

Community Leaders' Access to Channels of Communication: The Nigerian Experience



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Abstract

This article examines community leaders' crucial roles in development in a developing nation; on assumption that their level of mobilization and participation in leadership programs in rural communities is dependent upon the extent to which they have access to communication channels (social, conventional, and traditional). Over the years, community leaders have aided the development of grassroots through, leadership, networking, shared vision, and decision-making. Despite the contributions of community leaders to rural development, it appears that they are only drafted into the development process in theory but there exists no practical liaison with them. Commencing with an examination of the parameters for assessing "access", the article argues that since the rural community is the larger part of the nation's population and is often known for neglect, community leaders remain alienated, marginalized, and denied the privilege of communicating through conventional mass media. The objective of this paper is to identify communication channels with the potential for generating leaders' participation. The researcher adopted both qualitative and quantitative approaches. It is expected that "repackaging" of communication would ensure that leaders are no longer 'excommunicated'. The article concludes by advocating for more participatory people-based leaders and development-oriented communication channels as a way of integrating them into development efforts. The significance of the study is that community leaders will have access to important information through appropriate communication channels. It recommends making mass media more interactive and participatory with community leaders actively involved in the production of communication channels.

Keywords: *Community Leaders, Communication Channels, Access, Leadership, Nigeria*

Introduction

Nigeria is one of the developing nations where community leaders play crucial roles in the development process because true development commences from the grassroots. Community leaders are the solid rock and village anchors who hold the forth for the village people. They are the most recognized and the most elderly people, perceived to possess boundless wisdom. Community leaders cover local church leaders, community activists, school officials, and local business leaders who all need communication channels that function effectively, to aid in the development process of the Country as a whole. Oftentimes, they are not mobilized but barred from participation in community development programs by the government and NGO officials due to their traditional positions and roles. The reason may be that they lack access to communication channels.

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Hence, this could lead to an assumption that their level of mobilization and participation in leadership programs in rural communities is dependent upon the extent to which they have access to information channels.

Over the years, community leaders have aided the development of grassroots through, leadership, networking, shared vision, and decision-making, even when there was no information explosion just as it happening, especially with the advent of social media. One may ask what has been done in the past to strengthen the community leaders in the past. From an interview with some notable community leaders, it was gathered that the urban government plays a pivotal role in helping community leaders develop and revitalize low-income earners, and in some cases funds are allocated to communities through the activities of development agents and extension officers. Also, from documentary evidence, the government provides grants to support community leaders in providing services in the communities. In the same vein, McMillan and Chavis, (1986), asserted that the role of community leaders is key in creating initial project ideas as well as sharing them with the community members in order to mobilize support and create a sense of membership within the community.

Community leaders' job is not only to take the problems of the community upon themselves and fix everything but also to work together with everyone in the community to mobilize and guide others to facilitate solutions to community needs and aspirations. Judging from the above sentence, the highlight remains the fact that leaders require access to current channels to function effectively with their subjects. Rural communities are leveled with a series of challenges, some of these major issues include; agriculture and ownership of the land, lack of cottage industries, lack of education, social discordances, illegal wealth, illiteracy, poverty, unemployment, homelessness, crime, and violence, poverty, etc. Again, rural areas are perceived to be an abode of superstition, diseases, low income, and low productivity, so in cases like this, the community leaders will need access to transmit the required information on the government's sustainable policy towards rural transformation and dispel any such superstitious beliefs and challenges that are capable of being inimical to rural transformation/alleviate the poor condition in the rural community. To alleviate the suffering of the community dwellers, the leaders recruit and teach others to become leaders and develop them to build a strong community of individuals that can work together to achieve goals of meeting their felt needs (Mayer, 2005).

Part of the problems of access are derived from the traditionalism and conservatism of the rural society and only visionary leaders who have access to channels of communication are capable of managing such problems. These can be overcome through the intervention of community leaders' access to channels of communication which they can utilize to convey information or transmit to a wider audience. These channels can also be used by community leaders within a particular community to control, motivate, express, and inform on the eradication of poverty, and illiteracy, improvement of public health sanitation, women empowerment, and available credit facilities in agriculture and employment opportunities.

