Revisiting the Roots: Assessing the Suitability of African Traditional Communication System for Public Relations Campaigns in The Rural Area: an Empirical Study

ADELUSI, Gabriel Ayodeji[1], AKINMADE, Oyinkansola Henrietta[2]

[1,2] Department of media and communication studies, Afe Babalola University, Ado Ekiti

ABSTRACT	ARTICLE DETAILS

Despite the emergence of modern communication system such as print and electronic media, Africans people still consider traditional African communication system as a vital means of disseminating information especially in the rural areas. The rural areas which constitute the larger part of the population across the world are the economic base of the nations. They are the major sources of capital formation for the domestic manufacturers. This study explores the potentials of African traditional communication system in enhancing public relations campaigns in the rural areas. The aim of the study is to assess the suitability of Africa system of communication for public relations campaigns in the rural areas. To achieve this aim, the study examine the extent to which African communication system is effectively communicating public relations campaign messages to the rural dwellers, the gap between African communication system and other media categories in achieving the desired results during public relations campaigns in the rural areas and to suggest the media suitable for public relations campaigns in the rural areas. The study adopted Survey research with stratified random sampling to select the respondents from Ekiti State, Nigeria. The data for this study is primary and questionnaires were administered to the respondents. The study used descriptive statistics for data analysis. While correlation was used to test the hypotheses. This study revealed the media preference of the rural dwellers in the study area. From the findings, it was found that rural dwellers trusted and preferred traditional channels of communication such as town crier, traditional leaders and village square meetings, to electronic media on the issues that have direct effect on them. Findings also suggest African traditional communications system as a viable communication tool to complement public relations campaigns in the rural areas with the use of local languages.

KEYWORDS: Public relations campaign, rural areas, Africa traditional communication system

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INTRODUCTION

Public communications in the rural areas have been in existence for a very long time. Before the advent of modern media technology, the traditional African settings have been using some popular media to communicate the members of the society. This is popularly known as folk or trado media. Examples of this type of media include: town crier, village square meetings, horse man, fire work etc. Even though, the technological advancement has brought about a seemingly better and less tedious media of mass communication called Traditional media which are electronic and print media. Afterward the emergence of new media whose use might still be limited in the rural areas due to some economic and social factors. Wilson[1] , make a case for the usefulness of African traditional communication system by noting that, "they are instrumental in the mobilization of people at the grass root level for community development and national consciousness; enlightenment of people in cultural, political, health, and other programmes leading toward self-actualization; public entertainment through arts, cultural festivals, musicals and dramatic performances; and intercultural and other communications purposes leading to group and national cohesiveness".

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[1] D. Wilson, 'Traditional Systems of Communication in Modern African Development: An Analytical Viewpoint' (1987) 1(2) *African Media Review* 87, 104

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Asemah, et al.[2], say, "The African indigenous media have come to exist for their uniqueness and originality based on the tradition and culture of the people. These essentially make them highly effective and enduring in the dissemination of information personally, interpersonally, and through group communications". Rural communication has always been in the focus because of its importance to the national and organisational development. Ejejimogbe,[3] (2020) in Asemah, et al. [4] believed that, African Communication system remain what essentially sustain the information needs of the rural African societies. For this reason, rural dwellers have always been the target of organisations both commercial and non-commercial due to their relevance both in population and contributions to the growth and advancement of the world. Apart from their population which formed the major parts of the world, rural dwellers engage in primary activities that formed the foundation for any economic development. Rural areas as the major sources of market for domestic manufacturers that is why the business organizations are interested in taking their public relations activities to the rural area because they are the major consumers of their goods and services.

Despite the availability of electronic media in many of these rural areas, it is still observed that many of the public relations campaigns that required serious engagements and high level of effectiveness in the rural areas still revert to the traditional communication system called folk media to engage the members of these rural communities. Examples of such communications are the electioneering campaigns by political parties whenever they want to elect their leaders. Likewise, during immunisation campaigns to eradicate certain deceases in the locality, also, during emergency situations in the community when there is need to urgently assemble members of the community or whenever there is need to pass important information to the people in the community.

