Convergence of African Communication Systems with Information and Communication Technology for National Security

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Abstract – The pervasive nature of insecurity in Nigeria with its enormous challenges to national development has made the investigation of the relationship between African Communication Systems and Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in security management a necessity in Nigeria. This is true because the use of ICT among rural population has been on the increase. ICT have been found to be useful in bridging knowledge gap and enhancing social relationships. Africans have a long history of worship of deities, which command obeisance among members of the community. This has made traditional communication compelling and attractive in security management. With a large population of rural people who are deeply rooted in African Traditional Systems of worship, it is a contradiction that insecurity has been the greatest challenge facing the peoples of Nigeria. A study of the relationship between traditional Communication Systems and ICT as panacea for insecurity has proved to be a beneficial exercise. To what extent has the extra-mundane patterns of Communication leveraged on ICT in the fight against insecurity in Nigeria. This study was guided by the Technological Determinism theory, and adopted qualitative and mix-method, with focus group discussions. Findings indicate that there is a positive relationship between ICT and social relationships in rural communities as well as the nexus between ICT and ACS in the management of security in rural Nigeria.

Keywords – Insecurity, Convergence, ICT, Deities, Rural

I.   BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The present state of insecurity in Nigeria can be traced to the Boko Harm sectarian movement led by the late Muhammed Yusuf in the year 2002. It started as a campaign against western education which was termed evil. Its modus operandi gradually became violent and by 2009 its activities evolved into a dangerous level of violence and assassination. From its operation base in the North-eastern Nigeria, where it started many splitter groups and some other groups with similar ideology have taken over larger portions of many states in the Northen Nigeria, visiting unimaginable destruction to lives and properties. While the north is challenged by banditry, the southern part, particularly the south east is ravaged by the scourge of "unknown gunmen" who themselves have unleashed violence on the people. All over Nigeria, particularly the rural communities, these outlaws have taken over large portions of our forest reserves and turned them into   ungoverned   spaces.

Kidnapping for ransom, armed robbery and other criminal activities are prevalent and have become the order of daily life experiences in Nigeria. The efforts of the security forces have not yielded the desired result and there are claims and counter claims of success by the bandits and security forces.

Historically, African societies have established patterns of governance that promote development and good neighbourliness. One of the most reliable mechanisms is the use of masquerades to enforce social order. Throughout history, particularly pre ICT innovations, African societies have leveraged their religio-cultural heritage to organise themselves and creditably achieved justice and order in the system. The African communication systems (ACS) which have been in use in the communities are limited in reach and acceptance is mainly localised. Recent developments in ICT are attracting the attention of development communication experts, that could be a veritable tool for security management in the rural areas.

This paper intends to explore the relationship between ICT and social relationships in rural Nigeria as well as the usefulness or otherwise of traditional communication in security management.

II.   STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

All through the history of development in Africa and elsewhere, human society has never advanced beyond the level allowed by state of security – protection of live and properties – in the society. It is more so in predominantly communal societies like Africa where intra and inter communal relationships depend on the security in the system. The problem of religious fanatism, banditry and secessionist struggles have bedevilled our development agenda since 2009

when Boko Haram first reared its ugly head. Different groups have taken up arms against the nation, leading to hitherto unimaginable violence in the land.

Insecurity arguably has become the biggest challenge to development in Nigeria. The south-east is plagued by secessionist agitators even as the north-east and north-west are grappling with Boko Haram, insurgency and banditry respectively. Not a few citizens are wondering why this level of insecurity in a basically traditional society where many, if not most of the citizens pay allegiance to local deities with the ability to enforce rule and order in such societies. This paper explores the relationship between African communication systems and ICT in security management in rural communities and by extension the nation at large.

III.   OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY
The objectives for this paper are
A.   To determine the relationship between ACS and the social relationships in rural Nigeria; and
B.   To ascertain the relationship between ACS and ICT in security management in rural Nigeria.

IV.   REVIEW
A.   THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK
The Diffusion of Innovation theory by Rogers, E.M(2003) has been deemed an appropriate theory to guide discussion in this paper because it explains how new ideas and technologies can be useful within a social system. The ICT have gone through so much transition in a short time, and it is unimaginable how human society survived in the past without it. The ICT has become the most effective diffusion tool in the process of spreading innovation. In that same regard security management will benefit from its application especially in achieving compliance to order enforced through African communication systems.

Diffusion of innovation theory has been applied in research in agriculture, Feder et al(1985), healthcare(UNIAIDS, 2010), education(KOZMA, 2011), environmental sustainability(IPCC, 2018) and will be useful theory for this work on African communication systems and the ICT.