Despite this increased awareness of community leaders' role and the subsequent planning for their integration, it is observed that community leaders are not completely integrated into the development process but are merely drafted or conscripted into development to make people believe that they are being carried along. It is also observed that for decades now, the trends in most developing countries like Nigeria is that,

community development efforts are perceived to be conceived, brainstormed, conceptualized, designed, tested, documented, and implemented by only the educated government officials and directed by them, with the hope that the community leaders will eventually be reached and considered, but this is far from the truth. In the past, community leaders were neither reckoned with nor brought into the scene of developmental issues. They were only accorded due recognition as elders and advisers and were restricted or reserved for only ceremonial issues where they were revered as kings and queens, only to reign but not be involved in the administration of development programs.

Incidentally, over the years, there has been a paradigm shift in the reason why community leaders should be integrated into the administration of development projects at the grassroots. It became clear that they have the skills and experience to provide accurate and adequate information and regular documentation of their contributions to the grassroots economy. Ogbodu (1996), also recommended the same for women, whose contribution to the economy was ignored. It is the author's opinion that there has been inadequate data and misperceptions about the role of community leaders at the inception stage of development projects. Commencing with an examination of the parameters for assessing "access", the article argues that since the rural community is the larger part of the nation's population and is often known for neglect, community leaders remain alienated, marginalized, and denied their right to communicate through conventional mass media. The objective of this paper is to identify communication channels with the potential for generating leaders' participation in community development.

Community Leaders and the National Economy

In Nigeria, community leaders may be very few but their roles and services are enormous and they are key to creating the initial project ideas and sharing them with the community dwellers to mobilize support and also create a sense of membership within the community (Chavis, 1986). They possess the skills that make them effective community leaders and such skills can be identified as; strong interpersonal communication skills, empathy, ability to inspire their subjects, problem-solving skills, team leadership, etc. The basis for possessing these skills is to mobilize support and create a sense of oneness among members of the community. This is supported by Anna Maria College (2012), in their online programs which are committed to leading positive change in the public sector. Again, Ozor (2008), explained that the potential of local leaders must be recognized because they make decisions on different issues affecting the communities. The major role and responsibility of community leaders are seen where they work together and are amiable with all and sundry in the community.

Despite the huge contributions of community leaders to both rural and national economies, their entrants and activities are extremely invisible and overlooked because they lack access to the latest communication channels. Even the current data on engagements and contributions of community leaders are sparse in official documents, hence, it is obvious that their presence and activities are not recognized, cherished, or appreciated. Society only expected them to organize ritual celebrations for the gods in the hope of appeasing them and ensuring peace and prosperity on behalf of the community (International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences, (2001). Up till now, it is not clear whether their roles are even included in the national record. During the investigation of this article, it was gathered that the reasons for the exclusion of

community leaders, were purely cultural and it could be deduced that the community leaders are not regarded as important factors in rural information programs because of their traditional position in the society. Unfortunately, the emergence of mobile communication such as smartphones, laptops, the internet, and social media platforms not making things easier for community leaders because they are still alienated and marginalized and they are still treated as mere advisers and mere ceremonial heads who can not contribute to the community information process.

Communities Leaders and their Influences in Rural Areas

Community leaders are the landlords/landladies of all communities. They are the most respected group of people in communities, the first to be contacted and the last to be consulted. They are the most knowledgeable set of people, versed with all the facts required for development purposes. They strengthen community health and well-being through their links with community health and media officials and their involvement with development officials. They collaborate with all governmental agencies on various phases of development projects to raise the standard of living of members. Their influences as community leaders spread over mentoring and caring for the youths and engaging them to close the divide between the traditional ways and the new ways of doing things, as well as bridging the perceived divide between the younger and older generation. They preserve the cultural identity and their responsibilities rest both within and outside the community. They also share their knowledge, skills, and experience with other communities in the spirit of oneness. Rami, Abdulla, and Simin (2020) carried out some work on the influence of community leaders in rural communities and found that they exert a positive influence on the community's development and progress.

The emergence of mobile communication such as smartphones, laptops, the internet, and social media platforms is not making things easier for community leaders because they are still alienated and marginalized and they are still treated as mere advisers and mere ceremonial heads who can not contribute to the community information process.

