

Influence of Trado-Modern Media on Health Campaigns in Rural Areas

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ABSTRACT

A host of African communication scholars has conducted a lot of studies on conventional media of mass communication, ignoring the indigenous means of information dissemination among African people. Studies have shown that majority of African people still live in the rural areas without access to media of mass communication for information, education, entertainment, mobilisation and enlightenment. Besides, power supply, access roads are still a mirage in most rural areas of Africa, making it difficult for the media of mass communication to tread those terrains. Therefore, development communication experts, UNICEF, extension workers, development agents have resorted to using the traditional media of communication to extend development messages to the rural dwellers. Although, studies have shown that traditional media hardly go beyond human bearers, they offer credibility, inter-personal communication and on-the-spot clarification of issues when compared to media of mass communication which maintain a reasonable distance from the audience.

Keywords: Trado-Modern Media, Health, Campaigns

INTRODUCTION

Communication predates the creation of man. The instrument of communication put everything, living and non-living, in place. Communication is an ubiquitous activity which enables humans to relate anywhere with others. Numerous studies have confirmed that an individual, in his entire life, spends 75 percent of his daily activities communicating. One of such studies cited by Berlo (1960) says "each of us spends ten or eleven a day, every day performing verbal communication behaviour".

However, in a bid to promote development, government has been constructing bridges, hospitals, maternities, community health centres, among other structures in urban centres. But for the meaningful development to take place in Nigeria, there should be full participation of urban and rural sectors of the society. Unfortunately, few of African communication scholars have researched into the effectiveness of the traditional African communication system for information dissemination in the rural areas of developing economies.

In Africa today, the relevance of traditional African communication system continues to reverberate. Physical development is largely lacking in most rural areas of Nigeria. Agunga (1992:3) has noted that despite "more than forty years of organized assistance, the living condition of the vast majority of Third World people is still far from adequate". The observation, made in 1992, is still the condition today. One of such factors responsible for the developmental failure is communication which is crucial for effective social organization and physical development in any society. Bengé (1972:134) rightly observes that "communication difficulties represent one more symptom of underdevelopment and it emerges that factors which limit communication are those which prevent development".

When the content of modern mass media is analysed, it will be discovered that it does not relate to the social and cultural reality of rural dwellers who may not know how to profitably utilize the broadcast facility. For one, the rural dwellers are still largely homogenous. Yet, the mass media relate to their audience on the basis of differentiated mass of individuals who receive the message in their separate destinations with different experiences. One can best understand and relate to the content of the message when it is disseminated through a familiar medium.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

African communication scholars place more emphasis on the study of the modern mass media of communication which include radio, television, newspaper, magazine, billboard etc. The rural dwellers are less familiar with the modern media of communication. The simultaneous use of indigenous media for the dissemination of entertainment, education, information and socialization of the people makes African communication system to be unique. Traditional media are the indigenous means of communication in the rural areas and among the people of a tribe, ethnic and race in the urban centres. As Jefkins (1992:323) notes, the indigenous media are "folk media as found in developing countries. Unlike mass media, traditional or indigenous media are very personal and addressed to the small audiences, being based on local culture and symbolism. However, traditional media could be classified into two groups: formal transference media and informal transference media.

FORMAL TRANSFERENCE MEDIA

The formal transference means of oramedia are organized and more systemized dissemination of information not only between persons and persons but also between the government and the people. According to Omu (1978:3) the tools employed are the recognized officials and recognizable sounds, signs, and symbols. Few examples of formal transference media are treated below.

THE MARKET

The market is one of the most public of places that constitute the channel of information. Tradesmen and women leave their respective villages with the news of births, deaths, coronations, disasters, and go back to their various villages with new news. In the market, both formal and informal interaction takes place. News gets amplified or reduced in the market. It is pertinent to note that Africans, by virtue of their way of life, are involved in the two way-step flow of information. This is a process which is adequately described by Elihu Katz (1957) and cited in Defleur and Ball-Rokeach (1957:212), whereby individuals who have less access to source of information get such information from those who have better access to the source of information.

The market serves the two-step flow process adequately in which those who have better access become opinion leaders, while those who have less access become opinion followers. In this regard, a particular response may be triggered by an opinion leader who is better informed. The importance of the market can be gleaned from the fact that it is possible for all symbols and signs of the people to be seen in the market place. Anybody who wants to display any special gratitude for a favour goes to the market to do so. Symbols of dance could be found in the market place as has been noted by Ibagere (1982). The market thus represents what people actually are, especially from the perspective of the women. This is because they mostly transact businesses in the market.

