



TRADITIONAL COMMUNICATION MEDIA: A CRITIQUE OF THE INDIGENOUS COMMUNICATION MEDIA OF NGWA PEOPLE OF ABIA STATE

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ABSTRACT

Every society has developed a communication system that meets its peculiar needs. These forms of communication are regarded as indigenous and have been part of the people's culture. Though these communication systems might undergo some adaptations and changes, they have not been completely eroded, irrespective of technological advancement and modernisation. One such is the indigenous communication system in Ngwa land of the Igbo linguistic group of South Eastern Nigeria. This study, therefore, is a critical evaluation of the indigenous communication media in Ngwa land. The theoretical framework was anchored on Cultural continuity and the Indigenous standpoint theories. The objectives of the study were to identify the various indigenous communication media in Ngwa land and what they communicate, establish the role of indigenous communication media in Ngwa culture, and examine the challenges of using Ngwa indigenous communication media. Findings indicated that Ngwa people have robust indigenous communication platforms that are still relevant and in use today. These media fulfill specific roles in meeting their existential needs for religion, education, politics, entertainment, morals, social life, community development, dispute resolution, etc. It was found that modernity and westernisation have impacted the use of some indigenous media. At the same time, the younger generation is not as enthusiastic as the older generation in embracing indigenous communication channels. It was recommended that the people should adopt a blend of exogenous and indigenous communication while the government incorporates indigenous communication in its development initiatives and policies.

Keywords: Abia State, Indigenous Communication, Media, Ngwa people, Traditional Communication

Introduction

Communication plays a fundamental role in human existence. Human beings depend heavily on their communication skills to express and exhibit their cultural identity, demonstrate their capacity for critical thinking, and engage in innovative approaches to problem-solving (Abdulai et al., 2023). Izuogu et al. (2018) opined that every society has a distinctive and indigenous communication system, which is the

predominant means of information exchange among the populace. Prior to the emergence of contemporary communication technology, societies employed a wide array of distinctive methods of communication to fulfil their respective needs. While the forms, contents, and patterns of usage of channels of communication may differ across different locations and cultures, their fundamental essence remains mostly unchanged (Eze, 2016). Despite the emergence of technology, several of these communication channels have managed to maintain their relevance, particularly in rural communities of Nigeria. According to Oyesomi et al. (2014), indigenous communication methods hold significant importance within the socio-cultural fabric of African societies. These systems have facilitated collaboration, mobilisation, and engagement within the African populace.

To underscore the importance of communication to a people, Akakuru et al. (2015) stated that the indigenous communication media of a people play a vital role in preserving and promoting their cultural heritage, facilitating community interaction and cohesion, and addressing local concerns and issues. These forms of communication enable people to express their values, beliefs, and worldviews and also share information and knowledge within their community. In addition, they serve as powerful tools for cultural transmission and identity formation. Adebisi (2015) believed that communication within indigenous communities is commonly facilitated through various channels, encompassing oral traditions, storytelling, music, dance, and visual arts. The aforementioned modes of communication are firmly embedded within cultural customs which hold significant value as essential mechanisms for preserving and disseminating indigenous knowledge and values.

To further buttress the point above, Anyanwu (2020) postulated that indigenous communication media in Nigeria are a complex mix of cultural practices that have evolved over centuries among various ethnic groups. These communication media are profoundly rooted in the history, traditions, and values indigenous communities (Oyesomi et al., 2022). Like other societies, the Igbos, of which the Ngwa dialectal group is one, possess traditional forms of media that function as significant tools in fostering unity, peace, and growth within their community.

In light of Nigeria's extensive ethnic diversity, examining and comprehending the intricacies of indigenous communication media is imperative. According to Nwosu (2013), this exploration is essential for preserving cultural heritage, facilitating intercultural dialogue, and promoting inclusive development as the nation undergoes significant social, political, and technological changes.

Like any other society, the Ngwa people have continued to use some of their indigenous communication media to mobilise people to participate in the affairs of the community to ensure a sustainable existence. In Ngwa land, for instance, the town crier (*onyeokuekwe*) remains a very potent tool for disseminating information even with the advent of conventional and digital media. Other forms of indigenous media predominant in Ngwa land include cannon (*Ntu ala*), wooden gong (*Ekwe*), metal gong (*Igbugbo*), palm fronds (*Omu*), breaking of kola nut, clothing, shaving of hair by a widow (*Igba mkpe*) the traditional masquerades (*ekpe ornmanwu*), naming, songs and dance, village square, proverbs, food, libation etc. These communication channels continue to exist in Ngwa, regardless of modern forms of communication.

Therefore, this paper aims to critique the use of these indigenous communication media by the Ngwa people in Abia State, Nigeria, irrespective of the proliferation of other conventional and digital media, by examining their diverse forms, effectiveness, challenges, and potential in ensuring effective communication.

Research Objectives

This study aims to accomplish the following objectives:

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1. Identify the indigenous communication media in Ngwa and what they communicate.
2. Ascertain the level of awareness about the existence of traditional media amid modern communication media in Ngwa land.
3. Establish the role of indigenous communication media in Ngwa culture.
4. Analyse the extent of the influence of modern media and technology on Ngwa indigenous communication media.
5. Examine the challenges of using Ngwa indigenous communication media with the advent of technology.

