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## THE EFFECT OF MODERN TECHNOLOGY ON THE IGBO TRADITIONAL SYSTEM OF COMMUNICATION

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### **Abstract**

*Igbo people are now in a computer era which has made the world a global village. Technology has diversified, especially in the area of communication which is the main focus of this study. The modern system of communication is fast overshadowing the traditional system of communication. This has become the concern of the researcher. This work is carried out to find out the effect of modern technology on the traditional system of communication of the Igbo people. It is found out that if proper care is not taken the good traditional method of communication of the Igbo people will in no distant time be completely phased out and will automatically disrupt the unity among the Igbo communities which the traditional method used to foster. The paper suggests that the traditional system of communication be used side by side with the modern method instead of allowing our good traditional method of communication to go into extinction. This will always help to maintain the oneness among the members of the Igbo communities. The paper concludes that using the traditional method along side with modern method will make the Igbo people to continue to be law abiding that will sustain peace, respect, development etc.*

**Keywords:** Tradition, technology, communication.

### **Introduction**

Things change every now and then, old things give way for new things and old things give birth to new things. There is this belief that the world is a global village. The world is moving and we have to move along with it. As we are moving along with the world, we should not forget where we started.

Every race has its tradition that differentiates it from other races. Every tribe has its way of doing things. No matter how things change, the way of life of the Igbo people can always be traced back to their old way of life depending on how they cherish their culture. Ejiogu (2000, p.21) writes that people will be educated not only to love their fatherland, but also to water and nurture it. Instead of allowing their culture to go extinct, they resort to modification to adapt to the changing world. Without old things new things cannot spring up. Before the advent of modern communication system, the Igbo people have their own style of communication which is peculiar to them. Akidi (2013, p.45) states that no matter there could be differences in culture, custom, tradition and institution, we still maintain that Igbo customs are the same. This culture most especially in the area of communication system binds the Igbo people together. They obey and dance to the tune of the information which was relayed by the traditional communication system. With the information relayed, people of the same community gather without hesitation to address issues that arise in the society. The traditional communication serves and signifies a lot for people that are bound together in one common culture. They always

comply with the signals by the traditional communication system for the common good of every member of the community. But since the advent of technology, the modern system of communication is fast overshadowing the traditional system of communication of the Igbo people, and if proper care is not taken, the good traditional system of communication of the Igbo people will automatically phase out. Therefore, we advice that as one embraces modernity, one should not forget ones root.

This paper will in subsequent sections look at technology, tradition, communication, traditional system of communication, modern system of communication, how the modern system of communication has affected the Igbo traditional system of communication and establish some suggestions and conclusion.

### **Technology**

Technology is a body of knowledge devoted to creating tools, process actions and extract materials. Technology is wide, that is, everyone has his or her own way of understanding the meaning of technology. Arthur (2009) sees "technology as a means to fulfill a human purpose". Technology in this context is the current state of knowledge of how to combine resources to produce desired products, to solve problems, fulfill needs or satisfy wants, which include technical methods, skills, processes, techniques, tools and raw materials. Technology is constantly altering the way ones lives. From the method of feeding, to manner of travel, work and entertainment. Technology has become



an integral part of one's life. However, the aspect of our lives that technology has mostly impacted is the way we communicate with one another. Technology has amplified the rate at which we communicate with the world around us. Today, it is much easier to communicate with others, we can send and receive messages instantly with a number of new technologies like cell phones, computer, e-mail, social network sites like facebook, twitter etc. This has helped in some ways by allowing us to get in touch with each other quickly. Also, the internet has changed the way we communicate information across to people, it is no more difficult like those days we communicate with local means of communication. Decades ago, in Igboland, the only way people received information or send message across to the community was through traditional communication which has been the cultural heritage of the people. With traditional means of communication, everybody used to responding to information without trick or delay.

### Tradition

Tradition is the beliefs and customs passed from generation to generation. Chaney (1994:1) points out that, members of a group have characteristics and persistent forms or patterns of thoughts and values through which they understand and represent their lives. Igbo people are not exceptional. The Igbo people are one of the largest ethnic groups in Nigeria. They are found in the eastern part of Nigeria. They are enriched with varieties of cultures and traditions. The Igbo people have a system of folk beliefs that explains how everything in the world came into being. They believe in the supreme God who keeps watch over His creatures from a distance. They have a number of instruments they use for communication. Akidi (2013, p.44) writes that Igbo people are very industrious in all spheres of life. They measure up in everything they do: in politics, education, trade etc and they strive to excel. Akidi went further to say that Igbo people take anywhere they find themselves as theirs and develop it to their taste. Before the advent of the British, the Igbo people were known with traditional means of communication used among the members of the community. In Igbo tradition, there is verbal communication which enables the Igbo people to carry out their activities. Such modes of communication include: Ikoro, ekwe, opi, ogele, oja, igba etc which serves as a means of conveying information from the council of chiefs to the community through the town criers.