TOWN ANNOUNCERS OR GONGMEN

Town criers or announcers are the traditional announcers of community's news, decisions, instructions, laws and many other issues of the community to the people. They act as broadcasting stations of contemporary time. The system is still active in use in rural African societies. By this channel of communication, designated persons are employed honorary official announcers of the community whenever the need arises. Whatever they announce are responsibilities of the community. The announcements over everybody in the village as modern media do. According to Ogwezzy (1999), it is the quickest and widest way of news relaying the traditional media way. It is the people's main news media at the grassroots.

As pointed out by Nwuneli (1983), most of the information disseminated by town crier or announcer originates from some authoritative sources such as Emir, Oba, Council of Elders etc. It is this authoritative source that determines the content of the town crier's message. According to Ugboajah (1980:23-24), an Ijebu village announcer trains his children in the communication jobs that await them. Thus, the young village announcer must be briefed in his early years about the time, place and utility of the news and about the technicalities in the use of gong.

ATTRIBUTES OF GONGMEN

- He knows his culture
- He interprets his culture to suit the objectives of the society
- He is respected, revered and perceived as credible
- The notes from his communication medium- gong, drum or elephant tusk, the gongman I decoded appropriately and received attention from specific audience to whom they are addressed.

INFORMAL TRANSFERENCE MEDIA

The informal transference media of the oramedia are operated through informal contacts between individuals and persons and messages, information, ideas, rumours, and unofficial information is disseminated within the community. Informal transference media of the oramedia take the following forms:

NAMING CEREMONIES

These are the vehicles of communication in the African societies. Apart from bringing the members of immediate and extended families, friends, relatives, well-wishers, co-workers and religious leaders together, naming ceremonies serve as opportunity to disseminate unstructured information, educate and entertain the people.

The African traditional items for naming ceremony which Faniran (2008:154) identifies are "honey, sugar, local sweet, alligator pepper, kola nuts, and wine". The materials are used independently to pray for the child on the eight day of the baby. The name of the child is determined by the situation in the family. In agreement with this position, Ogwezzy (2008:18) notes that "names are channels of communication in Africa". In fact, it is a pointed application the period in which the child is born. The family names are determined by

ancestral records, heritage or expeditors. Such are royal families bearing Adebare, Adeyemi, Adelanwa, Adebisi and so on. It is called family name or surname (Sodipe, 2009).

POPULAR THEATRE

Theatre is the depiction of life by people acting different roles. In Africa, there is part of culture and expression of culture of the people. In traditional setting, theatre is an important means of communicating realities, situations, morals and others relevant to the people. Boeren (1992) notes that “theatre is based on village situations. It exploits social realities, encourages audience participation, it is expressed in local idioms and is accessible to the community at large. Theatre, as a traditional communication technique, can be used to communicate development-oriented messages. This is based on the fact that it builds on the people’s cultural heritage, using traditional channels and knowledge. In advancing this point, Salawu (2001:136) notes that another important aspect of theatre that makes it viable for development communication is the fact that the theatre or drama builds on the skills the people already have. Moyo (1997) notes that “drama is the most appropriate channel for effecting change for development because:

- *it involves inter-personal communication.

- *it is inherently dialogic.

- *it allows the target community to participate.

- *it is easy to assimilate

- *it can impart greater legitimacy to topics originating from the community or fuse a totally new concept with local culture.

Apart from disseminating information, as stressed by other scholars, theatre practice should be geared towards enlightening the rural populace to embrace health-related messages, communal work and cultural transmission from one generation to another.

THE CONCEPT OF MASS MEDIA

Mass media, according to Nwodu and Fab-Ukozor (2003), are modern channels of mass communication used for the dissemination of information and news to heterogeneous, large number of people simultaneously. Implicit in this definition is that mass mediated messages are usually directed at:

- *heterogeneous audience

- *living in diverse geographical area, and

- *who receive sender’s messages simultaneously?

From the definition, it is obvious that these media of mass communication are in appreciable magnitude in Nigeria.