Conceptual Clarification

Indigenous communication

Indigenous communication refers to established and customary media or channels of communication employed by local populations to fulfil their need for information, education, and entertainment (Eze,2016). Various researchers have delineated the concept of indigenous communication by employing distinct criteria. According to Ugboajah (1985),indigenous communication is the outcome of the dynamic interaction between various elements within a traditional community. These elements include customs and conflicts, harmony and struggles, cultural convergences and divergences, culturally specific tangible and intangible aspects, interpersonal relations, symbols and codes, and oral traditions. Similarly, William and Udo (2010) stated that indigenous modes of communication comprise a combination of social conventions and practises that evolved and got integrated into effective communication modes and systems that are widely adopted by a society.

Indigenous communication systems consist of diverse media unique to the cultural contexts of many societies. While these forms of media are specific to each culture, they have been recognised as means of transmitting information between generations. The media and channels utilised in this context include, but are not limited to, folk traditions, observations, interactions, oral media, informal communication channels, storytelling, visual arts, concerts, performances, drumming and dancing, interpersonal channels, performing arts plays, the utilisation of proverbs, songs and dances, as well as the incorporation of indigenous language and cultural resources (Akpan et al., 2015; Fab-Ukozor & Etumnu, 2022).

The significance of indigenous communication systems stems from the fact that they have been an integral part of a people's way of life and means of subsistence for several generations. The ownership of the means of communication resides with the society (Adesoji &Ogunjimi, 2015). Similarly, Nwosu (2013) stated that indigenous communication includes an indigenous people's distinctive cultural, linguistic, and social practices. Indigenous communities have a long tradition of oral narration in which knowledge, values, and beliefs are passed down through generations. Additionally, they are profoundly rooted in community participation and collective decision-making. Another crucial aspect of indigenous communication is its cultural appropriateness(Harfield et al., 2018).In general, traditional communication can be regarded as indigenous communication, as it is well-known by the people and widely used to disseminate information. According to Pwanshikai and Apuke (2016), traditional communication is durable, adaptable, and effective in rallying rural citizens and fostering community bonds and a sense of belonging.

The term “indigenous”, as used in this paper, relates to the cultural institutions, rituals, occasions, and artistic expressions of African heritage that have been observed, practised, and sustained by subsequent

generations. On the other hand, “media” denotes the various methods and mechanisms through which ideas, messages, information, orders, instructions, secrets, and movements are conveyed, accessed, and established. Indigenous communication media encompass various forms that fulfil both communal and individual objectives. It is a form of communication that originates from within these communities, exists within them, and is actively utilised by the people. Indigenous media comprise communication tools, channels, and techniques unique to specific people in a given geographical area and developed by those people to meet their existential needs (Ojebode&Owacgiu, 2015).

The Ngwa People of Abia State, Nigeria

Ngwa, the study area, is one of the most prominent clans in Southeastern Nigeria, and the people speak Ngwa, a dialect of the Igbo language. They inhabit the seven local governments of Obi Ngwa, Osisioma Ngwa, Isiala Ngwa North, Isiala Ngwa South, Ugwunagbo, Aba North and Aba South. According to Nwaguru (2012), Ngwa people reside inside the tropical rainforest of the southern Igbo plain, situated in the contemporary Abia State of Nigeria. Politically, the Ngwa clan share boundaries with Umuahia, Owerri and Mbaise to the west, Ikot-Ekpene and Abak, Akwa Ibom State to the east and Ukwa to the south.

According to Izugbara (2000), the Ngwa people are between Latitude 50.30°N and Longitude 90° and 70.30°E. According to him, its land mass is about 1312.768 square kilometres and has a population of over 1 million people. The predominant religion of the people is Christianity, with very few traditional believers. The family constitutes the basis for the sociological organogram in Ngwa and sometimes could refer to the nuclear family of a whole lineage- *onumara*, which includes dead ancestors (Ekpendu & Akwarandu, 2019). The true origin of the Ngwa, like their parent Igbo stock, is not known, and it may be challenging to trace. However, according to historical accounts of Nwaguru (2012), the Ngwas are believed to have originated from a settlement known as Umunoha, situated within the contemporary Owerri zone of Imo State, and first settled at Okpuala Ngwa in present-day Isiala Ngwa after a long expedition crossing the Imo River.

The majority of the rural population are predominantly farmers and some petty traders. The Ngwa people operate a village democratic political system, which facilitates the inclusion of viewpoints from members within each community (Ohaja, 2015). This system comprises autonomous units of individual families and compounds (*imeezi*) to prominent lineages known as *onumara*, ultimately encompassing the entire village. The traditional rulers or kings, known as *Eze* in the Igbo language, are chosen by the community through election. It is important to note that these monarchs do not possess absolute authority over the villages. Furthermore, the Ngwa people practised a patrilineal system of governance, where kingship and other critical political offices were primarily reserved for men or village elders.

Literature Review

Approaches and Classification of Indigenous Communication

Recent scholarly interests in the study of indigenous communication have recognised its significant role in the development and sustainability of African societies. Although Africa is not a monolithic society, and communication practices differ among regions and communities, some common areas aid the categorisation of indigenous modes of communication in Africa.

