



THE O-S-M-R/TRICYLCE MODEL: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING COMMUNICATION IN AFRICA

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Abstract

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) have been taught at tertiary level in Africa for over a decade. In Nigeria, there are 65 TVET institutions comprising 18 Polytechnics, two private Monotechnics and four Colleges of Health Science & Technology and 33 Innovation Enterprise Institutions (IEIs) and eight Vocational Enterprise Institutions. Thus, TVET has incubated enough for its principles to transit rapidly from the labs to towns. Adoption of innovation requires the deployment of appropriate communication models, especially in rural Africa, where resistance to new ideas is high. The concept of ‘circular economy’ aims at efficient management of the Earth’s resources to make them sustainable. It involves harnessing raw materials such that they are reusable, protecting the environment and curtailing wastes. Despite success stories reported in many continents, the rate of adoption of the ‘circular economy’ in Africa is low. One of the reasons for this is lack of (and non- application of) indigenous, contextualized communication models. This study exposes the O-S-M-R (Oramedia, Social Media Receiver) Model, an indigenous African communication model developed by Folayan and Ajibade (2022). The paper showcases a homegrown model in development communication, for promoting circular economy and other development paradigm aims to promote C.A.R.E. (Conservation, Adaptation, Recycling and Efficiency) in rural areas of Africa.

Keywords: Traditional, modern, communication, Oramedia, mass media, model

Introduction

Communication - the sharing of information, knowledge, ideas and meanings – is crucial to human existence. The earliest forms of communication were crude: Humans at various times have used various “media” such as wood, stone, parchment, and paper, fire, smoke, flags and semaphores, electricity and electro-magnetic waves to communicate. As humans advanced, they improved steadily on these means of communication and devised new methods of communication. However, the extent to which the newly-created communications media replaced the older ones vary from society to society. The fundamental fact remains that no society completely abandoned all the “primitive” media it had employed over the centuries. For instance, all humans still write on wood and stone. What actually happened was that the so-called “primitive” media of communication were refined, not discarded, in many cases. Africa in particular (and this applies to many nations in Asia) has continued to retain its ancient forms of communication, despite the massive presence of modern forms of communication. (Moemeka, 2000).

In the first human settlement (the Adam and Eve generation), communication was interpersonal, i.e. person-to-person. The first family only had to live in a small garden. So, the couple used signs and symbols to communicate. Later, they made meanings out of sounds to forms words. Words on their own mean nothing which nothing humans have not made them to mean. As the first family grew more and more in numbers, the need to disperse in the quest for survival became expedient. Communication became a challenge – essentially due to the problem of distance.



As they usually do when faced with existential challenges, humans invented better ways to overcome their communication challenges. Languages became more diversified. By the 16th century, the printing was invented by Guttenberg in Germany (although some scholars have argued that printing had existed in Africa and Asia before Guttenberg's invention, it is correct to state that Guttenberg was the first to introduce multi-printing and reproducible technology. Before him, professional scribes were the ones who helped to reproduce copies of written or printed matter.

Further advancement in science and technology brought, in quick succession, newspapers, magazines, books, telephone, telegraphy, radio, television, computer, cybernetics and of course the most pervasive of all: The Internet. While it is agreed amongst communication scholars that mass communication technology (especially the Internet) has radically changed how humans communicate, it is also true that new communications technologies have not fundamentally the constructs of communication in some societies. For example, has retained its conceptual characteristics:

- (a) Face-to-face (e.g. conferences, meetings, etc.)
- (b) Reading (e.g. newspapers, books, etc.)
- (c) Machine-to-machine, humans mediated (e.g. microscope, radars etc.)
- (d) Person-to-person, machine mediated (email, telephone call, etc.)
- (e) Machine-to-machine, (e.g. robots, bank alerts, etc.)
- (f) Humans-to-machine (e.g. using a laptop computer, etc.)
- (g) Institution to groups (e.g. broadcasts by a TV station, etc.)

