living which is a form of development. Radio programmes also help to educate people about different social issues like farming, agriculture, health, small scale industry etc. Radio forums serves as a weapon for radio programme producers to involve people in developmental projects. Discussions on different topics are done, and queries are answered. Similarly, television as a mass medium has a huge appeal to common person. For such reason, television is used in a planned manner to motivate people to participate in developmental programmes. Features, editorials, documentaries and development campaigns are used to create interest in the minds of viewers, and this is achieved through the use of contemporary contents to attract people of all ages.

Overview of the areas of strength for modern communication systems as opposed to the traditional media

Throughout the ages, humans have invented many means of communication, starting from sending signals through the smoke to the phone and e-mail, and the invention of the telegraph in 1831 made a jump in the world of communication which led to the development of the mechanism of interaction between humans, and at the present time digital means of communication have become the most common means of communication which offers the ability to access websites through internet connection, as well as connection to networks that enable people to transfer and exchange information.

Furthermore, modern media systems have also been put to serious use for development communication. New technologies like mobile phones, websites and internet are interactive in nature, and the interactivity, instant feedback and persuasion capability are used to rope in the common person into the process of development. Today government

has different websites and call centres that provide instant information or answers queries to questions of development. The areas of strength for modern means of communication include but not limited to transmission speed which ensures that messages are sent or received within a few seconds. Another is the expansion of coverage areas which covers all parts of the world so that the world has become a small village. Also, the use of modern methods significantly reduces effort and time.

The modern systems of communication as opposed to the traditional media is data-driven, cost-effective, accurate, enjoys global reach, has the quality of virality, mobility and adaptability.

Converging the old and modern communication systems for African development

Traditional media in the context of this study refers to media forms like radio, television, newspaper, magazine, cinema and books which existed before the advent of the internet and the new media. Modern media forms on the other hand refer to all internet-enabled platforms signaled by the emergence of new information and communication technologies. Such new media forms include cell phones, social networking sites like Facebook, YouTube, Whatsapp, and 2go etc. wikis, blogs, E-books, online newspapers, webcasts, video streaming and the likes, are also inclusive.

According to Jenkins, Media convergence is an ongoing process that should not be viewed as a displacement of the old media, but rather as interaction between different media forms and platforms. Supporting this, Deuze cited in Erdal (2011) suggests that media convergence should be viewed as cooperation and collaboration between previously unconnected media forms and platforms.

Burnett and Marshall cited in Grant and Wilkinson (2008:5) explain convergence as 'blending of the media, telecommunications and computer industries' or, in other words, as the process of blurring the boundaries between different media platforms and uniting them into one digital form.

Traditional communication with its consumer friendliness, cheap nature and ease of use also carries with it irritating liabilities of very limited coverage, imprecision and is grossly prone to distortion. Modern communication systems also, in spite of wider reach, interactivity, cost-effective and high fidelity among several other pay-offs can sometimes be too elitist and too alien for our masses especially the ruralites that constitute the majority. The modern media systems are also not helped by poverty that pervades our society; in addition to poor state of amenities and absence of infrastructure as roads and electricity. The modern communication system at the moment is only promoting knowledge gaps and creating information haves and have-nots.

It should also be noted that many negatives are resulting from the use of modern means of communication which includes hindrance in building relationships due to the reduction of direct meeting between people, and the reduction of dependence on actual telephone communication. Also, modern means of communication are insecure and prone to hacking and security breaches since the information is centrally stored in one database. It is likely to be exposed to tampering from corrupt people, and pirates or viruses can also attack it. Modern means of communication lacks credibility as people who are not

professionals share inauthentic information on the web, hence the lack of sensorship which the traditional media provides. By the same token, modern communication systems are harmful to health, especially as they use low-frequency signaling technology which may cause fatigue and sleep problems.

According to Agun (1986, p. 35), experience has shown very clearly that the effectiveness of any medium of mass communication depends essentially on the overall organization of services into which it is integrated and the socio-political framework in which it operates. It is in conviction of this that the UNESCO Inter-governmental Conference on Communication Policies in Africa held in 1980 in Yaounde, Cameroon, submitted in its report of the following year, a recommendation that member nations should incorporate in their national communication policies measures designed to ensure the convergence between traditional media and modern communication systems.

With the application of the concept of media convergence, the nature of media companies has also changed. For example, the computer company Apple, Inc., has become by far the world's largest distributor of music. The search-engine firm Google, Inc. plays a key role in making both news and TV content available to global audiences. However, achieve long-established principles of media policy, such as ensuring diversity of ownership and content, regulating access on the basis of community standards, and meeting local content requirements in an age of global media remains a major challenge for policy makers in the age of media convergence.

Discussions of findings

Following the completion of this study, the following findings are made:

Although the old media proves more potent in terms of superior in terms of high response rate, high level of sensorship and quality control, it is less intimate, comes with slow feedback mechanisms, not cost effective, requires special training to make programmes, and lacks the sense of community that the modern media offers.

The modern media as opposed to the traditional media is interactive, data-driven, cost-effective, accurate, enjoys global reach, has the quality of virality, mobility and adaptability. However, the modern media lacks the level of trust, credibility and believability that the old media enjoys.

The growing trend of modern systems of communication has an edge over traditional means of circulating news and information strictly on hardcopies for an information as media firms have now gained stronger circulation power. This is made possible as people can better and easily access information by visiting various websites from anywhere in the world.

The dire need to convey development messages in Africa makes it necessary to integrate the old media with the modern systems of communication and can play a key role in national economic and social development as it has the potential to impact on all segments of society.

Converging indigenous, traditional and new media platforms would promote the spread of, exposure and response to development ideas by the Nigerian dichotomized audience as well as influence human knowledge, attitude and behaviour.

Integrating media messages would ensure participation of diverse communities in development processes despite

peoples socioeconomic and residential background.

Conclusion

The ever-changing nature of life requires that mankind flows with the tides of time to be in tandem with prevailing realities. One of such realities is that the information needs of mankind have become too enormous and complex that an integrated approach using both traditional and the modern communication systems has become an imperative. This is not to suggest that the era of traditional communication has been supplanted by modern communication. Just as the existence of movies hasn't killed stage theatre, blending traditional media systems with that of the modern media can birth an interface that will bring about effectiveness in interactions.

In as much as modern communication systems reach vast audiences and can mesmerize, they should be complemented with old systems. This will boost the effectiveness of the development models including modernization, behavioural change communication, as well as aid sustainable development in Africa.

Recommendations

This paper recommends that non-modern and modern systems of communication must be blended to achieve effective messages delivery for Africa's development. It also proposes that the convergence of indigenous communication systems with traditional and modern media will foster participation and decision-making processes of different sectors of the population. This integrated strategy will impact on information acquisition, policy formation and implementation for community growth, and contribute to the general body of knowledge on the efficacy of combined media systems for community development in Africa.

It further recommends that the Integration of traditional and modern communication systems should be guided by appropriateness to the geographical and social environment as well as relevance to the overall objectives of communication activity.

For improved communication, scholars should continue with research to bring forth more practical ways through which the interface of traditional and modern communication systems can yield more efficiency.

In addition, all media platforms should be deployed in developing nations for the dissemination of development messages to various communities irrespective of people's socioeconomic and residential background. This strategy will enable rural, urban, rich, poor, literate, non-literates, and vulnerable groups, among others, to have access to, as well as have a comprehensive understanding of development information.

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