In his view, Nwosu (2013) stated that traditional means of communication in rural areas of Africa, including Nigeria, are purpose-driven and effectively structured. Similarly, Oyesomi et al. (2014) believed there has frequently been some confusion concerning what constitutes African traditional media and modes of communication. This is a result of the unique characteristics of African communication systems that make it difficult to accurately identify and categorise them using only Western typologies and

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communication models. Therefore, classifying constituent parts in a field as dynamic as indigenous communication is daunting but dependent on the background of the individual undertaking such a task (Akpabio, 2021). Irrespective of the different perspectives on the classification and complexity of indigenous communication media, scholars agree that there are areas of commonality and convergence across various cultures.

An important categorisation of indigenous communication systems from an African standpoint was proposed by Ugbojahin 1972, which brought attention to the 'Oramedia', an effective communication system that scholars had overlooked. Additionally, Wilson(2005) contributed to this field by conducting an ethnographic investigation of indigenous communication systems in the Cross River region of Nigeriain 1988 and proposed a typology of ten modes of indigenous communication media Akpabio (2021) revised the categorisation of indigenous communication into ten classes, incorporating Wilson's 1988 typology and Ogwezzy's (2008) work and also drawing from the classification proposed by Ansu-Kyeremeh (1998), and Doob (1966). His categorisation comprises the following, presented in the table below.

S/N	Category	Classes	Examples
1	Instrumental communication comprises various devices that serve as accompaniment in music, song and dance and are used to disseminate messages.	Idiophones	wooden drum, bell, metal gong, etc.
		Membranophones	skin drum
		Aerophones	whistle, deer horn, ivory tusk etc.
		Symbolography	tattoo, chalk marks, tribal marks, etc
2	Demonstrative communication: music has various manifestations and signals rooted in traditional society.	Music	songs, choral music
		Signals	cannon shots, gunshots, whistle call
3	Iconographic communication: icons or signs generally standing for or representing something else that, through use, have acquired rich connotations and consequently convey powerful meanings that are clearly understood and recognisable by community members.	Objectifics	charcoal, white dove, kola nut, palm frond
4	Extra mundane communication: with supernatural beings – ancestors, spirits, gods, the supreme God – or when it involves processes, elements or abilities that are superhuman, as in witchcraft and reincarnation.	incantatory	ritual, libation and vision
		Graphic communication	obituary, in memoriam notices
5		colour	white cloth, red cloth and black cloth

	Visual communication: cues supplied by one's physical appearance, clothing, hairstyle, tribal marks, tattoos, incisions and other marks on the skin. Various colour shades also communicate different messages.	appearance	dressing and hairstyle
6	Institutional communication: Traditional institutions ensure smooth-running and harmonious relationships, such as the traditional ruler, cabinet and kingmakers, secret societies, age grades, etc.	social	marriage, chieftaincy, food, local drinks
		spiritual	shrine, masquerade
7	Mythological communication: Myths and legends are significant windows into the African worldview because they reflect a people's political attitudes, conventional wisdom and attitudes.		myths and legendry stories
8	Axiomatic communication: Folktales and proverbs use entertainment and wit to communicate messages in the socialisation process and to underline the arguments of positions taken by speakers in formal and informal contexts.		fables or traditional tales, proverbs.
9	Venue-oriented communication: sites in which indigenous communication occurs, particularly as opposed to other forms.		village square, riverside, market places etc
10	Taxonomic communication: Names communicate. Traditional African names are not meant only for identification; they communicate a lot of information about their owners, family, and communal values.	Naming, labelling	use of names to communicate

Source: Compiled from Akpabio, E.I. (2021). *African Communication Systems and the Digital Age* (1st ed.) and Wilson, D.E. (2005). A taxonomy of Traditional Media in Africa. In Ansu-Kyeremeh, K (Ed.) *Indigenous Communication in Africa: Concept, Application and Prospects*.

In applying this classification to Igbo culture, Okpoko, Okpoko, & Eyisi (2016) asserted that naming children in Igboland, for example, frequently mirrors the parents' life experiences or the circumstances surrounding the child's birth. On the other hand, Obono's (2018) study referred to the "town crier" as a community mass announcement system (CMAS). He stated that African grassroots development still relies on indigenous sources and channels, including traditional education, folk media, and indigenous organisations. However, although these channels transmitted a vast array of messages via social discourses,

news, and entertainment, messages were limited in distance and permanence, Obono averred. Stephens' (2014) research findings underscored the function of indigenous media in safeguarding cultural heritage, fostering unity within communities, and contesting prevailing narratives imposed by the government. The study agreed that awareness and recognition of indigenous media exist as a valuable mode of communication among scholars and indigenous communities. On the dynamics of indigenous communication, Kombol (2012) argued that what was originally indigenous transforms to suit social environments. Accordingly, Africa's many indigenous communication styles reflect its cultural, linguistic, and historical variety.

The Role of Indigenous Communication

The role of indigenous communication system is diverse in meeting the needs of the people. Bussotti (2015), for instance, states that traditional African communication regulates justice and deviance beyond Western systems. In Bessotti's opinion, engaging in dialogue and problem-solving empowers communities and allows individuals to participate actively in their development. It also promotes indigenous expertise and resource sharing, resulting in lasting solutions tailored to each community's needs.

In their study, Gibson and Oberiri (2016) investigated the potential of Bwatiye traditional communication to foster greater democratic engagement among the Bwatiye rural population. The findings indicated that traditional Bwatiye communication is a dependable and credible method of informing the Bwatiye people regarding political matters and engagement. Additionally, the study suggests that the town crier system be enhanced by implementing contemporary methods, such as a public address system. They recognised traditional communication as a highly effective platform for uniting individuals to pursue a common goal that would advance the community.