The foregoing communication scenarios show that the “channels” of communication have become complex and interwoven that the need for reconceptualization of existing models of communication have become very expedient. For instance, we cannot fully comprehend today's communication process, using models developed in the 1930s and 1940s when TV and Internet were rarities.

Communication in the African context

Several communication scholars such as Doob (1966), Jefkins & Ugbaojah, (1986), Ansu-Kyeremeh (1998) and Wilson (1998, 2000) have argued that Africa has distinctive communication forms. They posited that Africans – like any other society in the world – engaged in unique forms of (mass) communication before the advent of (modern) mass media systems like radio, TV and newspapers. In other words, they argued that it is wrong to assert that Africans never practiced mass communication before TV, radio and print technology were invented. They found that most African societies have retained their traditional (so-called) ‘old’ forms of communication, perhaps much more than other human races. For example, Soola (1988) found that these traditional media such as peer group, town-crier and marketplace are more effective than later (modern) mass media in transmitting certain messages. This is more so in the rural communities where most Africans reside and where most people have no access to radio, TV, newspapers and the Internet.

It has also been argued that in most parts of Africa, symbols and complex linguistic components still dominate human communication. (Tejuoso, Folayan & Dipo-Adedoyin, 2021). The concern here is that while the modern mass media are more supported with huge financial commitments by the government, traditional media have almost been totally neglected. (Salawu, 2017). Yet, research has proved that when properly harnessed, traditional communication is more effective than the contemporary mass media in persuasive and behaviour change communication. (Wilson, 1988; Ansu-Kyeremeh, 1998; Wilson, 2000). The UNESCO Commission on Communication decades ago recognized the age-long potency of indigenous media and their relevance to contemporary world communication. The report indicated that the traditional media use body languages and other non-verbal languages for a variety of purposes, although like other forms of communication, they have their limitations. (McBride, 1981).



Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) have been taught at tertiary level in Africa for over a decade. In Nigeria, there are 65 TVET institutions comprising 18 Polytechnics, two private Monotechnics and four Colleges of Health Science & Technology and 33 Innovation Enterprise Institutions (IEIs) and eight Vocational Enterprise Institutions. Thus, TVET has incubated enough for its principles to transit rapidly from the labs to towns. Adoption of innovation requires the deployment of appropriate communication models, especially in rural Africa, where resistance to new ideas is high. The concept of ‘circular economy’ aims at efficient management of the Earth’s resources to make them sustainable. It involves harnessing raw materials such that they are reusable, protecting the environment and curtailing wastes. This paper presents a home-grown communication model that can be adopted for advancing TVET in the rural and sub-urban setting in Africa.

Literature Review

Conceptual framework

The terms “oramedia”, “traditional media” and “informal communication” have been used interchangeably in African communication literature to represent traditional communication whereas the terms actually represent different aspects of traditional African communication.

Oramedia refers to the process of disseminating information, ideas and knowledge through oral means (as against written means). It focuses on the exchange of information or message that have traditional undertone and are deeply-rooted in values and norms of people and societies. (Tejuoso, Folayan & Dipo-Adedoyin, 2019). Equivalent terms used to describe “oramedia” are “folkmedia”, “indigenous media” and “oral arts” and this has added to the conceptual confusion. (Salawu, 2019). The strengths of Oramedia include the following:

- It is part and parcel of the way of life of African people;
- It utilizes symbolism, among other precepts, from the community hence readily connects the people;
- It values of the community and institutions.

(Akpabio, 2003).

“Informal communication” describes done in relaxed or unofficial manner or language as against standard ways. Examples of such include slangs and colloquial expressions. Therefore, not all oramedia are informal. African communication is both formal and informal. In Yoruba culture (Nigeria) a child must greet their parents formally (bending the knee or bowing/prostrating) almost always while they greet their peers informally. A child saying “hi” to an elderly person is committing a taboo. Young Yoruba children today hardly can distinguish between the two foregoing context. Therefore, oramedia and informal communication should be regarded as forms of traditional communication in Africa; hence ideally should not be used interchangeably.