### Communication

Communication has been in place as far back as memory can recall. It is the activity of exchanging ideas; information, opinions, messages or thoughts from one person to another. In communication process, a sender (encoder) encodes a message and then uses a medium or channel to send it to the receiver (decoder) who decodes the message and after processing information sends back appropriate feedback using a medium or channel. As human beings, the Igbo people are involved in one form of communication or the other every minute of their lives. Uzoezie (1992:10) sees:

*Communication as the possible methods of conveying or passing information, ideas, feelings etc from one source to another in a systematic way using channels recognized and accepted by all the participants in the communication act, by means of patterned signs, signals or symbols with which predetermined meanings have been encoded.*

It is acceptable that communication is a method of sharing information, ideas etc through the means of recognized channels and patterns. From the linguistic point of view, Crystal (1997:72) states that:

*...the transmission and reception of information (a message) between a source and a receiver using a signalling system: in linguistic contexts, source and receiver are interpreted in human terms, the system involved is a language, and the notion of response to (or acknowledgement of) the message becomes of crucial importance.*

The above information shows that the sender must encode the message into a form that is appropriate to the communication channel and the receiver then decodes the message to understand the meaning. Communication is said to have taken place if the message transmitted by the source is understood by the receiver.

Based on Oppaper's (2011) postulation, every human society has developed into indigenous and traditional modes and channels of communication, which characterize its existence, organization and development. These communication modes and channels form the basis upon which these communities progress. The act of interaction according to Oppaper is primarily carried out through the use of sign (or symbols).



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In other words, communication as a means of conveying messages has existed before the emergence of modern communication in Igboland that is the traditional communication. The traditional communication is the oldest means of communication in Igbo land, in as much as it is the oldest means; it served the purpose of conveying message to everyone. The messages were relayed by the town criers, who transmits information verbally and by coded signal with metal or wooden gong. Subsequently, information came to be transmitted in written form. This was the early days down to the early days of postal services, which remained the only means of sending messages to a farther place. The accelerating rate of development led to the creation of new means of communication and that permitted the transmission of information at much higher speed. Communication has taken on a special role as one of the most important branches of economy. Communication is concerned with traditional and modern modes of communication as they relate to the way ideas; information and messages are communicated by human beings.

### **Traditional System of Communication**

Traditional system of communication is the oldest means of communicating information, ideas and messages before the advent of modern communication. Decades ago, Igbo people used the traditional means of communication which are still relevant today in most communities despite the invention of new technologies. These means of communication are part of the peoples way of life which fosters oneness exchange ideas, resolve problems and share information in Igboland. Their system of communication bring them together and allow them to communicate with their different communities and Igbo society at large. Ukonu and Wogu (2008) state that traditional system of communication refers to modes of meaning exchange that are rooted in people's culture, and which began from the era of pre-literate and pre-modern man. It is a means by which people communicate with one another that has survive the present, despite the influence of the modernity. These systems are passed from one generation to another and are derived from societal experience and thought over a long period of years. Ugboajah (1985, p.116) writes that indigenous communication could be called oral-media. These media include: mythology, oral literature (poetry, story telling and proverb), masquerades, rites of passage and other rituals expressed through oracy, music, play and material symbol which accompany

people from womb to tomb and beyond. Wilson (1998, p.27) provides classes of various forms of non-verbal traditional communication modes he observed in Africa, which are presented below: Idiophones: these are self sounding instruments or waves that produce sounds when beaten, examples are wooden drum, bell, metal gong, wood block, ritual rattle, xylophone, hand shakers, pot drum etc. Membranophones: these are media whose sounds come from the vibration of beaten membranes, example are skin drum. Aerophones: these produce sound that has the result of the vibration of a column air, example, flutes, pipes and horns. Symbolography: This refers to representation using objects and symbols understood within a particular cultural context. Signal: These are physical embodiments of a message. These include fire, gunshot and drum beats. Objectives: these are media presented in concrete forms which have significance for a specific society only. These include kolanut, palm frond, charcoal, flag and sculptures, colour scheme-colour combinations that produce certain significant meaning for certain societies. Music: this includes songs of praise or criticism. Extramundane: this involves prayers, libations, chants, trance, and hysterics though which the living communicate with the dead. Symbolic displays: these are culture specific. They are smiling, sticking out of tongue, expression of fear etc. This research work is therefore limited to the effect of modern technology on traditional instrument of communication; viz membranophone, aerophone, idiophones. Oreh (1980, p.97) divided traditional modes of communication into several categories: interpersonal or face-to-face type of communication, a border level intergroup communication and communication at the mass level. He further says that verbal or non-verbal communication would be used in each of the communication levels depending on what type would ensure message fidelity and effective communication goal achievement.

Communication is important because to satisfy human wants there must be verbal or non-verbal communication. These classifications of traditional communication remain valuable to Igbo society even in the face of modernity and people are familiar with the means of communication. Traditional system of communication serves the purpose of delivering a concise and effective message to a group of people, usually those people in the community.

In Igboland, some of the instruments used for communication include: Ikoro, Igba, ekwe, ogele, oja, opi, egbe etc. In all cases, each community



to keep quiet, announce important information in the meeting. It is also used by the native doctors to communicate to the spirits. The bell is used in the churches to inform the members of the time for the service.