Furthermore, indigenous communication practices promote responsibility and accountability, as decisions are made collectively, and everyone has a stake in the outcomes. Ultimately, it plays a vital role in promoting harmonious community relationships and is essential for preserving and promoting indigenous cultures and identities. Additionally, indigenous channels enjoy strong credibility because they are locally controlled, and sources are familiar to the people. Most local audiences are frequently sceptical of mainstream media that are externally controlled. Research by Neme (2021) has shown the importance of informal, interpersonal contacts in persuading people to adopt or reject innovations and adapt to new health practices through indigenous channels.

Indigenous channels can provide avenues for the engagement and involvement of local communities in various development initiatives. Jones et al. (2017) highlighted that it is a powerful tool for disseminating information, fostering community engagement, and promoting collective action towards sustainable development goals. For instance, indigenous language radio broadcasting, in particular, is considered the most effective mass communication channel, reaching peripheral areas and easily understood by the audience (Young et al., 2022). Oyesomi et al. (2014), in a study on assessing the uniqueness of indigenous communication in galvanising women's political participation at the local level in Nigeria, posited that indigenous communication provides women with knowledge and information on political activities at the local level. They maintained that indigenous media also plays a significant role in addressing social and political issues.

In public health, Monasta et al. (2012) advocated that indigenous communication media can also potentially address health-related issues such as otitis media. They argued that indigenous media can be utilised to raise awareness about this issue and provide information on prevention and treatment. Similarly, Gittelsohn et al. (2018) advocated using indigenous communication in health communication because it promotes community engagement and participation. They highlighted that traditional media recognise the

importance of community involvement in decision-making processes, program planning, and implementation. Through this media, indigenous communities actively shape health interventions and policies, ensuring they are culturally relevant, respectful, and responsive to community needs.

Challenges of Indigenous Communication Media

The development of indigenous communication media in Nigeria is hindered by various challenges attributed to the country's diverse cultural landscape, socio-economic factors, and modernisation (Izuogu et al., 2018). Many indigenous languages are endangered and are gradually facing extinction. As people prioritise learning and speaking the dominant languages, indigenous verbal communication is at risk of disappearing. Moreover, the formal education system in Nigeria often emphasises the use of English or other major languages, neglecting indigenous languages and communication methods. This contributes to the decline of verbal communication among indigenous peoples (Ayakoroma, 2017; Opeyemi, 2022).

Also, urbanisation has led to mass migration from rural to urban areas. This migration disrupts traditional community-based communication patterns and can erode indigenous non-verbal communication practices (Islam & Fitzgerald, 2016). On the other hand, the spread of different religious beliefs, such as Christianity and Islam, has led to changes in indigenous belief systems and practices. This, in turn, can affect traditional non-verbal communication methods associated with these belief systems.

The generation gap, where the younger generation may not be as proficient in, or interested in traditional indigenous communication methods, further contributes to the decline. On the other hand, Akintayo (2021) stated that the poverty level in rural areas puts economic pressures that may lead individuals and communities to prioritise financial gain over cultural and traditional practices. This can contribute to the erosion of indigenous communication modes. Furthermore, indigenous communication predominantly relies on oral means of transmission, and certain indigenous communication practices are not well-documented, making it difficult to transfer to future generations.

Language barriers also pose a significant challenge to the dissemination of indigenous communication media in Nigeria. Nigeria is a linguistically diverse country with over 500 languages. This diversity challenges effective verbal communication, as people from different regions often speak different languages. This limits and hinders inter-ethnic communication. On the other hand, many indigenous communities have distinct languages, which may not be widely understood or spoken outside their communities. This limits the reach and impact of indigenous media, as it may struggle to connect with non-indigenous audiences (Young et al., 2022).

The influence of global media, technology, and urbanisation has led to the widespread adoption of Westernized communication patterns. This has eroded traditional communication modes, making indigenous communication practices less common, particularly among the younger generation. While digital platforms offer new avenues for indigenous communities to share their stories and engage with a broader audience, the digital divide and limited internet access in rural areas pose barriers. This further exacerbates the disparities in media representation and access for indigenous communities. However, the shift to digital media, according to Onyenankeya (2021), poses challenges for the future of indigenous communication in Africa. He proposed that the sustainability of indigenous media within the framework of technological determinism and alternative media theories needs to be considered.

A similar concern has been raised by UNESCO (2023), which stated that oral traditions, like other intangible cultural resources, are threatened by increased urbanisation, migration, industrialisation, and environmental change. Books, newspapers, magazines, radio, television, and the Internet can damage oral traditions and expressions. UNESCO warns that modern mass media may replace oral expressiveness. Also, UNESCO advocates that oral traditions and expressions are best preserved by retaining their daily role in

society. Opportunities for elders to interact with young people and tell stories in homes and schools are also crucial.

Theoretical Framework

The study is grounded in the theoretical frameworks of the Indigenous standpoint theory and the cultural continuity theory.

Cultural Continuity Theory was formulated by Ulrich Witt in 2003. Witt developed the theory as a response to the core Darwinian principles, which he believed were inapplicable to the cultural domain due to substantial differences between biological reality and the cultural domain. It is a framework that emphasises the importance of intergenerational communication, narrative, and the transmission of traditional knowledge and values in maintaining cultural identity and resilience (Aldrich et al., 2008). The theory emphasises the significance of communication practises in preserving indigenous cultures and fostering cultural resilience. It equally recognises that communication and narration play vital roles in preserving traditional knowledge, reinforcing cultural identity, and ensuring the transmission of cultural heritage across generations.