“Traditional communication” warehouses all forms of indigenous forms of communication in Africa before the advent of printing technology, radio, TV, newspapers, the Internet and other forms of contemporary mass communication.

Ansu-Kyeremeh (1998: 68) defines “indigenous media” as:

Any form of endogenous communication system which by virtue of its origin form an integration with a specific culture; serves as a channel to messages in a way and manner that requires the utilization of values, symbols, institutions and ethos of the host culture through its unique qualities and attributes.

Examples of indigenous or traditional media include talking drums, folksongs, drama, festivals, towncrier or gong-beating, traditional wears, artifacts, artworks, paintings, story-telling, cultural architecture, folk drama, dirges and dancing. In the African communication context, the medium, the message and communicators are interwoven and



inseparable. It is interesting to note, for instance, that African proverbs are used vastly across various countries in Africa. The following proverbs are used in most African countries with slight variations of local adaptations:

1. Don't think there are no crocodiles just because the water is calm
2. Let us call a madman 'uncle' so that he will give us right of way
3. If the full moon loves you, why worry about the stars
4. One who plants grapes by the roadside and one who marries a pretty woman share the same problem
5. When the fool speaks, the wise person listens
6. In moments of crises, the wise builds bridges and the foolish builds dams
7. A wise person fills his head before emptying his mouth
8. That the lizard nods its head is no indication that it agrees to what you are saying
9. If you want to know the end, look at the beginning
10. No short cuts exist to the top of a palm tree

According to Doob (1966), traditional communication in Africa is cyclical and very complex. In his pioneering work on African communication, Doob identifies 12 key variables in African communication to be: communicator, goal, basic media, extending media, site, restrictions, communication content, mood, perception, reactions, changes and feedback. According to him, "people are exposed to a *communicator* whose communication seeks to achieve a *goal* or set of goals, through a *medium* or media at a particular *site*, in spite of certain *restrictions*, by means of a *message* that reaches them in a specified *mood*; subsequently what follows are *perception, reactions, changes and feedback*". (Doob, 1966:pp vii-xiv).

Methodology

The methodology used for this paper is the Historical Design Method. The method involves gathering data from primary and secondary sources, formulating a hypothesis, analyzing source materials and using them to support or reject the hypothesis. This section of our paper, therefore systematically recaptures the complex nuances of communication models in a narrative exposition leading to the model we shall propose.

Models are miniature, often visual or diagrammatic, representation of a process, object or phenomenon. Virtually all fields of human endeavour use models because they help to properly explain, predict and describe phenomena. Below are the most popular models found in communication literature (brosix.com, 2023):

Lineal Models

Linear models generally see communication as one-way. Commonest models under this are:

- a) Aristotle's Model: The model is regarded as the oldest model of communication, dating back to 300 BC. Aristotle used this model essentially to represent success factor in public speaking. According to him, the common success factors in public speaking are *ethos* (credibility of the speaker); *pathos* (the emotional connection of the speaker to the audience and *logos* (use of logic).

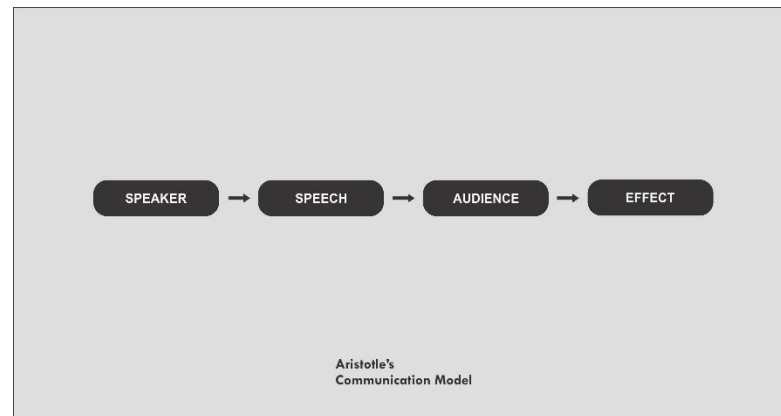


Fig 1. Aristotle's model

- b) Lasswell's Model: Lasswell saw communication as transmissions of message expected to generate particular results. If any of the first three 'boxes' in the model changes, the effect also changes.

