THE PLACE OF THE MASS MEDIA AND OPINION LEADERS IN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract
This paper is on the place of the mass media and opinion leaders in community development. The study used survey method of data collection, using Questionnaire and Personal Interview as primary sources, while the use of journals, books, libraries, schools etc formed the secondary source of data. The study’s findings reveal that information from the mass media get to leaders and community elders, but do not necessarily impact their lives or influence the opinion and behavior of rural dwellers. Mass media messages are better appreciated by the opinion leaders, whom the rural dwellers rely on for interpretation and explanations. The study recommends that the mass media should create a sense of identification through the propagation of common cultural values and symbols by giving desirable interpretation of events. It is also recommended that broadcast programmes are aired in the local language of the people, for better comprehension.

Keywords: Opinion Leaders, Mass Media, Community and Cultural Value

Introduction
The Mass media can be said to be those channels in which messages are made available simultaneously to a large number of people individually or group of different and varying sizes separated by distances from the source of the messages. These include: newspapers, radio, television, magazines, cinema, satellite, etc. Opinion leaders are those who have made remarkable achievements in their different fields or held titles in their communities. They are responsible for influencing the way matters are conducted in communities. They advise, correct and make decisions for the people.

These opinion leaders get messages from the mass media and relay the messages to the public. Community development on the other hand is a planned and organized effort to assist individuals to acquire attitude, skills and concept required for their democratic participation in the effective solution to a range of community problems in an order of priority, determined by their increasing lives of competence.

In the past, communities embarked on different development projects such as village halls, village squares, markets, pathways, etc which were done mainly by age grades. The ranking of such projects depends on the community’s leadership, while resources were limited to those of the immediate neighbors of the communities. In those days, there was nothing like western education and the developmental projects were centered on the tradition of the community. Some major development projects like hospitals, schools and roads were not felt because of ignorance. Today, communities are influenced from both within and outside the community. This influence has made them demand social, economic and political changes that may have reached other communities.

The advent of the mass media has been felt and this had brought about the transformation of the previously local forms of development projects into modern development projects such as schools, hospital, post offices, electricity, pipe-born water, roads and bridges. Communities now participate in modern developmental
projects but despite the progress of mass media, opinion leaders still influence the way development occurs in communities.

Problem Statement
The role of the mass media in shaping the opinion of the masses cannot be over emphasized. However, in most communities, opinion leaders appear to still have a lot of influence over the citizens, thereby serving as middlemen between the mass media and the rest of the citizens. This study therefore seeks to establish the place of the mass media and opinion leaders in influencing the decisions and behavior of citizens, while contributing to the development of Aniocha community in Anambra State.

Hypotheses

In this study, three hypotheses were formulated:

Hi: Radio and Television are more readily available and useful than newspapers to Aniocha community in contributing to the community development of the town.

Ho: Radio and television are not more readily available and useful than newspapers to Aniocha Community in contributing to community development of the town.

Hi: Aniocha people get information, which leads to development of the town more from opinion leaders than the mass media.

Ho: Aniocha people do not get information, which leads to development of the town more from opinion leaders than the mass media.

Hi: Opinion leaders influence development efforts in Aniocha more than the mass media.

Ho: Opinion leaders do not influence development efforts in Aniocha more than the mass media.

Starting with the simplest vocal gesture signal rooted in their physical structure; human beings develop a whole range of non-verbal means for conveying messages; music and dance, drum message, signal fires, drawings and other forms of graphic symbols, including the pictogram.

Pictograph was the next stage in the development of human communication, when early human gradually began to communicate through pictographs, which were picture message sketched or drawn on the walls of caves or on trees. These sketching become increasingly stylized, evolved into the first symbols and eventually developed into primitive alphabets, which marked the beginning of written communication. The development of language was a turning point in the evolution of communication. Language made human communication particularly powerful and gave human beings their pre-eminent position in the animal world (Mac Bride et al 1981:3).

According to Mac Bride and his colleagues (1981) the development of language was important for two main reasons. First, it gives scope and depth to the content of communication. Secondly, it allowed for details of expression in communication.

From its very inception, communication has been related to social structures, culture and the economic organization of the society. Consequently, communication has all through the ages been an inescapable part of the existence of human beings as social animals. In fact, so indispensable is communication to human existence that it is no exaggeration to say that the latter cannot exist without the former. Similarly, what has been said about communication in the modern world can correctly be applied to communication all through the ages. “Communication maintains and animates life. It is the motor and expression of social activity, whose relationship with communication distinguished human communication from the communication of the rest of the animal kingdom. All living specials have certain means to communicate with their members. What distinguished human beings from the rest of the animal kingdom is not only that they interact through communication, but, the process of communication with others. In other words, with culture as something to share commonly in terms of knowledge, beliefs and ideas, human beings are constantly interacting with each other in their social activities”.