The theory expresses the integration of individuals within their culture and how traditional knowledge is preserved and transmitted. (Auger, 2016). Gilchrist and Camara (2012) opined that the theory emphasises cultural development and adaptation, highlighting how cultural groups change and remain stable over time. Research on cultural continuity theory in communication has studied several areas, such as the impact of cultural continuity on the health of Indigenous communities' knowledge sharing in the academic setting (Auger, 2016), cross-cultural communication practises (Lu, 2022), indigenous architecture (Allam et al., 2021), among others. These studies contribute to a greater comprehension of the role of culture in communication and offer suggestions for enhancing intercultural interactions and fostering cultural continuity.

Key components of the Cultural Continuity Theory, according to Aldrich et al. (2008), include 1. the significance of intergenerational communication within indigenous communities; 2. that indigenous communities have a rich oral storytelling tradition in which narratives are used to convey cultural teachings, history, values, and traditional knowledge; 3. recognises the significance of indigenous traditional knowledge and practises; 4. highlights the relationship between cultural identity and resilience; 5. acknowledges that cultures evolve and adapt continuously.

In general, cultural continuity theory offers a framework for comprehending how cultures change and remain stable over time. This theory contributes to a greater comprehension of the function of indigenous communication in culture and offers insights for enhancing intercultural interactions and promoting cultural continuity. Cultural Continuity theory applies to this paper because indigenous communication is a significant aspect of culture. It is how a people's culture is transmitted and sustained from generation to generation. This theory provides a framework for studying indigenous communication's complex and nuanced nature.

Nakata (2007) proposed the indigenous standpoint theory in his book "Disciplining the Savages: Savaging the Disciplines," another relevant theory for this study. It is a theoretical framework centred on indigenous peoples' perspectives, knowledge, and experiences. It acknowledges that indigenous peoples have distinctive methods of knowing and comprehending the world, shaped by their cultural, historical, and social contexts. Indigenous standpoint theory contests dominant Western perspectives and seeks to decolonise knowledge production by placing indigenous voices and epistemologies at the centre of knowledge production.

Indigenous standpoint theory prioritises indigenous lenses and knowledge in teaching, learning, and research, according to Bodkin-Andrews et al. (2019). The theory ensures that indigenous individuals plan, own, and control research. It enables indigenous people to maintain, regain, or learn their lost epistemological perspective (Fitts et al., 2019). Phillips and Bunda (2018) discussed how indigenous and non-indigenous scholars can utilise storytelling to deconstruct conventional research practices. They examine narrative research principles from indigenous, feminist, and critical theoretical perspectives. Indigenous Standpoint Theory aims to illuminate indigenous knowledge creation derived from indigenous worldviews with a belief in a sacred ecology and respect for ancestral knowledge (Spiller et al., 2019).

Indigenous standpoint theory is based on indigenous perspectives, knowledge, and experiences. It endeavours to decolonise knowledge production by centring indigenous voices and epistemologies in opposition to dominant Western perspectives. Indigenous standpoint theory is utilised in numerous fields of study, including communication, education, psychology, procurement policies, and narrative research, and its critical perspectives are derived from the various standpoint theories.

This theory is pertinent to this study because it supports examining indigenous communication from a decolonised perspective. It emphasises the significance of an objective study of the indigenous approach from a standpoint not dictated by Western research knowledge. This will provide insight into the uniqueness of indigenous communication in meeting the social, cultural, and developmental requirements of the studied indigenous population.

Research Methodology

This quantitative study used a survey questionnaire to elicit data from respondents. Based on the assertion of Yamane (1967) that a 400-sample size is sufficient to represent a population > 100,000, a structured survey questionnaire was purposively distributed to 420 residents in the seven local governments that make up Ngwa territory. A total of 376 copies of the questionnaire, which form a 90% return rate, were returned and analysed for the study. A cluster sampling technique was employed to choose the participants for the study. The sample consisted of four distinct clusters, each representing a different interest group. The participants selected for this study included individuals from four distinct groups: traditional rulers/chiefs, market women, youths, and adult/older adults. Sixty copies of the questionnaire were distributed to each local government, and questionnaires were administered to a sample of 15 individuals from each cluster within each local government. The survey questionnaire was administered face-to-face (physically) with the support of 4 research assistants.

Analysis of Data

Table 1: The Demography of the respondents

Age Range	Frequency	%
16 – 25	45	12
26 -35	64	17

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36 – 45	83	22
46 – 55	60	16
56 – 65	71	19
66 - above	53	14
Total	376	100
Gender	Frequency	%
Male	195	52
Female	181	48
Total	376	100

Source: Field Study, 2023

The demographic composition of the study sample indicates a balanced representation of both male (52%) and female (48%) genders. The age distribution indicates that individuals from various age groups, including youths, adults, and older adults, were proportionally represented. The distribution and representation of age and gender in the population are appropriate. The data reflect the views, opinions, and experiences of the entire population and give more distinct insights and perspectives, which enhances the validity, reliability, and applicability of the research findings.

Table 2: Various indigenous communication media used in Ngwa land and the social context in which it is used.