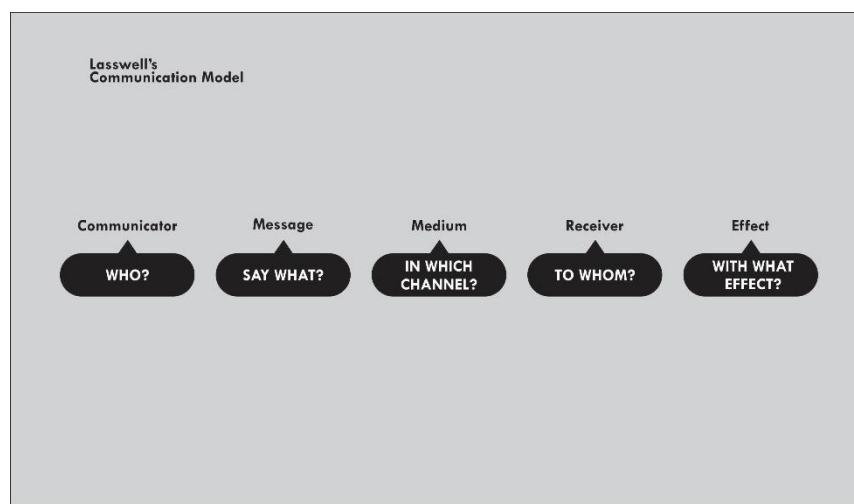


Fig 2. Lasswell's model

- c) Shannon-Weaver's Model: This is perhaps the most popular communication model because it was the first to depict communication as a continuous process. Some of the improvements Shannon and Weaver added to previous models are distinctions between Source, Sender and Encoder. The three may not necessarily be one and the same person. A news item being read on TV could be from the Ministry of Information ('source'); the 'sender' could be the reporter of ABC TV; and the 'encoder' could be the Newscaster. Similarly, the distinction of 'receiver' from 'destination' explains a situation where an information goes to a person to whom it is not intended. Also important in this model is the concept of 'noise'. Shannon and Weaver later expanded their model to incorporate 'feedback'.

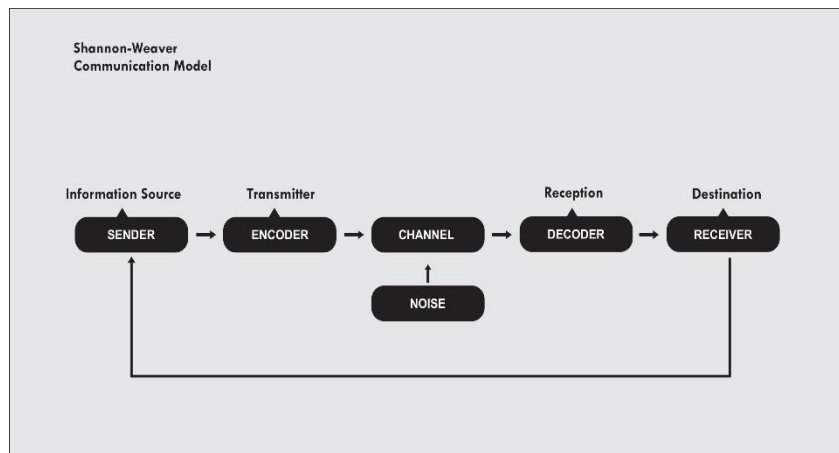


Fig 3. Shannon-Weaver's model

- d) Berlo's Model: This model provides further insight into the communication process. It situates communication as an activity that involves four components –the SMCR, Source-Message-Channel-Receiver. Each component in the process impacts the communication process. For example, the skills of the source matters in the message composition and understanding. The more human senses are deployed (channels), all things being equal, the more successful communication will be, according to this model.