Recognizing communication as the basis of culture, Fiske (1990) points out that communication is central to the life of our culture: without it, culture of any kind must die.
Communication is a complex process and is an exchange or a sharing of information or a message; this makes it require certain basic components to bring it into existence. This includes the source from whom the message originates, the medium through which the message is conveyed, the audience who receives the message, and the feedback is the reaction of the receiver of the message. In the process of communication, the information being shared make up the message or content of communication. This message originates from a source or sender of the message. The source is also referred to as the communicator, the formulator the encoder. This is because effective communication is a process of exchange. To be effective, communication must be a two-way process in which the receiver of the original message responds or reacts to the message. A response from the audience is the appropriate way to determine whether the tended message has been received and understood by the audience. It is the response that is known as feedback. Without feedback, the communication process can neither be complete nor effective.

**Traditional System of Communication in Aniocha Community**

The traditional media of communication are those forms, modes or channels of communication that have got little or nothing to do with the modern media of communication but reflect the people’s norms, beings, values and culture. Traditional communication is regarded as the product of the interplay between a traditional community’s customs and conflicts, harmony and strife, cultural convergences and divergences, culture specific tangibles, interpersonal relations, symbols and codes and moral traditions which include mythology, oral literature (poetry story-telling, proverbs), masquerades, witchcraft, rites rituals, music, dance, drama, costumes and similar abstractions and artifacts which encompass a people’s facial, symbolic and cosmological existence from birth to death and even beyond death (Ugboajah, 1985). They refer to the modes of communication, which are still in use today by the realities. They have been variously called folk media.

The people of Aniocha, before the advent of the white missionaries and modern mass media were communicating through the traditional systems. These include the use of metal gongs, wooden gongs, drums, flutes, palm front, masquerades, town criers, gun shots, whistling, smoke signals, mouth to mouth communication, visits, the church, the village square, and objectifies, native whites chalks, and other symbolic displays such as smiling winking, scratching of palm, leering, sighing or hissing, finer snapping and shoulder shrugging.

**Metal Gongs**

**For Meetings:** Metal gongs were used by Aniocha people to summon villagers to meetings, especially elders to the king’s palace. When people hear the sound, they would all prepare for meeting. This process was also used for the king’s announcement and any other announcement at all. So, whenever the people hear it, they would listen attentively to the message being conveyed.

**To summon the gods:** Metal gongs were used to summon the gods so whenever the chief priest went to the shrine for any divinity, he beats the gong to invite their presence.

**For communication:** It is used by the chief priest when communicating with the gods, he uses it to praise the gods, thank them for mercies and remind them of any upcoming festival in order to seek its advice, especially during yam festivals.

**Wooden Gongs**

**For Inspirations and Emergencies:** They were used for inspiration during wrestling tournaments. They were also used in dances, which was aimed at making dancers change their dance steps. These gongs were used to tell people of emergencies like wars. When enemies were coming to invade the community, the security men beat the drum in order to alert the people that enemies were coming for war so that the youths would prepare for the battle.

**Drum:** Used for festivals like traditional wedding ceremonies, new yam festivals etc.
Flutes: It was used to mark the arrival of masquerades. People who followed the masquerades blew the flute in order to tell the people to make way for the masquerade. So, the villagers when they heard the flute stayed indoors so as to give the masquerades chance to pass since they believed that they were representative of the gods who should not see humans, especially women. It is also used by the followers of the chief priest in order to tell the people to pay attention to the message the gods had for them.

Palm Fronds
For Burials: It was tied on any vehicle carrying corpse so that when people saw it, they would know what it was carrying. Other vehicles following that one with the corpse also tied palm frond to show anger and sorrow. The door of the room where a corpse was kept was usually tied with palm fond to signify death, loss. It was used during land dispute in order to warn the people not to go to that land until the matter had been resolved. It was also used to indicate boundaries.
For Sacredness: Palm fronds were used to signify any place that was sacred, for example belonging to the gods.
For ownership purposes: People used palm frond to tie on trees e.g. bread fruit trees etc. so when they are seen by people, they would know that somebody owned them especially when the fruits fell.
For war: People preparing for war tied palm foods round their arms and knees. This showed anger etc.