This assertion was confirmed by the Baale of Laniba village in Akinyele local government area of Oyo state, who stated that his village has been liaising with government agencies on development issues but media officials are still denying them access to the latest information channels. He added that local communities currently have their community websites and are on various social media platforms for various purposes and activities such as; local newspaper reading arena, learning about local organizations, emergency management participation, and so on. From the above, it can be deduced that community leaders are capable of communicating with the public, thus they should receive regular briefings and updates during various development projects and must not be denied access to information channels. Opportunities for briefs are available with the use of community resources but most times the community leaders are not consulted when the government brings the media to visit any site of community projects. It showed that the government had failed to recognize the valuable knowledge, skills, and experience of the community leaders (Elizabeth Brooks (2013). What government and media officials need to do is arrange for ways of creating awareness of the upgrade to mobile and other electronic communication tools and donate or distribute various mobile communication tools to them by way of showing their support to them. Experiences and valuable information on the conditions in rural communities are more enlightened now compared to what was obtained in the past, hence there is an urgent

need to create a relationship with traditional leaders to facilitate an effective exchange of information. In a most recent interview with community leaders in the Akinyele local government area of Oyo state, this researcher found that communication specialists are still not liaising with community leaders for information dissemination on various projects in communities. In various interactions with community leaders in about six villages in the Akinyele local government area of Oyo state, this researcher found that community leaders can make credible and confident spokesmen for communicating information to the public and the media on various vital issues. Research has revealed that community leaders already have links with their subordinates because they are wise elders and custodians of the people's culture, they are trusted and respected by their subjects and contribute to the reformation and reintegration of deviants or recalcitrant individuals and groups into their society. (Tile, 1995).

Causes of Marginalization of Community Leaders

Community leaders were and are still treated as sacred cows in society, this could be enough reason for their exclusion in the process of communication. They were accorded the highest esteem and treated as the pride of the community, on this basis, were not invited to be involved in the local information process. It is possible that the government and media officials felt that they were not educated enough to participate in the process of development. Thus, exclusive groups like the community leaders must be invited, encouraged, and equipped with the due and necessary knowledge, skills, and tools for making discriminating choices to liberate themselves from a state of imaginary illiteracy and inferiority complex. As community leaders' contributions are hardly accorded adequate attention or appreciated in the development process, one can guess that communication channels designed for liberation will not be directed at them. In addition, available research findings have shown that community leaders in developing countries are information poor, therefore deserve special attention at all levels of communication. It is therefore our contention that the degree of community leaders' emancipation with its corresponding implication for their mobilization and participation in development is dependent on the extent to which they have access to channels of communication.

Social Media and Community Leaders.

It is amazing the manner Social media affects leadership, it allows for more personal communication between the leaders and the followers. Following recent research, it was found that community leaders use these social media platforms to grow and improve their communities. Hoigman(2019), lists some of the leaders who have used social media to communicate effectively, they include; Beth Comstock, the former vice-chair of General Electric, and John Legere, the CEO of T-Mobile. Both have personally used social media to raise their respective company profile. Scott (2015), in his contribution, stated that communities now need highly sophisticated social media. To corroborate Scott's contribution, in an in-depth interview with one of the Societies in the Catholic church, it was found that the Parish Priest has created various platforms for separate Societies in the church to disseminate information for all members. In a structured interview directed at the village heads, the majority of the respondents agreed that Webinar is very suitable for organizing interactive sessions for topical issues such as the coronavirus pandemic and other challenging health issues in the community. Community elders are known to be responsible human beings in society and it is assumed they are capable of handling

information on social media in a more mature manner. Since it has been established that social media is suitable for community interactive communication, social media platforms should be adapted and utilized as one of the major channels for village information dissemination. This will create and add value to meet what the members want and will enable leaders to know how to use various social media platforms and communicate effectively. Research has revealed that effective ways of using social media include; planning informative content, building an active audience, consistent information exchange, and experimenting with them. In addition, useful advice on how community leaders can utilize social media has been given as follows; by making direct conversations on social media, by making predictions on what issues to resolve, and by focusing on relevant conservative issues (Honigma, 2019).

To facilitate our discussion of the topic "Community Leaders' Access to Channels of Communication: The Nigerian Experience.", attempts have been made to provide answers to the following questions among others: 1). What are the current channels of communication available to community leaders? 2). Are these channels and message delivery timing suitable for reaching community leaders? 3). To what extent have the community leaders' needs, interests and aspirations been considered about the communication content and format of presented materials? 4). To what extent have community leaders' literacy levels been considered in messages designed to ensure that they are not "excommunicated through incomprehension"? 5). Has it been assumed that any communication directed to community leaders 'trickle down' effectively to those who need the information, and in the appropriate form? 6). To what extent have professional media men utilized their position in the media to publicize community leaders' issues and problems and how have they channeled their image?