S/N	Indigenous Communication Media/Mode	Social Context in which it is used
1	Canon shots– ‘ntu-ala’	traditional festival, burial, traditional ceremony, childbirth
2	Town crier- ‘okuekwe’	information dissemination, public announcement, meetings
3	Talking drum ‘ese ike’, ‘nkwa’	traditional festival, burial, traditional ceremony, entertainment
4	Wooden & Metal gong- bell, ‘Ikoru’, ‘ekwe’, ‘ogele’. ‘igbugbo’ ‘uhe’	traditional festival, burial, entertainment, information dissemination, public announcement, traditional marriage, summons, call to order during meetings,

5	Kolanut (oji)	unity, reception, traditional festival, burial, entertainment, traditional marriage, spiritual, dispute resolution, divination, prayers
6	Folklore- folktales (akukoifo), parables, proverbs (ilulu), riddles, jokes	meetings, dispute resolution, teaching morals/social values, communal meetings, traditional ceremonies, entertainment, intergenerational culture transfer
7	Dressing and clothing (isiagu, aka, okpueze, okpuegwurugwu, nkalari etc	cultural festivals, a mark of identity, traditional marriage, festivals, entertainment, burial, masquerade display, spiritual
8	Palm fronds 'ómu', sacred plants and trees	dispute resolution, spiritual, burial, caveat in a disputed land/item
9	Naming/names	identity, world view, life experiences, authority/dominion, labelling, upbringing,
10	Age grade, okonko	dispute resolution, community service, camaraderie, entertainment, social gatherings, entertainment, law enforcement, burial, meetings, savings & loans, security
11	Colour schemes	burial, spiritual, entertainment, festivals, traditional marriage, decoration, mourning,
12	Food/Culinary, palm wine – (ofeukazi)	festival, burial, entertainment, libation, spiritual (sacrifice), meetings, social gathering, meetings
13	Festivals and traditional dance, songs	spiritual, entertainment, historical facts, satire, family upbringing
14	White powder	childbirth, celebration, spiritual, facial beauty, naming ceremony,

Source: Field Study, 2023

The research findings indicate that the respondents identified fourteen indigenous communication media in Ngwa. The data also emphasised the different social contexts in which these indigenous media platforms are utilised. These show that each traditional media has multiple applications and uses, demonstrating their varied functions and the many situations in which they are employed depending on the context.

Table 3: Whether these indigenous communication media are still used in the communities.

Response	Frequency	%
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Never	4	1
Seldom	83	22
Some of the time	124	33
Most of the time	165	44
Total	376	100

Source: Field Study, 2023

From the above data, a minimum of 4 (1%) respondents believe that indigenous communication is no longer in use compared to 289 (77%) respondents who agree that these modes of communication are sometimes or primarily used in Ngwa land.

Table 4: The level of awareness of the use of the indigenous communication media in Ngwa land.

Response	Frequency	%
Not aware at all	68	18
Somewhat aware	19	5
Moderately aware	71	19
Very much aware	218	58
Total	376	100

Source: Field Study, 2023

The responses from Table 4 show that a combination of 290 (77%) agreed that they were very much and moderately aware of the existence of the traditional media in Ngwa land. This is significantly higher than 68(18%) who said they were unaware. Further analysis of the data also shows that all the respondents who were unaware were between the ages of 16-35 and mostly residents of Aba and Osioma.

Table 5: Whether the people still use these indigenous communication media in their communities today.

Response	Frequency	%
Not at all in use	8	2
Somewhat in use	56	15

Moderately in use	98	26
Very much in use	214	57
Total	376	100

Source: Field Study, 2023

A significant number of 312 (83%) respondents affirmed that these indigenous communication media were widely or moderately utilised in their communities compared to 8(2%) who stated that traditional media is not in use at all and 56(15%) who said they are somewhat in use.

Table 6: Indigenous communication media help maintain and reinforce the cultural identity of the Ngwa people

Response	Frequency	%
Strongly agree	218	58
Agree	150	40
Disagree	4	1
Strongly disagree	4	1
Total	376	100

Source: Field Study, 2023

From Table 6 above, 218 (58%) strongly agreed, and 150 (40%) agreed that indigenous communication still plays a key role. On the contrary, only 4(1%) strongly disagreed that this communication mode helps maintain and reinforce cultural identity in Ngwa.

Table 7: Indigenous communication media play a role in maintaining a sense of community and belonging in Ngwa land.

Response	Frequency	%
No role at all	0	0
Somewhat play a role	26	7
Moderately play a role	86	23
Very much play a role	263	70
Total	376	100

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Source: Field Study, 2023

The data from Table 7 above indicate that a combined total of 350 (93%) respondents attested that indigenous communication still plays a significant or moderate role in maintaining a sense of community belonging. Comparatively, no respondent has an opposing view that indigenous communication does not play a role at all.

Table 8: The advent of modern media and technology has impacted traditional indigenous communication practices.

Response	Frequency	%
Strongly agree	94	25
Agree	203	54
Disagree	71	19
Strongly disagree	8	2
Total	376	100

Source: Field Study, 2023

The responses in Table 8 showed that 297 (79%) respondents strongly agreed or agreed that modern media technology has affected the use of indigenous communication media, compared to 8(2%) who strongly disagreed and 71(19%) who disagreed. Further data review showed that most respondents who disagreed or strongly disagreed were from the 16-45 age range.