Masquerades
Entertainments: Were used during festivals, this was done by parading all over the village a day before the festival so when seen by people, it reminds them of upcoming festivals.
Sacredness: They signify sacred beings like the deities.
Town Crier: They were used to make announcement so people paid attention to town criers since they are responsible for announcement and other messages.
Gunshots: During occasions like chieftaincy titles, birth of a baby, etc gunshots were used to tell people of a great celebration. Gunshots were also used during burial ceremonies.
Whistling: Whistling was used by friends, to call one another. The friends only understood the code for e.g. when a child is in the house with the parents, his friends being afraid of the parents may choose to go to the back of the house and whistle, immediately the child hears it, he seeks for an excuse and to go after has friends. It was also used for attraction, to relay message, for attention for entertainment.

Paying of visits: The people of Aniocha regarded visits as a demonstration of brotherhood. During such visits, conversations took place over kola-nuts or a keg of palm wine. During conversation, information were shared among participants. Information was clearly disseminated and even analyzed by friends and relatives.
The Church: This was another place for communication in Aniocha community. The officiating priest passes information during the sermon or after church service. Important announcements were made during or after church services. The church was regarded as a place of gossip and fashion center as well as where attitude or group norms were either reinforced or changed.

Village Square: It was a venue for village meetings and a centre of activities during festivals. The villagers converged at the village square for crucial meetings that concern the villagers. Information and announcements were made during such occasions.

Objectives: It could be said to be another form of communication in Aniocha. They were concrete objects like kola nuts, native white chalk (Nzu) etc.
Kola Nuts: The offering of kola nut to a visitor or a stranger signifies that the visitor is welcomed.
Native white Chalk: It was offered by any family where a new baby was born. It signifies birth and life, meaning that another life has been added to the family. Also, native doctors rub the chalk across their left eyes, which conveyed information to their clients that they are men of great powers.
Symbolic Displays: These are other forms of communication. They include smiling, winking and scratching of palm, learning, sighing or hissing, finger scrapping and shoulder shrugging.
Smiling: This communicates happiness. When one was seen smiling or a person smiled due to a message given to him/her, it shows joy/happiness.
**Winking:** It stood for admiration or love, especially of the opposite sex. When a boy winked at a girl, it showed his admiration or his love for her.

**Scratching of the Palm of the opposite sex:** Another way of showing love, when a man shook a woman’s hands and in the process scratches it, it shows love. Only the two will understand what has happened.

**Sighing or Hissing:** Means dejection or disgust. So, when a person sighs, it shows that he is not happy or he is disappointed with somebody for a deed done by the person. For a person known for committing atrocities, whenever he passes, the villagers may hiss or sigh at him. This shows that they look at him with a feeling of annoyance and disappointment due to his unacceptable behaviour. When something unpleasant happens in the village, people discuss it among themselves and show disappointment through sighing or hissing.

**Finger Snapping:** In those days, it was used to draw someone’s attention, or a sign of an abomination.

**Gossips:** When people gossip, they spread important information and create awareness in people. Rumors also helped in communication.

**Age Grades:** Through meetings and other gatherings, age grades give information and advice to the people and help to execute developmental projects in the community.

**Community Development**

Community is a collection of people who have become aware of some problems or some boards goal, having passed through a process of learning about themselves and their environment and on the basis of which they have established a collective objective. This broad perception of community implies also the existence with small groups of people in small organizations. Hillary (1955), after analyzing 94 definitions of community came to the conclusion that common ends, norms or means are its most remarkable features. This reveals that the term community is not static. It entails the interaction of several elements whose geographical boundaries are a clear function of time, place and the context or issue under consideration (Oshiyi, 1984).

This is what Marshall McLuhan had brought out in his six-fold approach to defining the concept. Akinpelu (1981) quoted McLuhan as having used the term community to refer to “a social unit, or enological unit, a legal political entity and a process. As a social unit, a community may be regarded as consisting of a group of people or persons in a prescribed locality. These people engage in some form of interaction aimed at improving their lives. Akinpelu (1981) in reviewing the features of a community sees it not as a monolithic entity, but as something consisting of constituencies, interest groups and associations. From this perspective, we can say that a community consists of people with diverse interests. A community cannot be formed until the objectives have been carefully identified, formulated and agreed upon by all concerned as something that must be achieved.

Therefore, one might say that the community is created only when a group of people delineated with common problems, generate a set of objectives and establish among themselves a clear sense of identity. A community as a concept therefore features a kind of integrated relationship of people and this is what has led Newman and Oliver (1967:23) to take community to being “Organic natural set of objects that establishes among themselves, a clear sense of identity. A community as a concept therefore features a kind of integrated relationship with people.”