The above highlights the need to focus on community leaders and the role of communication and their inclusion, and the goal is to obtain information from each of the variables subsumed under a topic for consideration to explore community leaders' access to relevant information disseminated through the various communication channels. Some of the basic assumptions that have informed the topic of this article were equally considered as quickly as possible as follows:

Basic Assumptions

The basic assumptions would include; Firstly, the channels of communication that are currently available to community leaders are still elitist, urban-centered, technologically impacted, and tend to further exclude community leaders, especially in rural settings. Considering the global village syndrome, where information is at the doorstep of every individual, one readily assumes that community leaders require adequate information and education for the emancipation of their subjects. The world needs adequate information, and so does the grassroots. Secondly, community leaders have not only been persistently excluded from communication conception, design, and execution but when the media choose to consider them, they portray them ironically which indirectly disrespects their positions; and in consciously trying not to disrespect them, they are excluded. Thus, the media in this regard can only be seen as a conservative force that avoids promoting major changes in the status of community leaders. Thirdly, because for a long time, the government's official-dominated reality has been conceived as the only accurate and appropriate channel available to community leaders, it was assumed that

communication directed to the youths and the educated will flow down to community leaders who need appropriate and relevant information.

Consequently, professional media community officials have an important role to play in ensuring that community issues and problems are sufficiently articulated and well-publicized. Lastly, it is assumed that social media allows for much more personal communication between community leaders and their followers, it has created a shift in the power dynamic because the dialogue allows followers to influence decisions and outcomes (Honigman, 2019). In a recent survey of the women leaders in one community church in the Eruwa area of Ibadan (2020), it was found that the church leaders use social media to express their community's information and opinion on relevant religious issues for their members. For instance, they can share on Twitter how they and their subjects are expressing and managing felt needs.

Accessibility

The term "access" as cited in Ogbodu, (1996), means "the essential physical potential for exposure", with this definition, access is limited to the reception of messages without due consideration of the other useful aspects with serious significance for evolving a more democratic media. For the benefit of this article, "access" will be seen in a broader sense as a form of a continuum that ranges from ownership of receiving sets to the quality of the reception, the languages employed, and the concentration of media facilities at locations as well as coverage of communication networks. In this case, accessibility of information is determined by factors like the ability to own receiving sets like radio, television sets, mobile channels, and electronic communication, availability of electricity, and use of indigenous language in both print and electronic media such that the vast majority of the population who cannot communicate in English are not denied access to relevant information, participation by the intended beneficiary in decision-making, message conception design and media facilities. The article also examines the concept of communication with particular reference to community leaders and communication channels.

Channels of Communication: Past Ventures

In the past communication channels were restricted to very few channels like Broadcast, print traditional, and alternative media, such as music, drama, town crier, and so on. After decades, other channels like mobile and electronic communication (mobile phones, tablets, smartphones, Laptops, etc) networks and the internet filtered the market and the world became a global village. In attempting to describe the characteristics of communication channels, it is important to explain what channels of communication mean; Ogbodu (1996), explained that channels mean anyway by which ideas, stimuli, news information, communication among persons and groups of persons, a vehicle, instrument or medium by which people communicate are conveyed. In a recent definition by Wikipedia (2020), a communication channel refers either to a physical transmission medium such as wire or a logical connection over a multiplexed medium such as a radio channel in telecommunications and computer networking.

From observation, basic channels are written (hard copy print or digital formats), oral spoken, electronic, and multimedia. Generally, channels of communication are characterized primarily by the signaling transmission method used; its bandwidth or bite rate capacity; the direction or direction in which signals can flow; by its noise,