Table 9: Blending traditional communication media with modern media will help preserve traditional media from extinction

Response	Frequency	%
Strongly agree	83	22
Agree	177	47
Disagree	105	28
Strongly disagree	11	3
Total	376	100

Source: Field Study, 2023

Table 9 shows that 259 (69%) respondents strongly agreed or agreed that a blend of traditional and modern media should be used to preserve the extinction of the media, 11(3%) strongly disagreed, and 105(28%) disagreed.

Table 10: Young people do not derive the same meaning from these indigenous media channels as their elders.

Response	Frequency	%
Strongly agree	53	14
Agree	207	55
Disagree	94	25
Strongly disagree	23	6
Total	376	100

Source: Field Study, 2023

According to Table 10 above, 53 (14%) strongly agreed, while 207(55%) agreed that young people interpret indigenous media differently than their elders. In contrast, 23(6%) strongly disagreed while 94(25%) disagreed with the proposition.

Table 11: Challenges faced in preserving and promoting indigenous communication media in Ngwa land.

Response	Frequency	%
Never	19	5
Seldom	23	6
Some of the time	180	48
Most of the time	154	41
Total	376	100

Source: Field Study, 2023

A total of 335 (89%) respondents believe that there are challenges with preserving and promoting the use of indigenous media most of the time or sometimes. These data contrast with the 19 (5%) respondents who said there were never challenges.

Discussion of Findings

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The first research objective was to identify the indigenous communication media in Ngwa and what they communicate. The findings identified fourteen distinct forms of indigenous communication media that have continued to be utilised in Ngwa land. Most respondents agree that these modes of communication are currently utilised in Ngwa land although the extent of usage and prominence vary.

The findings show that the cannon shot is a prominent traditional media in Ngwa land and aligns with Akpabio's (2021) demonstrative communication categorisation. Also, the town crier, popularly called '*onyeokuekwe*' in Ngwa, is listed as another influential traditional mass communication media and community mobilization channel. The town crier is an example of institutional communication in Akpabio's (2021) classification. The town crier continues to serve as the village broadcaster, responsible for communicating the decisions of the traditional political institutions to the people in Ngwa. This finding agrees with Obono (2018), who highlighted the significance of the town crier as a community mass announcement system (CMAS) and Gibson and Oberiri (2016) research findings.

The research findings also indicate that proverbs, folktales, and parables are potent communication media in Ngwa land. They are tools for the intergenerational transfer of knowledge, values, education, and entertainment and are used in formal and informal contexts. Their uses correlate with the findings of Okpoko et al. (2016) that proverbs, folktales, and parables are used to advise, praise, commend, rebuke, acknowledge, predict, caution, lament, and teach moral lessons in Igbo land. They can be categorised as axiomatic communication in the Akpabio 2021 classification.

Other communication media in Ngwa land listed by respondents include wooden and metallic gongs, which are extensively used for mass announcements, entertainment, and to draw public attention. The kola nut signifies the reception of a guest and is used for the traditional invocation to ancestors and as a covenant seal. In addition, dressing, clothes, cuisine, and palm wine serve as additional forms of indigenous communication. For instance, the customary *ofeukazi soup* and palm wine are served as a unique cuisine during traditional marriages, festivals or ceremonies, while dressing symbolise class and social status. Another example of Akpabio's (2021) taxonomy of communication in Ngwa is naming people and places. Beyond being a means of identification, naming communicates heritage, history, experience, worldview, family values, circumstances of life, a child's position or day of birth, and expectations (Okpoko et al., 2016).

Colour schemes are non-verbal communication in Ngwa land. For instance, traditionally, a woman wearing black cloth with shaved hair communicates that she is in a mourning period. Similarly, Ngwa festivals and songs are imbued meaningfully and manifest in diverse formats. Findings indicate that songs communicate the mood and type of occasion, such as *imeokwukwu* (a traditional funeral rite), *onunwa* (childbirth), *iliozu* (burial), *ilunwany* (traditional marriage), and other cultural festivals, etc. During cultural festivals, satirical songs are composed to name and shame those who commit abominable acts (*nso ala*), while individual and collective accomplishments are recognised using praise songs. Songs and dances belong to Akapbio's (2021) demonstrative communication, and the performance style determines if it is ritual, ceremonial or social.

The findings above show that indigenous communication plays a prominent role in meeting the day-to-day existential needs of Ngwa people, irrespective of modern forms of communication. The cultural continuity theory supports the study's findings, emphasising the significance of communication practices in preserving indigenous cultures and fostering cultural resilience (Auger, 2016). Indigenous communication methods often carry deep cultural significance. Therefore, supporting and preserving these communication methods is essential for safeguarding indigenous cultures and identities. Accordingly, policies promoting indigenous languages in education, media, and governance can help preserve cultural heritage and foster

inclusive development. This is supported by the findings of Nemeć (2021) and Jones et al. (2017) in the literature review.

The second objective was to ascertain the extent to which people were aware of traditional media in Ngwa land. Results from Tables 4 and 5 indicate that the people are very aware, as a significant number confirmed that indigenous communication is widely used in Ngwa land. This conforms with previous findings by Pwanshikai & Apuke (2016) that traditional communication is now essential for enhancing people's participation in various spheres of life. In most Ngwa communities, people still rely on opinion leaders and traditional institutions to validate messages received via government mass media channels. The finding aligns with Obono's (2018) assertion that indigenous methods of communication continue to hold relevance and are utilised by various groups of people in rural areas and individuals. This is also related to Izuogu et al. (2018) position that the level of awareness shows that indigenous communication demonstrates greater efficacy in mobilisation, enlightenment, and the cultivation of a collective identity among the Igbos.