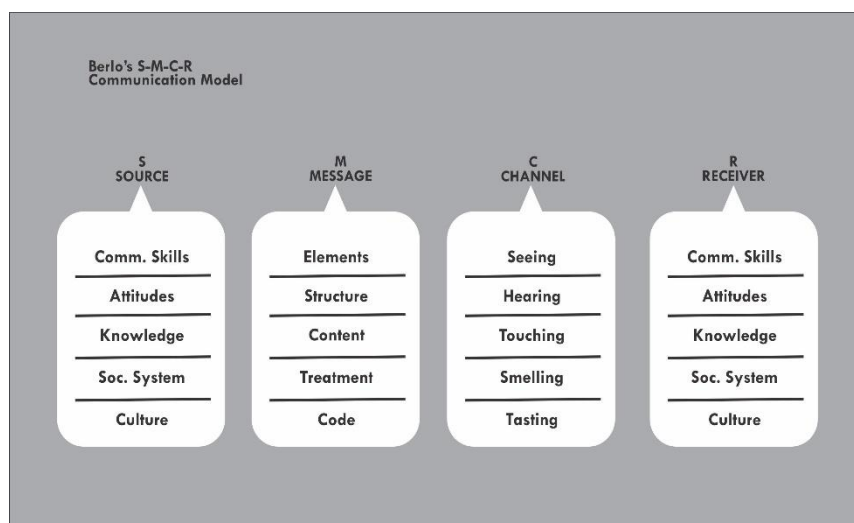


Fig 4. Berlo's model

2.2 Interactive Models

These models present communication as two-way, rather than being linear.

- a) Osgood-Schramm's Model: Additions to existing models by Osgood and Schramm were that communication is circular, equal and reciprocal; message requires proper interpretation; and that communication necessarily requires encoding, decoding and interpreting, irrespective of whether object of focus is the communicator or the audience. This underscores the fact that communication is interactive and continuous in most situations.

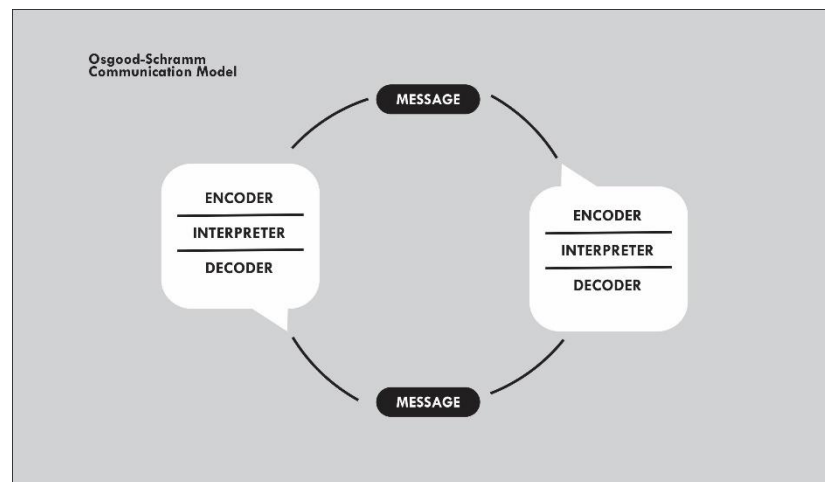


Fig. 5. Osgood-Schram's Model

- b) Westley-Maclean's Model: this model is regarded by many scholars as most descriptive of the process of mass communication. The model highlights the importance of cultural and environmental factors in the process of communication. It adequately highlights, also, the key roles of feedback and co-orientation (opinion leaders, gatekeepers and feedback). This model also emphasizes that communication does not start always with a sen