B.   CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

1)   ICT PENETRATION AND USAGE IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

Since the invention of the telegraph by Samuel morse in 1837 the global interconnectivity has gone through different and many inventions. Inventors such as Alexander Graham Bell, 1876 (telephone), John Mauchly and J Presper Eckert, (1946) Electronic Numerical Integrator and Computer (ENIAC)), Tim Berners – Lee, 1991 (the World Wide Web), are some of the early contributors to the development of internet. What started as inter – connectivity of computers has since been improved upon to include wireless connection of billions of gadgets on various platforms like Facebook, YouTube, Twitter (X) and numerous others in support of Marshall McLuhan concept of the "global village".

In Nigeria, the first internet connection was at the university of Ibadan in 1991 and within five years of this, the first Internet Service Provider (ISP), Pipelines, was licensed in 1995. Many other developments occurred in quick succession starting with the introduction of the Global System for Mobile Communications (GSM) 2001 (NCC, 2001), cybercafes in 2002 (Afolabi); Broadband internet services in 2005 (Main one).

The use of ICT in Nigeria is almost pervasive with estimated internet users of 103 million which is almost 46% of Nigeria's population in 2024. According to DATAREPORTAL (retrieved 29/10/24) social media users are 36.75 million or 16.2%, cellular mobile connections are 205.4 million or 90.7%. These figures show that a reasonable size of the population is captured in the communication net. It is therefore the responsibility of agents of governments to deploy communication in a planned and sustained way in order to take advantage of the power of communication to achieve society's development plan.

It has been observed that deployment of ICT in Nigeria particularly in the rural communities is challenged by some administrative and technical issues. These challenges include multiple taxation, Right Way (ROW) charges, damage to infrastructure, inadequate distribution of infrastructure and long delays in permit processing. There are multiple taxes by the different levels – local, state and federal – which increases operational costs as well as discourage investment. Furthermore, existing infrastructures are damaged during road constructions and sometimes wilfully by scavengers who damage and steal some of the accessories.

In spite of the challenges, governments in Nigeria – state and federal – seem to have a perfect understanding of the role of ICT in aiding the development agenda of the nation. Both levels of government "have begun to implement policies and ICT projects that may help attract ICT investments" (retrieved 29/10/24 www.trade.gov/country-commercial-guides/nigeria-information)

2) AFRICAN COMMUNICATION SYSTEMS (ACS) AND DEVELOPMENT

African communication systems (ACS) have been described in Ansu – Kyeremeh (2005) to include verbal and non – verbal, traditional and modern means ways of communication in African societies. Asante (2015) argues that African communication systems are characterised by oral traditions and communal orientation. These forms of communication have been in existence for as long as African society has been and they have been quite effective in information dissemination because of their uniqueness and ease of adaptation in the communities. Asema, Keute and Nkwam – Uwaoma (2021:8) espouse the uniqueness and peculiarity of African communication systems to Africa because "the indigenous media or communication systems… remain what essentially sustains the information needs of the rural areas in the developing countries of Africa". The communication systems are the oxygen and blood of development in African societies. Uchendu (1965:111) describes it as "a complex system of communication, which pervades all aspects or rural life". By Uchendu's description, it is indigenous to African societies and by that fact emanates from the African culture. Edegoh, Ogunyemi and Osifila (2013:1) supports the cultural orientation of African Communication System (ACS) in their position that it comprises three principles;

1.   It is part and parcel of the way of life of a people
2.   It utilises symbolisms from the community and hence readily connects with the people; and
3.   Values of the community, as well as, age – old institutions come into play in the communication process.

This implies that despite its complex nature, the it's use in African societies is common and easy. They are often conceived as the result of the relationship between community's customs and conflicts, cultural convergences and divergences, Ugboajah (1985). Asemah(2011) underscored the cultural origin by observing that it serves as a channel for messages in a way and manner that requires the utilisation of the values, symbols, institutions and ethos of the host culture through its unique qualities and attributes. ACS reflect the various talking drums, the folk songs, drama, festivals, town criers, traditional wears (Osho, P.8). The messages and ideas are transmitted by means of itinerant dance and mime groups, puppet shows and other folk media which serves not only to entertain but to influence attitudes and behaviour. While the audience get entertained, the attitudes and behaviours are being modified by the subtle codes of communication inherent in the objects of entertainment. The endogenous nature of ACS enhances its exploitation of the culture and tradition. Masquerades and deities in this regard play very important roles in rural communities. The resort to magical powers by many Africans is a practice that has survived since recorded history and these magical powers are employed to compel obeisance. People still patronise the traditional priests who prepare certain charms to meet certain demands in life. Bandits and criminal elements in the society who depend on these priests could be controlled by the magical powers. As Nwosi (2009: 109) observes, "many Africans still travel back home to offer sacrifices and to worship the deities" and may have resorted to the local deities summoning one another to appear before the gods and tell the truth about what they know (Nwosi, 2009 : 111).

