



Mountain Top University

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College of Humanities, Management and Social Sciences

Department of Mass Communication

- Course Title: African Communication Systems
- Course Code: MCM 104
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Course Outline

- What is African Communication Systems
- Reasons for studying ACS
- Classification of traditional channels of communication
- Verbal and non-verbal communication
- Differences between verbal and non-verbal communication.
- Visual channels of communication and pigmentation/Colours as a group of visual channels
- Appearance: Costume, Facial marks and, Physical look, Tattoos/Records
- Iconographic channels of communication.
- Instrumental channels of communication: definition, types, functions.
- Idiophones: wooden drums, bells, gongs, pot drums
- Membraneophones in the south-western Nigeria
- Aerophones, whistles, pipes and flutes
- Poetry, chants and incantations
- Signals, signs and symbology

What is communication?

Communication is a process by which a sender passes information to the receiver or decoder.

It involves the contacting, relaying and transferring of ideas, news, secrets, messages, orders and information from one person, group or community to others.

What is African Communication Systems

- It is a complex system of communication which pervades all aspects of rural African life. According to Denga (1998) cited in Mede (1998), it has varied characteristics which include dynamism and the fact of its being a multi-media and multi-channel system. It is perhaps the most important way by which the ruralites communicate among themselves and with others. So, despite the advent of the modern-day media in Africa, the use of traditional cues and materials is still very much common; and acceptable, adaptable and recognizable by the people.

Model of communication

- Basically, the model of communication is the structure that is prevalent in the old African era of communication where feedback mechanism was minimal.
- Before communication take place, it is important to eliminate the barrier of language and observe the prevalent established structure.
- The message, sender, channel of communication and the receiver.

Reasons for studying ACS

- It is in fact very essential to understand the mode of communication prevalent before the advent of technology.
- It is also used to preserve the memories of communication systems used in different communities in Africa.
- The channels of communication used in these localities and the importance attached to these would also be studied.
- The types of messages communicated.
- The use of symbols and what each represents in the old African traditions.

Importance of African Communication Systems

- Before the invasion of technology, there was an established structure through which the African folks communicated to one another?
- African Communication System is all about understanding some of the media and medium through which communication is achieved.
- Also, it serves as a means of keeping alive the communication tradition of the olden days before the era of technology.

Different cultures

- Each culture of different regions had their established mode of communication. The Japanese culture is different from the American Culture, the Chinese's culture also different from the African culture. Even among Nigerians, the Yoruba culture is different from the Kanuri and diverse in all cultures in Africa.
- This course will look at the prevalent communication methods in Africa.

Classification of African Communication Methods

- Traditional channels of communication are the ancient methods of communication by which information is relayed to the audience in the pre-technology era.
- There are different scholars that gave different classifications to the traditional channels of communication but we are going to understudy four major classification.

Classification of Traditional Channels of Communication.

- According to Ibagere, there has often been some confusion regarding what actually constitutes African traditional media or African traditional modes of communication.
- Changes in technology and organization make it difficult to draw a firm line separating indigenous from exogenous communication systems which existed in Africa before the arrival of the mass media. In the nutshell, we had, the source, channels, destination and feedback mechanisms.
- The source: Emirs, Chiefs, Obas, elders. Channels- speeches, town criers, horsemen, bells, drums, gongs. Destination- audience, family members, local vigilantes and the feedback was bottom-up mechanisms

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- Omu in 1978 said the traditional media can be conveniently classified into two groups namely the oral communication or informal transference media and the organised communication or formal transference media.
 - Oreh in 1980 said it can be classified into interpersonal/ face-to-face type of communication, intergroup communication and communication at the mass level.
 - In 1994, Ibagere verbal, non verbal and esoteric modes of communication.

Verbal communication

- Verbal communication refers to direct contacts and actions or word of mouth. People communicate through discussions and songs as the need arises. By this mode, people meet face to face to discuss, decide and act. Since most of the various ethnic groups in Nigeria are basically non-literate, oral forms of communication play a significant role in their indigenous communication networks. In many places, the most important channel for the dissemination of news (information) is the word of mouth ie verbal communication. Oreh divides verbal communication into three main groups. 1.spoken communication, consists of simple statements, proverbs, riddles. 2. folktales (folk tale characters or folk tales which contain both animals, human and superhuman characters), and 3. Mythology and legends.
- Ibagere lists the following forms as verbal modes—spoken language, song, poetry, chant and incantations.