The fact that most of the rural communities in African and Nigeria in particular, still rely on these traditional communication system called folk media to achieve effectiveness whenever there is need to mobilise or persuade members of their communities on certain events call for question on the need to identify the suitability of folk media for public relations campaigns in the rural areas among the three media categories.

Scope of the study

The scope of the study is limited to the suitability of Africa communication system for public relations campaigns in the rural areas. The study has been confined to Ekiti state, Nigeria which can largely be described as rural going by the universal definition of rural area.

Objective of Study

a. To examine the extent to which African communication system is effectively communicating public relations campaign message to the rural dwellers
b. To study the gap between African communication system and other media categories in achieving the desired results during public relations campaigns in the rural areas
c. To suggest the media suitable for public relations campaigns in the rural areas

LITERATURE REVIEW

African traditional communication system comprises of many forms of communication among which are storytelling, town crier, village square meetings, gong man, town hall meeting etc. past studies have highlighted the potency of this African communication system in community mobilisation, effective and enduring information dissemination, promotion of social change and in ensuring community cohesion. African communication system is distinguished for its capacity to effectively deliver an effective communication to African rural population. Ayantayo[5] disagreed with some past scholars with the ways in which African indigenous communication systems were discussed. This is because of their inability to properly identify the boundary between African communication systems and modern mass media. According to Ayantayo[6], "from the past studies of African communications systems, we notice ambiguity which is associated with the manner in which indigenous communication systems were discussed. For example, scholars like Dobb and Wilson[7] are found wanting because they mixed-up traditional communications systems with

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[2] E.S. Asemah, J.S. Kente, and A.O. Ukwam-Uwaoma, Handbook on African Communication Systems (Jos University Press 2021).

[3] Ejejimogbe, 'African Indigenous Media' (2020) <https://ejejimogbesite.wordpress.com/african-indigenous-media/> accessed 26 August 2024.

[4] Asemah et al. (n 2)

[5] J.K. Ayantayo, 'The Ethical Dimension of African Indigenous Communication Systems: An Analysis' (2001) 1 Topical Issues in Communication Arts & Sciences.

[6] Ayantayo (n 1)

[7] D. Wilson, 'Traditional Systems of Communication in Modern African Development: An Analytical Viewpoint' (1987) 1(2) African Media Review 87, 104

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exogenous ones like radio and television, and hence they could not adequately identify or distinguish the boundary between traditional communication systems with modern mass media.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed quantitative research approach. Survey research design was used to collect data for this research (n = 500) to explore the suitability of African traditional communication system for public relations campaigns in the rural areas.
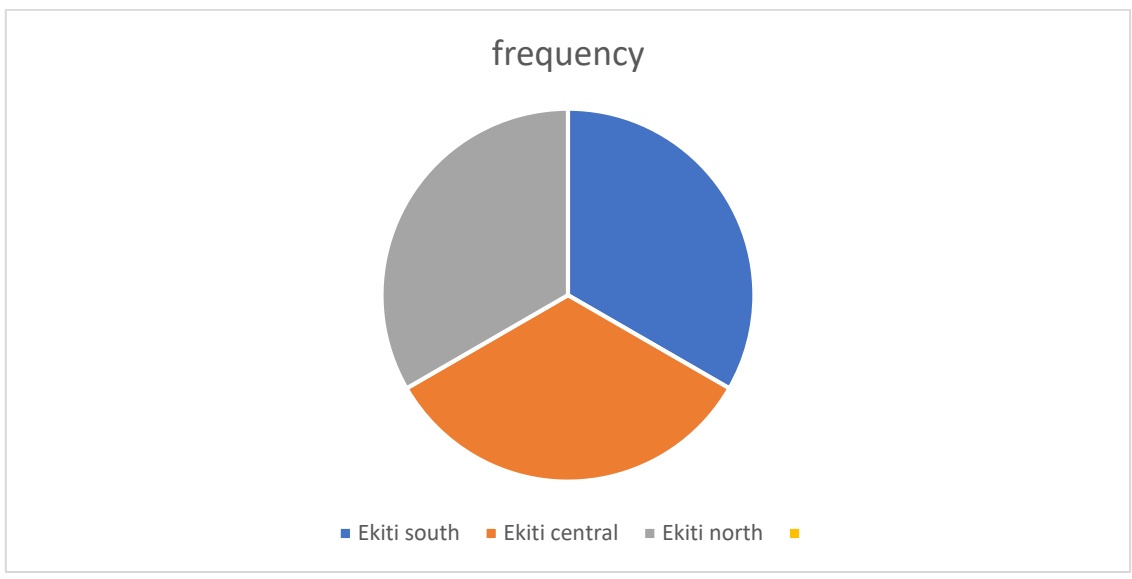
DATA ANALYSIS