The respondents' level of awareness and use of indigenous communication show that it may be a potent tool for fostering strong social bonds within communities and promoting collective action to address common challenges. Therefore, policies that support community-based initiatives and empower indigenous people using the various indigenous media can strengthen social cohesion, help in resolving rising communal conflicts, foster inclusive rural development, fight poverty, bridge the communication gap between the government and the people, and rebuild the trust deficit.

The third objective was to establish indigenous communication media's role in Ngwa culture. The study's findings indicate that most respondents agreed that indigenous communication plays a significant role in maintaining a sense of community and belonging in the Ngwa land. They further agreed that such media helps maintain and reinforce the people's cultural identity. The findings agree with Jones et al. (2017) that traditional communication systems are crucial in mobilising communities for development initiatives and are tools for promoting collective action towards sustainable development goals. Bussotti (2015) also posited the role of indigenous communication systems in meeting the needs of the people. This finding is consistent with the indigenous standpoint theory, which recognises that cultural, historical, and social contexts have influenced indigenous peoples' unique ways of knowing and comprehending the world. Irrespective of modernisation, people have relied on indigenous media to disseminate information orally and faster. For instance, indigenous media are used to mobilise people for self-funded community development projects, as could be attested to by various community development projects in Ngwa land. Community development meetings are summoned through the channel, and decisions from the village council are mass disseminated by the town crier and cascaded to kindreds and families through word of mouth by family heads. The role of indigenous communication in meeting the socio-economic and development needs of Ngwa people has significant social and policy implications, especially in contexts where modern forms of communication may not be accessible or culturally appropriate. By recognising and incorporating local knowledge, policies can become more contextually relevant and effective, resulting in sustainable socio-economic development. Indigenous communication can also play a crucial role in fostering community-led development initiatives, strengthening social networks, encouraging collective action, and empowering local leaders for self-reliance.

The next objective considered the people's perception of whether modern media and technology have impacted indigenous communication media in Ngwa land. The findings show that most respondents believed modern media and technology have strongly impacted indigenous communication practices. This aligns with the findings of Onyenakeya (2021) that the shift to digital media poses challenges for the future of indigenous communication in Africa. Data from Table 8 shows that the respondents agree that blending traditional communication with modern media will help preserve traditional media from extinction. The respondents stated that the younger generation sees anything traditional as primitive and outdated. The

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finding reiterates Wefwafwa's (2014) and Nwiedorbu & Nsereka's (2021) call for a blend of both the indigenous communication systems and the modern communication systems to generate a hybrid communication system(s) in Africa. With the inevitable proliferation of digital media, fostering collaboration among indigenous communities, governments, and other stakeholders is crucial to maximising the advantages of digital technology and minimising its adverse impacts on indigenous peoples.

Objective five examined the challenges of using Ngwa indigenous communication media with the advent of technology. Respondents agreed that there are challenges in using indigenous communication in Ngwa land. The challenges are in tandem with the positions of Islam & Fitzgerald (2016), UNESCO (2023), and Onyenankeya (2021), which state that numerous factors threaten indigenous communication. Some of the identified challenges listed by respondents include the inability of the older generation to transfer indigenous knowledge to the younger generation, lack of awareness, the threat of digital media, the demonisation of indigenous practices by Christians, the new wave of passion for European football, the preference for western culture, downplaying cultural values, history and local languages in the schools, and urban migration of the young people, among other challenges. The findings also indicated that the younger generation does not find the same meaning in indigenous communication as the elders. Therefore, the challenges are diverse and require a multifaceted approach. Nwiedorbu & Nsereka (2021) recommended a hybrid system and a blend of indigenous and modern communication systems. Communication policies and directives should be tailored to fit the cultural context and address the community's specific needs and priorities while upholding indigenous peoples' rights.

Conclusion

The Ngwa people have distinct methods of communication that fulfil their individual and communal needs for a functional society. The findings have established that the Ngwa people have a well-developed indigenous verbal and nonverbal communication system. People are well aware of these means of communication and use them for education, entertainment, morals, rituals, religions, social activities, mobilisation, development, and many other uses and gratifications. It has been established that though modernity has eroded the extent and application of some of the established indigenous communication media in Ngwa land, the people still advocate its use. However, the younger generation does not derive the same meaning from these communication media as the elderly. This knowledge gap may further deplete their applicability and survival with technological advancement and rate of adoption. It is advocated that a blend of exogenous and indigenous communication would help sustain the indigenous communication system.

Recommendations

1. In line with the first objective, states and local governments should consider utilising and institutionalising traditional media platforms, such as the town criers and festivals, as part of their grassroots development strategies.
2. Considering the awareness and use of indigenous communication in Ngwa land, the government should continue to deploy and adopt indigenous communication as a potent tool for fostering strong social bonds within communities and promoting grassroots development.
3. The government should incorporate or blend indigenous communication systems with any other mass-mediated communication strategy in designing communication strategies for any intervention or project.

4. With the influx of digital media, the government must prioritise policy efforts that preserve and promote indigenous languages, channels, traditions, and storytelling methods.
5. To address the challenges, the people should strive to popularise indigenous communication practices, such as festivals, music, and dances that benefit the younger population through their development associations.

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