attenuation, and distortion characteristics. From investigation through a group discussion, channels of communication are mediums, means, manners, or methods through which a message is sent to its intended receiver/audience. For example, phone calls, text messages, emails, video, radio, television, newspaper and magazines, smart and mobile phones, internet, and social media platforms are all types of communication channels (Ogbodu, (1996) and Hing-Lap, 1985). Studies have described other common types of current communication channels as Meetings which could include; teleconferences and video conferences; conversations that could include telephone calls and in-person conversation; events that could be public speaking and networking at events, documentaries, publications, graphics, and audio. All these channels help define the distinctiveness and appropriacy for the transformation of various messages. Non-verbal communication is a channel that is culturally defined, which means that its appropriacy depends on the extent to which they are congruous in the cultural setting of the community in which they are located and relevant for meeting the stated objectives. For instance, the music, dance, talking drums, and varieties of materials (for weddings and burials) can easily pass as cultural exhibits in Nigeria and most African countries. In other words, a channel may take any shape but its meaning is highly significant when viewed from its cultural setting. Among the Ibibio and Igbo women of Nigeria, there is a particular design of wrapper of a white background with tiny black dice, anywhere and anytime this particular design is used, it signifies those women are attending a funeral service. Tying a double wrapper signifies the dress code for married women and ceremonies in Eastern Nigeria.

The western women (Yoruba tribe) also have their traditional dress code, which is called the Iro and Buba. This is the beauty of culture and this is why different channels have different characteristics. Thus, the relevance of each channel of communication depends on the cultural milieu which lies in its selection and usage. It is very useful to note that failure to consider the cultural background in the usage of any channel may not reach its intended audience, as a result, inappropriate channels render communication ineffective.

Community leaders communicate to share their vision with others in the community and beyond, they also inspire and motivate others to strive towards their visions as well as the collective vision of the community, to build and maintain a healthy relationships at all levels.

Features of Social Media in Rural Areas

Nigerian communities have always lived through times of great challenges and changes. Communities are constantly passing through an age of new information technology such as the use of radio, television, newspapers, and so on, hence the era of digital communication. (Acholonu, 2013), sees Social media as forms of electronic communication, which facilitate interaction based on certain interests and characteristics which include web and mobile-communication-based technologies as channels of communication. Some features of social media include; websites, applications, forms of electronic communication, online sharing of information, and creating/sharing of content (Saxena, 2017). The term "Social Media" is a device or means of communication which can include; the internet, Youtube, Whatsapp, Twitter, Facebook, Bebo, My Space, and others. Research also revealed that social media are tools and services that allow users to engage with each other, generate content, distribute and search for information

online, and concluded that it is the interactive or collaborative nature that makes them social (Nwafor, et al). Social media can help find and build relationships with others through leaders and influential individuals. It is important because it plays a crucial role in connecting people, developing relationships with key influential people, and listening to feedback. In local communities, social media is needed/relevant because it allows people to reach, nurture, and engage with the target audience no matter what or where their location is (Acholonu, 2013).

Feature of Social Media

The term mass media refers to means of communication which include print and electronic media and other visual and audiovisual devices. Their content is essentially non-personal and public and is designed to reach a large heterogeneous audience in a relatively short space of time. Objectives of mass media as stated by Jakande (1974), cited in Ogbodu, (1996) include; providing useful information, proving entertainment and leadership, acting as a watchdog over the government by facilitating channels of popular participation in government decisions, transmitting values and culture, providing entertainment and leadership. It can be inferred from the above assertion that modern mass media can form a powerful force as educators, mobilizers, entertainers, and agitators, but can only be relevant and effective to the intended beneficiaries when they have access to the necessary information. The basic issue is that if the target audience is denied access to the messages or information, then the objectives of social media cannot be said to have been achieved. Ogbodu (1996), enumerated some factors that can infringe on community women's access to mass media as; ownership pattern, location of media facilities and news content, quality of reception, and language. All these are equally applicable to community leaders and were equally investigated.

Mass Media Ownership and Community Communication

Nwabueze, (2020), explained that media ownership refers to the possession and control of a medium of communication. That is, how specific mediums (like radio, television, newspaper, etc) are funded or financed, managed and who controls them among other issues. Mass media ownership and affordability constitute essential indicators of the extent of accessibility. Over the years, ownership patterns of mass media have always been owned by the government and a few individuals or groups (popularly termed as a monopoly of the media). But now, with the proliferation of mass media and the explosion of mobile, electronic communication, and social media, the issue of ownership is beyond government control. The problem about access now has to do with the coverage of communication networks, whether or not there is total coverage of radio, television, mobile phones network, and the internet. Before 1992, media ownership was under the government of the federation until Babangida took over as the president of Nigeria where mass media started operating via private and government media (Apuke, 2016). Government monopoly of the media in the past. In the past, media that existed in Nigeria was influenced by the ownership pattern form it took. This was based on several factors, such as content distribution, profit maximization, etc. but now everything is independent. Nigerian media is no longer controlled by the government. The influx of social media in the country has changed the climate of the Nigerian media landscape. In the past, information channels were heavily controlled by the government, however, print, radio, and television channels are no longer dominated by the government or