Table 1.1 Profile of respondents

Variables	Classification	Total N (%)	
Gender	Male	235	47%
	Female	265	53%
Age	Less than 18	0	
	18 – 24	225	45%
	25 – 39	240	48%
	40 – 60	35	7%

Table 1 2 distribution of the respondents

Senatorial districts	Total	Percentage
Ekiti south	160	32%
Ekiti central	180	36%
Ekiti north	160	32%
Total	500	100%

The distribution of respondents among the three senatorial districts that makes Ekiti state with Ekiti south having 160 respondent, Ekiti central 180 and Ekiti north 160.

Table 1.3 Effective delivery of PR message through African communication system and other media

	Variables	Total No	%
Effectiveness of ACS and Access to other Media	Receipt of PR messages through African Communication System	195	39
	Receipt of PR messages through other media sources	305	61
	Access and usage of other media	375	75
	Non reliance on other media	125	25

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The percentage of effective delivery of public relations messages through African system of communication is 39% lower than the 61% which are those who receive public relation messages through other media sources. This shows that the number of those who are being mobilize through other media sources is fairly higher than those who receive their PR message through African communication system. This indicate that public relations practitioners are focused on using other media sources to mobilize rural dwellers during public relations campaign in the rural area. Also, those that have access and use other media to receive PR messages are far more than those who exclusively depend on African communication system for their PR messages. However, this may not translate to effective mobilization but more people in the rural areas are getting more awareness from other media sources.

Table 1.4 Motivation of rural dwellers with African communication system more than other media categories in the rural areas

|	Variables	Total No	%
Motivation to use African communication system than other media	Motivation to use African communication system	135	27
	Motivation to use other media	365	73
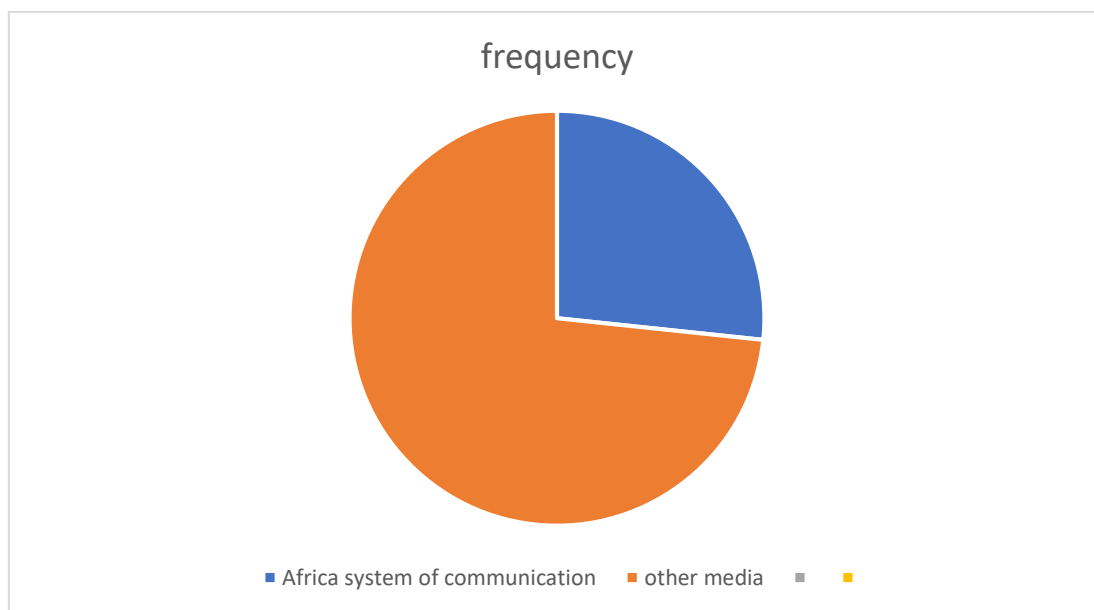
This indicate that more people i.e. 73% are motivated through the use of other media categories than African communication system 27%. However, it could not be ascertain if this translate to effectiveness. This shows that African communication system do not have the capacity to serve the populace in the rural areas or it is gradually fading among African rural dwellers.