The role of the masquerade in maintaining social order and compliance including security is well documented in African communication systems literature. They are engaged by communities for social control, conflict resolution and moral education (Okafor. 2011, Anyanwu: 2015, Eke: 2017)

With the advent of ICT, the mythical powers of deities and masquerades could be communicated intra and intercultures for the benefit of societal security

3) SECURITY CHALLENGES IN NIGERIA 2014 – 2024

The security of Nigeria and Nigerians have been under threat since the 2000's.

Boko Haram a jihadist terrorist group crusading against western education in the north-east of Nigeria in 2002, founded by one Mohammed Yusuf, has been the identified as the foundation of violent extremism in Nigeria. The group initially known as Jamāʿat Ahl al-Sunnah li-l-Daʿawah wa al-Jihād (People committed to the propagation of the prophet's teachings and jihad) focused on the campaign against western education and strict adherence to Islamic laws. Its operation was mainly in Maiduguri the capital of Borno state, but with influence extending to other North-east states of Nigeria. After the demise of its founder Mohammed Yusuf in 2009, Abubakar Shekau took over as the leader of the group and his leadership escalated the level of violence. The 2010 Christmas day bombing of a church in an Abuja suburb heralded the "tsunami" of violent attacks on the citizens and the state. A litany of attacks cataloguing the activities of Boko Haram

followed. They are the UN Headquarters Abuja bombing (2011): 23 killed, 100 injured (Al Jazeera), Kano mosque bombing (2012), Baga massacre (2013): 185 killed, 2000 homes destroyed (Human Rights Watch (2013)), Chibok schoolgirls kidnapping (2014): 276 girls abducted (CNN, 2014), at least one major attack each year between the years 2010 and 2014.

In the year 2015, Abubakar Shekau the new leader of Boko Haram pledged allegiance to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and carried out several attacks in Maiduguri, Dapchi and even claimed responsibility for the kidnap of 10 oil workers in the Niger Delta between 2015 and 2018.

While Boko Haram was ravaging the Northeast with its attendant insecurity another type of violence was unfolding in other parts of the country. The age long conflict between herders and farmers assumed a different dimension. The Fulani herdsmen attack in Plateau state, (2018) bandits kidnap of 300 schoolboys in katsina (2020) and the Zamfara state Governor's convoy attack (2020) that killed 10 are just a few examples of the escalation of violence to other parts of the country.

It is estimated that banditry, kidnapping and Boko Haram activities cost the nation $1.3 billion annually with hundreds of thousands, if not millions of people displaced from their indigenous land, in addition to the thousands of deaths. Apart from the death and displacement of citizens, insecurity has contributed to economic instability and the take-over or undermining of government authority particularly in the North-west but generally across the country (council on foreign relations, 2020).

C.   EMPIRICAL REVIEW

Olalekan and Grobler (2020) conducted research on the topic "Information and communication technology penetration level as an impetus for economic growth and development in Africa" published in Economic and Financial Sciences. Primarily the objective was to establish the nexus between ICT penetration and economic growth and development.

The study found that even though Libya, Gabon and South Africa were the most sophisticated in terms of mobile telecommunication development in Africa, South Africa stood out as the country that benefitted most from mobile telecommunication penetration than any other African country. The three countries were higher than other African countries in Human Development Index. Conversely other African countries with low access to telecommunication experienced lower HDI. The researcher concluded that ICT penetration had a positive impact on economic growth and development.

The Second Study is "The Role of Traditional Communication in Rural Development: A Study of Igbo People of Nigeria by Nwabueze and Onyebadi (2020), the study set out to

i.   Examine the role of traditional communication in rural development among the Igbo people of Nigeria;

ii.   To identify the traditional communication channels in Igbo rural communities;

iii.   to investigate the effectiveness of traditional communication in mobilizing rural people for community development projects; and

iv.   to explore the challenges facing traditional communication in rural development.

The research design was a mix – methods approach (quantitative and qualitative).