private individuals due to the intervention of digital platforms. Almost all the mass media (print or broadcast) were owned by the government either federal or state, before Galaxy television which was the first private registered television station in Nigeria, emerged along with other private television stations. It became full broadcast in May 1994 from the hills of Oke-Are, Ibadan with a 10 kilowatts Aerodyne transmitter. Print media also witnessed the emergence of private ownership and the boom of social media (Obijiofor, 1985; Osoba, 1986; Nnaemeka, 1986) cited in Ogbodu (1996). But with the entrants of social media platforms, mentioned earlier in this article, government control is no longer effective and the masses are no longer caged or frustrated. Though private ownership existed, government policies influenced all its operations (Ogbodu, 1996). Nwabueze, (2020), on the other hand, explained that ownership by private individuals came as a passion for reaching out and making information available to a larger audience. This article leans in the opinion that, both private and government monopolies negatively affect access to information at the grassroots, as ownership is still concentrated in the hands of rich and influential individuals who may likely use the media only to advance their personal and sectional interests, especially the politicians and the religious leaders. This is justified because media ownership can greatly influence access to information to community leaders by way of filtering the kind of information that should be disseminated in rural communities. Again, it would be difficult for traditional leaders in Nigerian communities to gain access to information through a private individual who operates mass media.

Quality of Reception and Language

The quality of reception of radio and television is very significant to access to information channels because poor reception does not guarantee full access to the intended audience. This means that transmission will not be heard or seen by the target audience. For example, Oyo State being a rural community did not possess the advanced technology for radios and televisions at the onset, and this caused a major setback for its dwellers due to a high lack of vital information. Another important factor to consider when discussing access is the language because Nigeria has now become multi-lingual. Conventional and print media now present news in local languages, such as Iweiroyin in Yoruba local language /dialects. In Cross River State, in the late 70s news in the local language had commenced in various dialects like Ejagham, Bekwara, and so on. Both the radio and the television have been repackaged and adapted to accommodate the contents of programs in local dialects. In Oyo and Akwa Ibom states, certain dialects are employed in news broadcast on television to represent certain ethnic groups. News and radio broadcasts cannot be limited to only foreign languages because most of our traditional rulers and dwellers are not well-versed in foreign languages. Television and radio broadcasts could still be far better than newspaper issues because of the level of illiteracy in rural areas. Currently, Nigeria has over 50 newspapers in the country and only a few are published in indigenous languages.

Traditional Media and Access to Information:

Africans had their mode of communication which was traditional /indigenous before the advent of colonial masters and the introduction of mass media. Traditional channels of communication remain the use of folk media, gongs, talking drums, music and songs, dance, drums, proverbs, storytelling, religious rituals, mode of dressing, and artworks

and community people utilize them in communicating with one another. They have always played a crucial role in political issues as well as vouching for peace, justice, stability, and national integration. Over the years, in his research Desmond Wilson (Wilson (2003) came up with ten classes of traditional channels of communication which include; instrumental, demonstrative, iconographic, extra-mundane, visual, institutional, venue-oriented, myths and legend, names as communication, and folktales and proverbs. In the same vein, some researchers also considered interpersonal communication as channels, mostly taking place during family visiting, marriage and circumcision ceremonies, town hall meetings and village festivals, public trials, quarrels, and disputes settlements (Omu,1964: 4 and Yazidu, 1973, cited in Ogbodu, (1996).Abaoyade, (1981) in her contributions, listed town criers, talking drums, village squares, schools, churches, and mosques as sources of interpersonal communication among the grassroots people. The above studies confirmed that traditional media have always had an African traditional way of communicating and it is part of the cultural experience of the grassroots people. In my opinion, compared to conventional and electronic media, traditional channels are readily available to the target audience and in tandem with the community's cultural milieu.

Community Leaders' Access to the Media.