Table 1.5 Major information source of the respondents to determine suitable media for PR campaigns in the rural areas.

	Variables	Total No	%
Major information source of the respondents	African communication system	310	62
	Other media sources	190	38
		500	100

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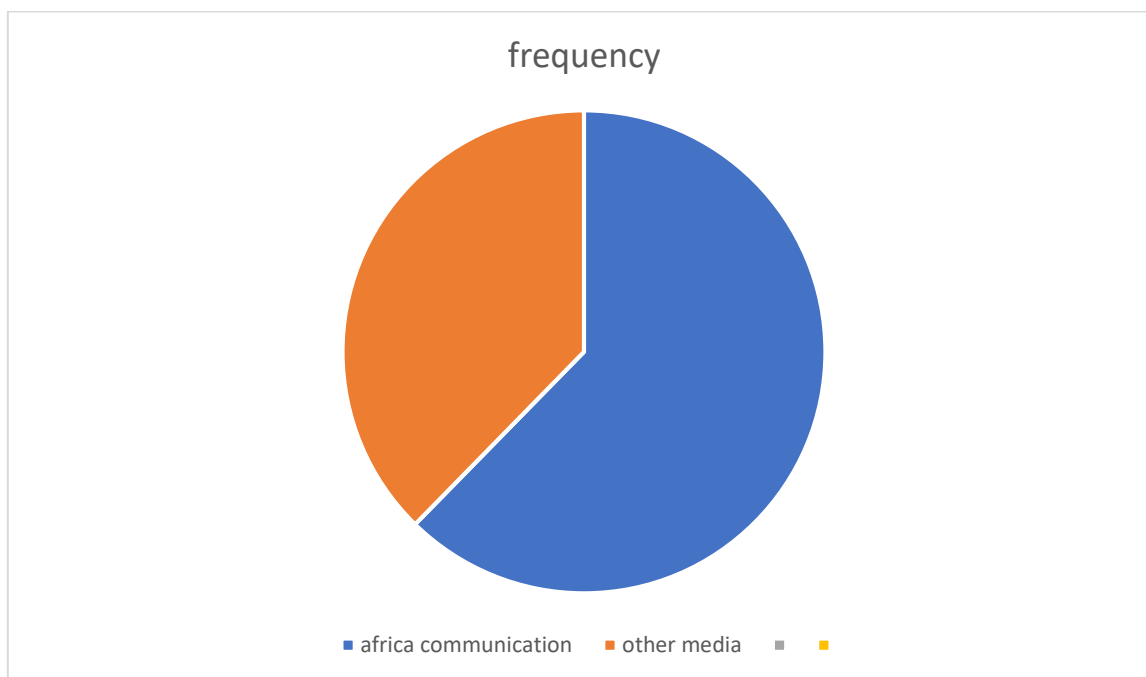
62% of the respondents in the population under study got their information much more on media sources other than African communication system, while 38% got their information from African communication system. Therefore, media sources other than African communication system may be more suitable for communicating public relations campaign messages in the rural areas than African communication system.

Findings

While testing the hypotheses of this study, the pearson correlation "r" statistics was employed. Where the result is presented as follows:

Analysis of the relationship between effective delivery of PR message through African communication system and other media

Indicators	B	T	R	R2	F	Remarks
African communication system and other media	0.94	17.831	0.94	.347	.000	0.94

From the above, there is high positive correlation of 0.94, therefore, the Null hypothesis of no significant relationship between the use of African communication system and other media in ensuring effective delivery of public relations campaign messages in the rural areas is rejected. This means that there is a significant relationship between African communication system and other media categories in ensuring effective delivery of public relations messages to rural dwellers. This implies that public relations campaign messages are being delivered more effectively to the rural dwellers through other media categories than African communication system. In other word, public relations campaign messages in the rural areas can get to the target audience through other media better than African communication system