What is said at his point is that a “community” is not community unless the perceived common problems have been so recognized through interaction. This is what makes communication a very important element in the recognition of a group of people to be a community.

Development itself, according to Todaro (1989) is a multidimensional process involving changes in structure, attitudes and institutions as well as the acceleration of economic growth, the reeducation of equality and eradication of absolute poverty. This way, development implies remarkable and sustained improvement of the socioeconomic welfare of the people. The process of development in community development implies first the perception of a problem or what is termed the people-felt needs which normally generates a feeling to worry over the given condition. This ‘worry’ becomes the creative force which moves
the people on the part of learning about the problem themselves and the environment using the techniques of communication.

**History and Roles of the media towards Community Development**

Mass media of communication can be said to be of two major groups: print media and electronic media. These groups play important roles in spreading development messages and mobilizing the people for national development. The print media appeal to the eyes, while the electronic, also called broadcast media appeal to both the eyes and ears.

The print media were the oldest mass media and include newspapers, magazine, books and other publications alike. The first newspaper in Nigeria, Iwe Irohin, was started in Abeokuta in December 1859 by an English Missionary of the Anglican Mission named revered Henry Townsend. The first printing press in Nigeria was established in Calabar in 1946 by the mission. According to Townsend, Iwe Irohim was established to get the people to read; to beget the habit of seeking information by reading. Thus, the paper carried a combination of religious reporting and social, political and cultural commentary.

As Tador (1996:40) pointed out, this newspaper was set up “to help the overall development of literacy among the Egba people. This function can be seen in the full name of the newspaper-“Iwe Irohin fun Awon Ara Eegbe Ati Yoruba” – which literally translated means “Newspaper for the Egba speaking people and Yorubas”.

The print media cannot effectively be used as of now to mobilize the community for development, because of the majority illiterate population who cannot read or understand messages in newspapers and magazines. These channels however carry news stories, photographs and advertisements relating to development programmes and projects but they are not enough to ginger the masses into embracing development.

**The Electronic Media**

The other channels of mass media known as the broadcast or electronic media comprise of those media that use electric power to get its messages to the public. These include: Radio, television, cinema, satellite, etc. Radio as a broadcast medium began in the twentieth century, with the introduction of Wireless Telegraphy by Supliemo Marconi in Italy, in 1895. This was the system through which electromagnetic impulses could be sent through the air, without the use of wires. Thus radio is usually referred to as wireless.

Radio as an electronic media channel plays a very strategic role in communication for developing an area through communication, but, according to Moemeka (1983) radio is the best medium for development. Radio is the only medium of communication with which the rural communities are familiar. However, in developing countries such as ours, a greater number of the population live on the land, and are frequently isolated by illiteracy and lack of transportation. Effective communication for the development of rural areas is very essential for a developing society.

Television is very good in promoting national development especially in the rural areas. Its advantage over other channels stems from the fact that it combines both sound and sight (audio-visual) in the dissemination of information. Despite the fact that many rural dwellers can now watch or view television, this medium has not been very effective in development, as that of radio. Without electricity, one cannot watch television and majority of Nigerians who are poor and rural in nature cannot afford the cost of electric generators. Television will be a powerful medium for the promotion of development and mobilization of the people when the infrastructural inadequacies that hinder its effective role must have been addressed. The mass media have played important roles, which will be viewed as aiding development communities like the case of Aniocha community. The roles include:

**Information**

The mass media posses incredible power at the information level. Stuart (1989:11) refers to this power when he says “that the mass media have ability to reach millions, to raise issues, to create awareness on topics and to disseminate information with great efficiency.”
Education
Education of the mass media comprises intellectual development, acquisition of skills and capabilities and the formation of character. The mass media are involved in the transmission of the knowledge necessary to achieve all the three aspects of education mentioned above.

Socialization
The mass media as a socializing agency works closely with other agents of socialization like the family, the school, the church and the peer group. Through socialization, the individual is made aware of the values, norms and acceptable behaviors and patterns of the society.

Motivation and Mobilization
The mass media encourage and ginger people up to achieve the aims or goals of the society. These goals are promoted by the media, which then stimulate and foster the aspiration and activities of individuals and communities to achieve such goals.

Interpretation
In Nigeria for instance, when the different Nigerian Television Authority stations in various states of the federation exchange programmes about their people’s way of life, this could be seen as an attempt in national integration through the mass media. By watching such programmes, people of one state can get to understand and appreciate the pattern of life, view points and aspirations of other people in another state.