**Ishi Egbe (gun):** Is used to convey the message that an important person has died and also during the burial, local gun is been shot to give the dead the last respect.

These systems of communication helped to maintain peace, foster progress, respect, unity etc. Even till today they are still effective means of communication that have some degree of advantage over the modern system of communication.

### Modern System of Communication

In the modern world, life will be impossible without communication. We use communication in all the activities of our daily lives. Modern communication is the process of transferring information from one person to another with the use of technological medium in which the communicated information is understood by both parties. Today communication has developed so much that we always interact with it in all activities. In the present world, communication plays key role in all the development activities. The development in modern communications has brought new era in Igbo land.

There are many benefits of the modern communications to the lives of the Igbo people in all their fields of life. The modern means of communication includes telephone internet, computer or any other present resources of communications. Modern communication has made the world a global village. This means that today, the world has become such a small place for which through communication we can know what is going on anywhere, everywhere any time.

In Igbo land, communication were limited to face-to-face, gathering people and sharing information through the sound of ogele, ikoro, ekwe etc. it is of no doubt that as new technologies emerge to make life easier, new ways to communicate are also introduced. The ways in which people communicated have changed significantly and new technologies like cell phones, SMS, computer, and internet are increasingly being used for communications in the daily life of the Igbo people.

### Examples of modern communication:

1. **E-mail:** Is commonly used and many scholars believe that it is one of the quickest means of

transmitting messages. It involves sending messages via telecommunication links. It is possible to send messages from one person to another. The person operating the computer terminal at the receiving end is alerted by a signal that a message or mail, meant for him/her is in the electronic mailbox. E-mail can send messages to a large number of people simultaneously.

- ii. **Internet:** Is a network of computers worldwide which allows its users to share information. It is a medium in which one can send information and people can reach it anytime of day or night.
- iii. **Mobile phone:** There are many types of phones, the land line and the mobile phones. Mobile phone is one of the most convenient developments of the late twentieth century. One can make a phone call and be called almost wherever one likes. It is the most important telecommunication breakthrough in recent times. Today, one needs not to be out of information. One can call anywhere and can be reached from any telephone in the world.
- iv. **SMS:** Stands for short messaging service. This is a feature of mobile phones that lets you type messages by using the letters on your keypad. Once you have finished writing your message, you can send the information out to other mobile phones.

### The Effects of Modern Technology on the Igbo Traditional System of Communication:

The introduction of modern system of communication has curtailed the rate of bottle necks in communication among the Igbo people. The use of modern system of communication like mobile phones which is the most common means of communication has made dissemination of information easier and faster. However, the invention of modern system of communication from the western world has caused a decline in the use of Igbo traditional system of communication. Despite the fastness of the modern system, it still has some short comings. The use of modern communication especially the mobile phones has been seen as the easiest way of achieving fallacy and people can easily deny receiving information through mobile phone with excuse of availability of network, this compels them to shy away from their responsibilities. In the traditional system of communication, once ikoro is beaten, nobody denies it, all the members of the community assemble immediately at the village square without any excuse. The use of modern system of communication is not sufficient in communication



hence; in most Igbo communities there are no network services at all.

Most people do not have phones, computers etc also many have no access to the internet. Most modern system of communication requires people who are formally educated whereas some people in the rural areas are not literate and cannot comprehend and interpret information from modern communication. From an unpublished source; the use of mobile phone, computer, internet, e-mail etc as means of communication can be expensive. Some people cannot afford buying them nor have money to recharge card which isolate the less privilege from being involved in receiving information from people. In most cases, this excuse arises because of modernity. This hinders peace, unity, growth and development and cannot create positive impact that calls for society building.

These are contrary to the traditional system of communication. The system does not cost much, no excuse is usually given in terms of lack of service, network failure or no money to recharge card. Both the rich and the poor enjoy the same communication channels which cannot be denied once the ikoro, ekwe or ogele is beaten. Members of the community help to spread information that cannot be doubted or denied of truth. Information from modern communication can easily be denied without trace. The modern system of communication has been observed to endanger the morals of the young people in Igbo communities and also obstruct the transference of Igbo culture to the future generations. Igbo people now prefer the use of mobile phones to ikoro, ekwe, ogele etc and

therefore have no zeal in the production of traditional instrument for communication. This is a sign that the future generation will completely ignore traditional means of communication if care is not taken.

However, the modern system of communication is good in its own, traditional means of communication is also good because of its merits in traditional Igbo society and therefore should be used along with the modern system of communication in other to promote and preserve the traditional method of communication from phasing out.

### **Suggestions and Conclusion**

Our traditional means of communication should be preserved by using and transmitting them to the future generations.

Effort should also be made to improve the Igbo traditional system of communication through training the young ones on how to use the traditional mode of communication and understand what they signify at any point in time.

In conclusion, the modern technology should be used in conjunction with the traditional system of communication which people are familiar with. The traditional system of communication should be kept and encourage although the traditional system of communication should be modernized to face the challenges of the twenty first century. This will enable the traditional modes of communication to regain its ground again.

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