Analysis of the relationship between the use of African communication system and other media categories in motivating the people in rural areas to embrace public relations campaign messages

Indicators	B	T	R	R2	F	Sig	Remarks
African communication system and other media categories	.752	18.754	.752	.347	347.941	.000	Significant

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From the above result, the correlation "r" is 0.75. This shows that there is high positive correlation. The Null hypothesis of no significant relationship between the use of African communication system and other media categories in motivating the rural dweller to accept public relations messages in the rural areas is therefore rejected. This means there is a significant relationship between how rural dwellers are motivated through African communication system and other media categories. In other words, the media that motivates the respondents are most likely to be the right media for public relations campaign in the rural areas.

Analysis of the relationship between the information sources of the respondents to determine suitable media for PR campaigns in the rural areas

Indicators	B	T	R	R2	F	Sig	Remarks
African communication system and other media categories	.814	17.831	.814	.347	347.941	.000	Significant

From the above, the calculated "r" value is (0.8). This show high positive correlation. The Null hypothesis of no significant relationship between the use of African communication system and other media categories as major sources suitable for public relations campaign messages to the people in the rural areas is rejected. This means there is a significant relationship between the two information sources to the rural areas. This result implies that the information sources is very important in determine the media suitable for public relations campaign messages in the rural areas. Therefore, other media categories other than African communication system is the suitable media to communicate public relations campaign messages to the rural dwellers in the study area.

DISCUSSION

The result of the findings underscore the suitability of using African communication system for public relations campaigns in the rural areas. The result shows that African communication system also known as folk media may not be the most suitable media for public relations campaign in the rural area due to the advancement in media technology but agreed with the positions of Ate[8] that other media such as electronic media and social media mostly radio are the dominant media in spreading of information, most ubiquitous and the cheapest medium of communication available to man and also the most pervasive and most effective media in reaching the country's widely dispersed heterogeneous audience. Because 75% of the respondents said electronic media (Radio and Television) are the major sources of their information and 82% of respondent have radio. Therefore, other media mostly electronic media have the capacity to effectively deliver public relations campaign messages in the rural areas better than African communication system.

The result also shows that other media categories (i.e., electronic media, social media and print) are capable of motivating the rural dwellers better than the African communication system. Therefore, these media categories are most likely the right media to motivate the rural dwellers on any public relations matters

Significantly too, the result of the findings pointed to the fact that the rural dwellers trust African communication system to get reliable information more than other media categories but does not have the capacity to effectively deliver public relations messages like other media which are technologically driven. This may be partly agreed with Nwagwu[9] and Nwammuo[10] who are of the opinion that interpersonal sources that provide opportunities for discussing information impact, are most useful for adding credibility to media content, shifting altitude and prompting behavioural practice change. This shows that African communication system may have limited ability to spread public relations messages but has the potential to persuade rural dwellers more than other media categories.

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis of the findings of this study, it was concluded that the rural dwellers in the study area have their own preference for media usage. And African communication system does not have the capacity to deliver public relations campaign messages more than modern media in the rural areas. Even though, African communication system has limited capacity to spread public relations messages, but they possess the ability to reinforce the message gotten through other means and persuade the rural dwellers

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[8] A.A. Ate, S. Oloruntola, C.I. Otulve, and C.H. Onwobere, Media and Society (National Open University Press 2008) 9-16.

[9] W.D. Nwagwu, 'Awareness on the Reproductive Health of the Girl Child in Imo State: A Report Submitted to MacArthur Fund for Leadership and Development' (2006)

[10] .N. Nwammuo, 'Mediamorphosis: Analysing the Convergence of Digital Media Forms Alongside African Traditional Media' (2011) 5(2) *African Research Review* 234, 238.

to accept or reject certain idea or products, this may be responsible for its continuous usage by organisations and politicians when there is need to persuade members of the public on important matters. This is an opportunity for the PR practitioners to embrace the potentials of African traditional communication system as highlighted in this study during public relations campaigns in the rural areas. However the academic scholars will have to look for a way of expanding the scope of African communication system, so it will not go into extinction.

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7) A.N. Nwammuo, 'Mediamorphosis: Analysing the Convergence of Digital Media Forms Alongside African Traditional Media' (2011) 5(2) African Research Review 234-238