The instruments of data collection were questionnaire and focus group discussions, The study found that:

i.   85% of respondents use traditional communication channels (e.g. town criers, community gatherings)

ii.   70% reported that traditional communication effectively mobilises people for community projects

iii.   60% identified cultural preservation as key benefit of traditional communication.

The study therefore concluded that traditional communication plays significant role in rural development among the Igbo people of Nigeria.

This study is relevant to this present study because the issue of security in any society can not be divorced from the communication environment. Communication is the lubricant that oils the wheels of community relationship.

V.   METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted using Focus Group Discussion (FGD). Focus groups are a form of group interview that gathers people from diverse backgrounds and experiences to discuss a specific topic (Krueger, 2005: 5). Ten lecturers in the areas of Communication Studies and Religious and Cultural Studies departments were selected as participants. They were chosen because of their knowledge of the ACS and religious and cultural studies.

Five participants were purposefully selected from each of the specialisations outlined above. A discussion guide was developed in the form of open – ended questions. During discussion, participants consented to be decorous to avoid any single participant or a few to dominate the discussion.

Discussion output was transcribed and identified according to themes and interpreted in consonance with literature and context.

VI.   RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A.   INTERVIEW QUESTION GUIDE AND RESPONSES

1.   What are the uses of masquerades in social engagements?

PARTICIPANT 1 Response: Masquerades are objects of entertainment during festive times but they are also objects of determining adulthood in rural communities. Those that require special initiations are used to determine class delineation in the community.

PARTICIPANT 2 Response: Masquerades are channels of communication between the community and the spirit world (rituals). They are used to enforce ostracization of members of the communities who have committed acts of sacrilege. Masquerades also appear, to accompany dead prominent members of society to the spirit world during burial ceremonies

PARTICIPANT 3 Response: Masquerades are also artistic artifacts as well as agents of cultural preservation

PARTICIPANT 4 Response: In some communities, masquerades are change drivers through critique of social issues. They can say what no human in the community can say since they are spirits.

PARTICIPANT 5 – 10 Response: They concur

2.   Do deities play any role in justice delivery in rural communities?

PARTICIPANT 10 Response: Among the Etsakor of Edo state deities like Iyabhana dispense justice.

A community member who is in denial of any criminal act is visited by Iyabhana at night and they will defecate all over the compound as punishment for the act

PARTICIPANT 9 Response: Deities are usually invoked and are required to punish any member of community who violated communal rules. The judgement will manifest in different forms. Sometimes stolen items are returned, at other times it could lead to very severe consequences

PARTICIPANT 8 Response: The case of Okonkwo in Umuofia who was exiled after he killed Ogbuefi Ezeudu's son at the burial was both to serve as justice for the bereaved family and to appease the land. This is an example of justice by the deity of the land.

PARTICIPANT 7 Response: Disputes are resolved through divination to the deities by the priests

PARTICIPANT 1 Response: No further input

PARTICIPANT 2 – 6 Response: Agree with earlier submissions

3.   Do deities posses investigative powers and how does it apply?

PARTICIPANT 7 Response: Yes, suspects in the community are taken before the masquerade for confession. Community members revere masquerades as spirit and cannot hide any secret act from the masquerades since they are believed to have powers of revelation

PARTICIPANT 6 Response: In most African communities, conflict of chieftaincy and land ownership are investigated by masquerades, they are also invisible eyes that observe members of the community to identify abhorrent characters.

PARTICIPANT 1 Response:

4.   How do communities enforce sanctions with the aid of deities

PARTICIPANT 2 Response: Sanctions on individuals are enforced by invoking the powers of the deities to punish any member of the community who relates with a sanctioned member of the community

PARTICIPANT 3 Response : No further comment

PARTICIPANT 4 Response : Agree

PARTICIPANT 5 Response : Agree

PARTICIPANT 6 Response : Agree

5.   Can African Communities use oath taking to achieve security

PARTICIPANT 7 Response: The security of an African community can be guaranteed by members of the community taking oath that no member shall harm anyone.

Again, through oath members of the community swear not to bring strangers to cause any harm to anyone or the community in general

PARTICIPANT 8 Response: Community members under oath can not steal from members from the community and any violator is usually visited with some natural disaster

PARTICIPANT 9 Response: Agree

PARTICIPANT 10 Response: No further contribution

PARTICIPANT 1 Response: No further contribution

PARTICIPANT 2 – 6 Response: Concur

6.   How could ICT be useful to African communication systems

PARTICIPANT 2 Response: One of the ways ICT could be useful to ACS is by adopting ICT in transmitting the cultures, values and other elements of ACS beyond community boundaries This will help overcome the challenge of limited jurisdiction inherent in ACS

PARTICIPANT 3 Response: ICT usage will be beneficial to ACS in cultural preservation and will aid cooperation among communities.