Non Verbal Communication

- This is sharing meaning with others non-linguistically. It refers to the mode of communication done with the human body and does not involve the use of words.
- It involves all such modes of communication which make use of any device other than the spoken word, song, chant, incantation and other related modes. So, it refers to the mode of communication done with the human body and does not involve the use of words.
- Ibagere classified the non-verbal mode into the following groups: body language, symbology, dance, music and the hardware of music (idiophone membraneophone, chordophone, aerophone and xylophone.)

Differences between verbal and Non-verbal Communication

Verbal communication	Non-verbal communication
<p><u>a. characteristics of language</u></p> <p>It has structure.</p> <p>It exhibit displacement.</p> <p>It is productive.</p> <p>It is self reflexive.</p>	<p><u>Characteristics of language</u></p> <p>It does not possess the characteristics of language.</p> <p>It does not possess an explicit set of grammar or syntax or any other characteristics of language.</p>
<p><u>Number of channels</u></p> <p>It is single-channelled. One can express enthusiasm using expressions like; wow, what a day! etc</p>	<p><u>Number of channels</u></p> <p>It is multi-channelled, which adds impact and believability. For example, expressions of enthusiasm can be done by jumping up and down; flailing gestures, wide eyes, smiles, expressive tone of voice etc.</p>

Visual Channels of Communication

- These are derived from the sense of sight and knowledge. The mere sight of someone's tribal marks, hairdo, tattoos, and incisions communicates. Visual communication is used for different purposes and communicates different messages. Each has its own peculiar meaning. Some warn people or signify sundry things. Black, for instance signifies mourning or gloom; red signifies danger

Types of visual communication

- Some examples of visual communication channels are dress codes, colours, facial marks, hairdos, tattoos, incisions and marks on the skin, and they all communicate.
- 1. Pigmentation and Colours eg. White, red, green, and black.
- 2. Appearance eg.
 - - Physical appearance
 - -Clothes, and
 - -Accessories

Icons as Channels of Communication

- Akpabio noted that icons are generally regarded as standing for or representing something. These do not uniformly communicate the same message and are culture as what they communicate is based on a society's history, experience and circumstance, elements, symbols, and icons.
- 1. Objects Examples are: Charcoal, White dove, Kolanut, White clay, Feather, Egg Calabash, Beads, Drinking gourds, Flag**
 - 2. Florals. Examples are, Young unopened palm fronds, Okono tree, Plantain stems**

Instrumental Channel of Communication

- Every ethnic group in Africa has instrumental devices that are peculiar to them and perform different communication functions. Such instrument may be totally different from those used by other people. Instrumental communication devices can be divided into two. Those with definite pitch and those with indefinite pitch.
- Instruments of definite pitch include drums, bells, xylophones and gongs etc. while those with indefinite pitch include tambourines, cymbals, rattle etc.

Idiophones

- These are percussion instrument capable of producing sound by themselves (self sounding instruments). The objects could be struck, pricked, pulled or pressed with the foot e.g. gongs.

Membraneophones

- These are media on which sound is produced through the vibration of membranes. They include all varieties of skin or leather drum. These drums are beaten or struck with well carved sticks. Examples include the Iya ilu in the dundun set of drums among the Yoruba, the ikoro by the Igbo, and drum of the ikine society among the Kalabari. Skin drum goes by different names in different parts of Nigeria and the size of the drums are factored into the names they are given.

Aerophones

- According to Ibagere, these are musical instruments which produce sound as a result of the vibration of a column of air which is forced through a kind of pipe. It is the mouth that is usually used to force this air through the instrument. The aerophone include instruments such as the flute family, reed pipes, horns, trumpet and other such kinds

Demonstrative channel of communication

Akpabio states that there are two main types of demonstrative communication which are music and signals. Dance is considered a type of demonstrative communication device as certain dance steps communicate too.

Music is used in religious worship

It is also used as a form of celebration and ceremonies.

Dance is culture specific. One has to be literate in the culture of the source of the dance to understand what the dance is communicating.

Poetry chant and incantations

- In whatever language, poetry is regarded as emotions recollected in tranquility because of its high order as demanded of the poet and the audience. Poetry has intellectual, entertainment and instructional functions. It can be used to propel positive change.
- Chants refers to articulating rendition in musical succession. It is used mostly in occasions of societal significance
- Depending on circumstances, incantations is used to serve different purposes such as religious or extra mundane communication.

Signs, signals and symbols

- Signals such as gunshot signifying death of a prominent communal person
- Signs on trees to mark the road and danger zones are prominent
- Symbols such as whitehead, comprise metaphors of visual communication. Symbolography are not languages but means by which ideas too obscure dangerous and inconvenient are communicated.

Self Assessment

1. How do justify the importance of understanding African Communication methods?
2. Highlight the communication methods prevalent in the traditional African communities.

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