Although Nigeria is a developing country, the rich and the influential in the cities are enjoying all kinds of state-of-arts mass media tools, social media, and technology in all its ramifications. Community leaders do not enjoy the same access as those in the city who benefit from immense communication network coverage. Rural communities do not have total coverage of radio, television, mobile network, and the internet. In a recent interview with Baale of Laniba village in Akinyele local government of Oyo state, the Baale lamented that they do not have total coverage of conventional media facilities and social media in the community and neighboring communities. He added that things are a bit easier with the emergence of mobile phones and social media platforms because conventional media officials do not recognize them. Despite community leaders' contributions in developing countries, they do not have the technology to access coverage. Other social issues dominate social media, for example, they are featured by conventional or social media only for ceremonial activities and they are hardly ever well represented. The experience with the print media is even more serious because the traditional rulers have been portrayed as an illiterate group of old people who lack comprehension skills and cannot be evolved.

Reaching Community Leaders - Alternative to Mass Media

Are the community leaders a difficult audience for the mass and social media to handle or address? Due to the traditional responsibilities of community leaders, they have become a difficult audience to conventional and social media platforms. Due to the secrecy attached to traditional laws and customs, television and radio channels can contradict their traditional commitments. The print media on the other hand remains effective as they are now available in local publications, which creates ease in its accessibility. Based on this realization, it has become relevant to source alternative channels of communication to ensure that information gets to the community leaders. These alternative sources could be adapted or "repackaged" to make sure that the community leaders are not "excommunicated".

Meanwhile, alternatives to mass and social media include all types of traditional media of communication. The traditional media are easily adaptable as vehicles for information dissemination for grassroots people. Pool, 1983, cited in Ogbodu, (1996) asserted that traditional forms of information such as folk songs, plays, or sermons have a degree of credibility and meaningfulness that the current technology cannot overcome. For instance, Ibibio people use songs and dance to warn young maidens against infatuation and falling in love at a very unripe age. Electronic media such as videotapes and CDs could be used as alternative mass media to highlight community leaders' basic problems and needs. Educational videos motivate and educate them on knowledge and experience for their daily lives. These can open up opportunities for community leaders access to participate in community development programs. Most important is their feedback capacity and how posters and pictures can be useful channels of information for community leaders

Conclusion

Mass media is indispensable for the development of families, communities, societies, and the nation as a whole, especially in attitudinal change, behavior, informing and educating, and in the vast dissemination of information to a wide and diffused audience (Gerbner, 1980). The article concludes that mass media, may not be a sole motivator in developmental issues as regards the exclusion of community leaders. Access to mass media and other forms of communication is a sine qua non to grassroots development and societal change. Total access to new media (mobile and electronic) is not still available in Nigerian communities and their leaders. In other words, mass and social media alone cannot serve as the main source of information for community leaders due to poor communication networks and a lack of epileptic power supply in local communities. Thus, for ease of communication channels for community leaders, more efforts must be put in place to investigate and identify those communication channels that are appropriate and effective for the participation of community leaders in the face of the current mobile and electronic channels of communication that have to stay. Community leaders would need people-based media, such as participatory and interactive modes of communication due to villages' rural economy, social and cultural structure, traditional values, and customs, they are key to achieving genuine development. To this extent, at the grassroots, conventional media and social media alone may not be suitable for community leadership since they can only create awareness but do not drive home the message. Therefore, there is a need for the combination of traditional, conventional, social, and other alternative media such as songs, dance, drama, town criers, and so on, which are all relevant to the cultural milieu of the communities. Currently, social media has entered the interiors of rural communities and community leaders must be encouraged to access the various social media platforms. In addition, electronic, traditional, and alternative sources of information could be adapted or "repackaged" to make sure that the community leaders are not "excommunicated. Therefore, all the suggested channels in this article for rural connectivity are a panacea for development issues at the grassroots. Total access to appropriate channels is the key to keeping community people productive, engaged, and aligned with values, culture, and vision for local communities.

Recommendations

1. It recommends making mass media more interactive and participatory with community leaders actively involved in the production of selected communication channels for the achievement of stated goals and the target audience.
2. The potentiality of various forms of traditional media must be explored and integrated with social media platforms to identify with the activities of the community rulers and their members.
3. Since the use of mobile and electronic media channels is increasing in the local communities, the government should provide adequate network coverage and engages the community leaders in the process.
4. Community leaders should establish a collaborative relationship with the Nollywood performers, traditional media groups, conventional media producers, NGOs, and government agencies related to community access information to help push their agenda on a larger scale.

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