When the consequences of violating community values like acts of insecurity are transmitted through ICT its efficiency is authenticated and compliance by community members is guaranteed

PARTICIPANT 4 Response: Images of sanctioned members of communities could be communicated widely, thereby making it difficult for criminals to move to other communities when they are sanctioned by another.

PARTICIPANT 5 Response: Town hall meetings where important decisions are taken when placed on virtual platforms will enhance inclusivity and deal with the challenge of time and space. Immediacy is enhanced

PARTICIPANT 6 Response: Digital platforms will reach wides audiences and could be antidote against criminals who will be afraid of being recognised by large members of public. Feedback on fugitive means more security for the community.

B.   DISCUSSION

Two objectives were formulated for this study and they were also used to derive the research questions.

The first was to determine the relationship between ACS and social relationships in rural Nigeria.

Group discussion established that there is a nexus between ACS and social relationships in rural Nigeria. This was supported by agreement of the use of masquerades as objects of entertainment during festive times. As a medium of communication between the community and the spirit world, African communication system helps to deal with deviant behaviours among community members. Masquerades also acts as artistic artifacts and agent of cultural preservation which is a reinforcement of the fact that ACS play significant roles in social relationships in African societies. Masquerades have also been categorised as drivers of change in society by acting as authoritative critics of social issues. Other areas in human relations that benefit from ACS in African societies include justice delivery. African communication Systems are useful in dispensing justice in African societies because through them sanctions can be imposed on guilty parties. The case of Okonkwo's exile from Umuofia after he killed Ogbuefi Ezeudu's son at Ezeudu's burial was to serve both as justice for the bereaved family and to appease the land.

Furthermore, deities act as investigators in rural African communities. Suspects are usually taken before masquerades for confession which has proved its efficacy in determining guilt in the land. In addition, conflicts of chieftaincy and land ownership are investigated by masquerades and resolved because they are presumed to be dependable arbiter.

The second objective was to ascertain the relationship between ACS and ICT in security management in rural Nigeria.

Data reveals that African societies rely on the powers of deities to punish members of the community who fall out of line with community values including the issue of security management.

The use of oath in the communities has been accepted as a guarantee by members of the community to ensure the safety of life and property in the society. ICT in convergence with ACS will enhance the security of rural communities. When consequences of violating community values like acts of insecurity are transmitted through ICT its reach and efficacy in compelling compliance by community members is guaranteed. Images and profile of sanctioned members of communities could be communicated virtually within and outside the immediate community to ensure that criminals have no hiding place. The transmission of punitive measures taken against criminals and criminal activities will instil fear on community members who may have disposition towards crime in the society.

VII.   FINDINGS

The paper has demonstrated that there is a nexus between ACS and social relationships in rural African societies, particularly because,

i.   masquerades are objects of entertainment during festive times.

ii.   Masquerades are media of communication between the community and the spirit world.

iii.   Masquerades also act as artistic artefacts and agent of cultural preservation which is a reinforcement of the fact that ACS play significant roles in social relationships in African societies.

iv.   Masquerades have also been categorised as drivers of change in society by acting as authoritative critics of social issues.

v.   African communication Systems are useful in dispensing justice in African societies because through them sanctions can be imposed on guilty parties.

The second objective was to ascertain the relationship between ACS and ICT in security management in rural Nigeria. Data reveals that

i.   African societies rely on the powers of deities to punish members of the community who fall out of line with community values including the issue of security management.

ii.   The use of oath in the communities has been accepted as a guarantee by members of the community to ensure the safety of life and property in the society.

iii.   ICT in convergence with ACS will enhance the security of rural communities. When consequences of violating community values like acts of insecurity are transmitted through ICT its reach and efficacy in compelling compliance by community members is guaranteed.

iv.   Images and profile of sanctioned members of communities could be communicated virtually within and outside the immediate community to ensure that criminals have no hiding place.

v.   The transmission of punitive measures taken against criminals and criminal activities will instil fear on community members who may have disposition towards crime in the society.

VIII.   RECOMMENDATION

Having established that there exist a strong and beneficial relationship between ACS and ICT in rural African societies in particular, it is recommended that,

i. Traditional institutions and authorities should codify symbols of ACS and transmit them through ICT to ensure wide reach and acceptance by community members.

ii. The relationship between ACS and ICT should be explored in the rural areas for security of lives and properties.

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