THE STRUCTURE OF MASS MEDIA IN NIGERIA

Mass media structure here pertains to the operational base vis-à-vis the impact of such a base on mass media uses for national development (Nwodu and Fab-Ukozor, 2003). At present, the Nigerian mass media are replete with so many newspapers and magazines titles, several government and privately-owned radio and television stations and uncountable video titles. In view of the population of mass media organs in the country, therefore, it is safe to say that Nigeria has more than enough mass media of communication to achieve social development of the nation. However, rather than contribute effectively to social development in both rural and urban Nigeria, the mass media have remained an urban phenomenon. The rural dwellers have been greatly alienated from information that aids development. Newsworthy events in the rural areas are either underreported or not reported at all. Mass media of communication beam their searchlight on the rural areas when a group of individuals applaud the government for the phony project it has been able to complete, a group of individuals decamp to the ruling party or they pledge their loyalty to the ruling government.

ELECTRONIC MEDIA AND THE HEALTH CAMPAIGNS IN RURAL AREAS

The concern here is on radio and television. The reason is that they are mostly employed in communication for national development and health information in Nigeria. Onyekwere (1990:66) notes that “with the exception of radio, which has been found to be effective in reaching the rural Nigerian masses, other channels of mass media of communication have been less effective”. Reinforcing this Ansah (1991:34) agrees that “of all the mass media generally available to Africans, radio is the most widespread and accessible. The implication is that radio by its nature has some potential that makes it the most effective medium tool for national development. Nwodu and Fab-Ukozor (2003:67-68) articulate the potential as:

- Appeals to illiterate audience as development news and programmes can be broadcast to the audience within their language and dialects. However, scholars have argued that radio health news and programmes are too elitist and are not packaged in the language understood by the rural dwellers.

- Radio is relatively cheap compared to other channels of communication. Poverty and illiteracy, on the

part of the rural dwellers, have refuted the submission.

On the other hand, television seems to be the least applied electronic medium to health campaigns in rural areas. Television has some potential that makes it an effective medium of national development, some of which include:

It encourages group viewership for advocacy and mobilization. However, findings have shown that television does not only have acute limited reach, but also need power supply to function, which is lacking in the rural areas.

It also breaks language and illiteracy barriers. However, television is an urban affair. Most people living in the rural areas do not understand English Language.

THE PRINT MEDIA AND THE RURAL HEALTH CAMPAIGNS

The print media (newspaper, magazine, poster, books) industry in Nigeria is a robust one. The discussion here is limited to newspapers and posters which have proved to be more potent in national development and health information system. Newspaper, particularly rural-based newspaper, has the potential of contributing to national development and creating enlightenment in the rural areas.

The newspaper has enough space for the in-depth reportage of development issues, health new. Besides, it can be published in local languages. However, regardless of whether a newspaper is vernacular newspaper or not, it requires some level of literacy to appreciate the contents.

It ensures easier storage and retrieval of development information and news, but newspaper is largely an urban phenomenon and hardly circulates to the hinterland due to bad road and low readership. Besides, it is capital-intensive to establish.

COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES IN HEALTH CAMPAIGNS IN RURAL AREAS

Communication in public health is defined as the strategic design, application and evaluation of communication interventions (social mobilization, inter-personal communication, mass or local media and advocacy) to achieve health objectives (Haider, 2005, Hornik, 2002, Salmon and Murray-Johnson, 2003). In combination with other immunization components, it plays an important role in achieving the goals of improving coverage and reducing drop-outs (Shimp, 2004). However, the following methods are used by the development agents to pass health information across to the rural dwellers in Africa.

Advocacy: it is defined as a range of strategies designed to make people participate in decision-making at the organizational, local, national and international levels, usually involving strategic planning, community mobilization, coalition building, policy promotion and environmental change.

Social Mobilisation: according to UNICEF (2005), social mobilization is defined as “a broad-scale movement to engage the people’s participation in achieving specific development goals through self-reliant efforts”.

Behavior Change Communication (BCC): this is an interactive process with communities that use various communication channels to develop tailored messages and approaches meant to build positive behaviours, promote and sustain individual community and societal behavior change, and maintain appropriate behaviours” (FHI, 2002:5)

RELEVANCE OF TRADITIONAL MEDIA FOR HEALTH CAMPAIGNS IN THE RURAL AREAS

CULTURE: The oramedia are based on the way of life of the African people. It reflects in their language, mode of dressing, occupation, food, drinks, religious beliefs, naming ceremony, marriage, burial rites divorce among others.

NATURALNESS: Traditional media are natural to the people of Africa. They are natural means of disseminating information, socializing, entertaining, and interacting from the time immemorial.