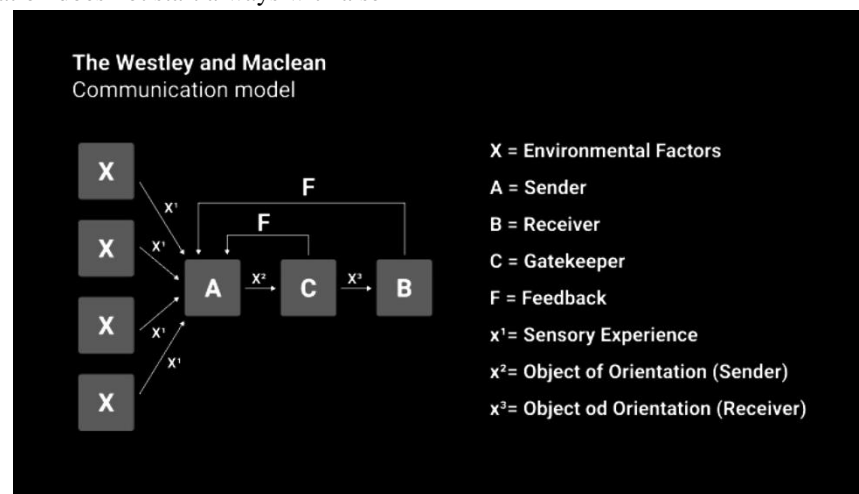


Fig. 6. Westley-Maclean's Model

Transactional Models

When communication is seen as a transaction, its model presents communication as dynamic and involves sharing of meaning. Most models under this are cyclical. Thus, the phenomenon goes beyond interaction. It is actually an interaction that generates mutual and counter influences that shape the conduct or outcome of communication.

- a) Barnlund's Transactional Model.

Barnlund introduced the roles of social, relational and cultural context in communication modelling. The model also emphasizes good concepts in earlier models; for example, "noise". According to Barnlund, the sender and receiver of communication messages change their places and they both provide feedback during communication. More than the previous models, this model identifies the place of cues in impacting messages. It identifies 'public cues' (environmental), 'private cues' (personal thoughts and background), and