Opinion Leaders’ Roles Toward Community Development
Opinion leaders are those people who influence the way issues are conducted in a given society or community. These groups of people are those that have achieved remarkable successes in their various fields and are titleholders e.g. Chiefs, Elders, Intellectuals, Business Tycoons and Executives. The need for these leaders aroused due to the fact that the community rallied round them since they were the people who had the power, wealth, fame and position in the community. This concept of opinion leadership was first formulated by Lazefield Berelson and Couadet (1948) in the course of their analysis of the 1940 election. These investigations discovered that personal contact appears to have been more effective than the mass media in influencing voting decisions.
When the early missionaries came into Aniocha community, there was need for interpreters who would be able to relate to the people what they said. So, those people that had traveled out of the community or had the opportunity to understand a little of the white man’s language were employed to interpret the message to the villagers. The villagers then took these people to the leaders since they could understand the white men. Since then, this group of people have been regarded as the mouthpiece of the community.
This made the people to have respect for them, which gave them the right to decide, correct and advice the community. These opinion leaders are embodiments of the norms and values of their groups or social categories. They protect the interests of their groups.
Thus, opinion leaders act as intervening variables between their followers and the mass media and could help to cushion the effects of the mass media on members of the groups.
In Anicha community, these opinion leaders influence the way development projects are carried out, especially those projects embarked upon by the community, like the construction of markets, building of town halls and signposts, etc.
These opinion leaders give out information on matters concerning the welfare of the people and tell them what happens both within and outside the community. They usually get information through the mass media and relate such to the people.
Finally, since these opinion leaders play very important roles, the people tend to appreciate them more than media of communication which they have not felt much of its impact.
Research Question 1

Table 1: What communication process or mass media exist in Aniocha?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mass Media</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Television</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>65.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>80</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table above shows that majority of the people (65.5% of the population) believed that radio exists more since radio is the most used mass medium in Aniocha. This is because they listen to radio for entertainment in form of music and for the fact that radio uses batteries where there is no electricity supply. Television is not patronized by many due to the fact that there is no constant electricity supply. This accounts for the 25% (20) of the respondents. The remaining 12.5% (10) of the people read newspapers, which can be said to be the lowest population. This is because many people who are illiterates cannot read and write.

Research Question 2

Do opinion leader provide information needed for development more than the mass media?

Table 2: Main Source of Information in Aniocha Community

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Media</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>43-75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opinion Leader</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>56.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>80</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above question was designed to ascertain if the opinion leaders provide the necessary information needed for development in Aniocha more than the mass media. From the table above, 56.25% of respondents believed that the opinion leaders are their main source of information while 43.75% of the people see the mass media as their main source of information.

Research Question 3

In what ways have the mass media helped in development projects in Aniocha?

Table 3: Do the Mass Media Help in Development Projects in Aniocha?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opinion</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>80</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 above was designed to know whether the mass media have performed roles towards development. From the data above, 75% of the people still have not felt their impacts in the community; they do not regard the mass media contributions since they believed that the media have not addressed the main challenges of rural dwellers. The remaining 25% are those that know the importance of the media.

Research Question 4

Table 4: Do Mass Media or Opinion Leader Influence Development Efforts in Aniocha?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mass Media Influence</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>31.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opinion Leaders</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>68.75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>80</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

68.75% of the respondents from the result gotten agreed that they were encouraged towards development by the opinion leaders more than the mass media, since the opinion leaders are the ones that direct them on what to do and also on matters relating to their welfare. They tend to believed that they are the ones that give them
the support, encouragement, and advice on how to go about development in the community. The 31.25% of the population are mainly the opinion leaders who are encouraged by the messages received from the mass media and they pass same to the villagers who are less exposed to the mass media.

**Conclusion**

Exposure to the mass media, mainly radio and television has in no small measure, contributed to the overall development of the (Anioma) community. Radio sets which the communities acquire for entertainment purposes are now used for information, since radio can operate with batteries when electricity is not available. Aniocha people however still depend largely on the opinion leaders at this present age for their information needs, especially in the area of community development.

**Recommendations**

1. The media should take steps to introduce programmes (content) that address the needs of the rural people.
2. The Mass media should positively change the lives of rural dwellers by drawing the attention of relevant institutions to their developmental/infrastructural needs.
3. The broadcast media should introduce programmes that are delivered in the local language of the rural dwellers.

**References**