CUSTOMARY: The traditional African media are rooted in the customary law, ways of life of the African people. Hence, they arThis study is hinged on the two communication theories: two-step-flow of information theory and democratic-participant media theory. The two theories best explain what in rural areas of Africa e inevitable in modern times when development is seriously lacking in most African societies. This study is hinged on the two communication theories: two-step-flow of information theory and democratic-participant media theory. The two theories best explain what in rural areas of Africa This study is hinged on the two communication theories: two-step-flow of information theory and democratic-participant media theory. The two theories best explain what in rural areas of Africa. This study is hinged on the two communication theories: two-step-flow of information theory and democratic-participant media theory. The two theories best explain what in rural areas of Africa. two-step-flow of information theory and democratic-participant media theory. The two theories best explain what in rural areas of Africa This study is hinged on the two communication theories: two-step-flow of information theory and democratic-participant media theory. The two theories best explain what in rural areas of Africa

TRADITIONAL INSTITUTION: The sustenance of the institution of traditional rulers, despite the colonial heritage or the adoption of Western political systems of government, makes the application of traditional media

of communication unavoidable. Lending credence to this position, Olurin (1990:142) notes that even in Ibadan, the biggest city in African South of Sahara, the town crier goes to This study is hinged on the two communication theories: two-step-flow of information theory and democratic-participant media theory. The two theories best explain what in rural areas of Africa. town whenever the occasion demands, for instance, during the yearly Okebadan Festival celebrations.

LOW LITERACY LEVEL: Literacy level in Africa is very low. MacBride et al (1981) note that “the level of illiteracy in Africa is over seventy percent. Hence, it is only the few elite that are exposed to the messages in modern media. The majority of Africans who are unlettered must interact through the traditional media”.

OCCUPATION: The occupation of the people is rural-based. Hence, the traditional media are still prevalent among the people. Common occupations of about seventy-percent of Africans are farming, trading, blacksmiths and allied professions.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

This study is hinged on the two communication theories: two-step-flow of information theory and democratic-participant media theory. The two theories best explain what in rural areas of Africa.

TWO-STEP FLOW OF INFORMATION THEORY

This study employs the two-step flow of information theory. The theory stresses that some individuals have better access to the media. These individuals are referred to as significant others or opinion leaders.

The theory is suitable for this study because in rural areas, information has to be diffused from the opinion leaders and the opinion followers. Opinion leaders, in a community, are the Baales, Chiefs, Community Leaders, Political Leaders, Religious Leaders etc. Whenever development messages, relating to health and communal works, are to be spread in the communities, the opinion leaders have to disseminate it to the members of the community through various traditional media of communication such as town criers, chiefs, talking drummers, village square meeting etc.

The researchers have found out that messages from the mass media first reach opinion leaders (active information-seekers) who then pass them to friends or group members (less active information-seekers) who consider them as influential people. The opinion leaders have enormous influence in making the followers accept or reject ideas.

DEMOCRATIC-PARTICIPANT MEDIA THEORY

Folarin (1998) notes that the main thrust of democratic-participant theory is in its insistence that “the existing bureaucracy as well as commercial and professional hegemony in media systems be broken down so as to guarantee easier media access for all potential users and consumers”.

This theory stresses an unhindered access to the media by the people. The theory is more suitable in the explanation of the situation in rural areas of developing economies. The rural dwellers have no access to the media of communication like their urban counterparts. As a result, development is concentrated in the urban centre. Democratic-participant media theory emphasizes a situation whereby the rural and urban dwellers would have an equal access to the media of communication, so that the development will not be elusive in both sectors of the societies.

CONCLUSION

The development of any society largely rests on the ability of the media to effectively disseminate development-oriented messages, not only to the urban centres, but also to the rural areas. Information relating to health, education, environment, justice, government, agriculture, economy, should be adequately spread to both sectors of the society.

Studies have shown that rural areas of Africa are neglected and under-developed due to misapplication of media of communication. Majority of Africans live in the rural areas with no stable power, hospital and other basic social amenities. Therefore, since the media of communication are very important for the dissemination of relevant information that can aid development in the rural areas, the traditional media of communication as well as radio should be adopted by the development agents to diffuse information in the rural areas, where people are predominantly illiterate and poor. Traditional media of communication offer face-to face interactions, credibility of the source and can be understood better by the rural dwellers. The potency of the traditional media combined with radio cannot be ruled out in the effort to develop the rural areas in Nigeria and Africa as whole.

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