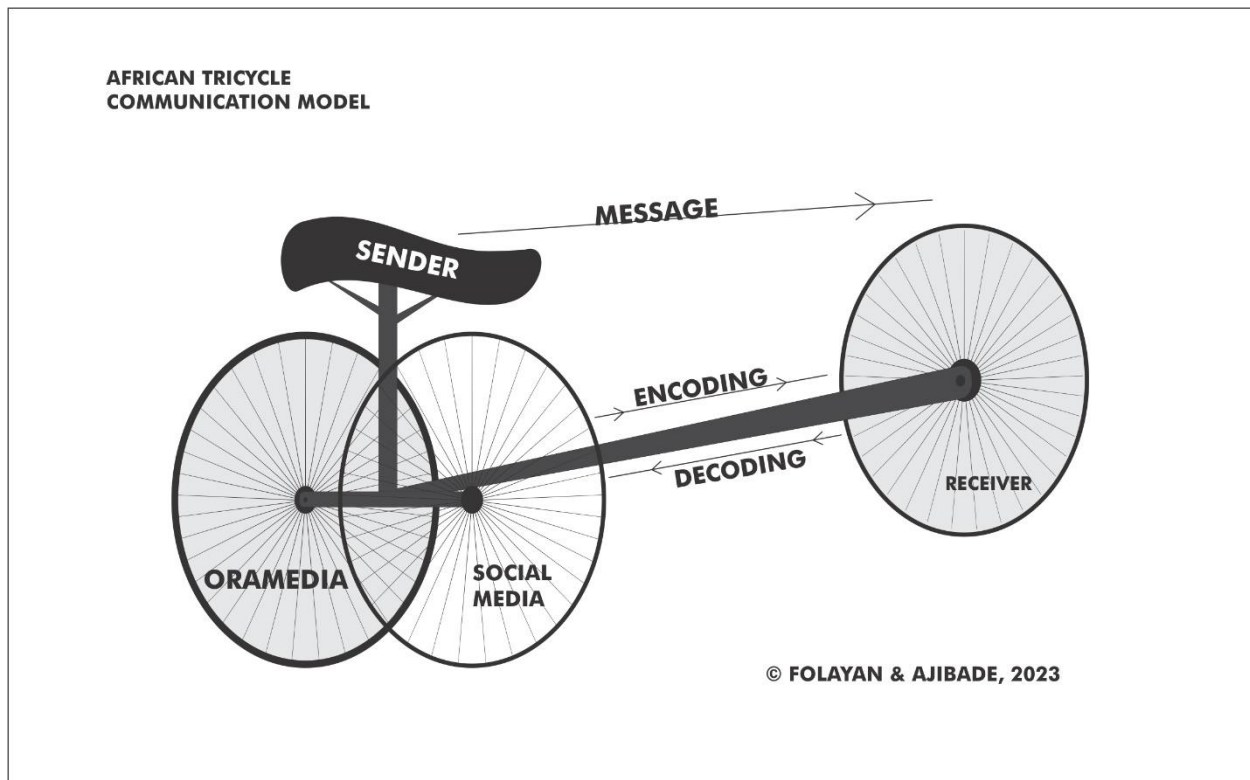
Various scholars and researchers have conducted numerous studies on the efficacy of various communication models. Evidence emerging from these studies suggest that there is no one model that fits all communication situations. (Moemeka, 1981, 2000). Communication remains a very complex phenomenon and it is so diverse that one diagrammatic representation can capture all salient features in the process. But these suggest models that represent particular contexts have better heuristic values. In persuasive communication (e.g. advertising), Westley-Maclean's model has explanatory power because it provides for 'delayed' and 'immediate' feedback. But in when persuasive communication takes the transactional context (e.g. sales promotion at a trade fair), Barnlund's Transactional Models appears to have more meta-theoretical value.

Results

In developing and presenting *THE OSMR-TRICYCLE MODEL OF HUMAN COMMUNICATIONM* we took into consideration the following objectives:

- There is a need to incorporate Oramedia as a meta-theory in the world of communication to understand how Africans communicate
- There is need to have models that have explanatory power in African communication context. With due respect to the explanatory power of existing (foreign) models, none of them comprehensively addresses the African communication context.
- It is expedient to draw the attention of African communication scholars to the need to have contemporary home-grown models to understand communication in Africa. The modern mass media have continued to dominate the media space for many decades, making steady incursion even to the rural areas where Oramedia are still more dominant.
- There is a dire need to develop a homegrown model in development communication, for promoting circular economy and other development paradigm aims to promote C.A.R.E. (Conservation, Adaptation, Recycling and Efficiency) in rural areas of Africa.

Fig. 8 . The Tricycle/O-S-M-R Model of Human Communication in Africa.



Components of the O-S-M-R Model

- We built this model using a very common or familiar object in Africa: a tricycle. The essence of this is to not only indigenize the model but to locate it the frame of reference of Africans.
- It presents African communication as systemic. The system has at least three inter-dependent sub-systems with components – Oramedia Subsystem, Social Media Subsystem and Receiver Subsystem, forming the shape of a tricycle
- Each *subsystem* has components that drive it. For example the Oramedia subsystem has components such as:
 - *Instrumental* (e.g. drums)
 - *Demonstrative* (e.g. music, signal)
 - *Iconographic* (e.g. Kolanut and palmwine, among the Igbo of Nigeria)
 - *Extra-mundane* (e.g. incantations, ritual)
 - *Visual* (e.g. dressing)
 - *Institutional* (e.g. chieftancy, masquerade)
 - *Folktales and folklores* (e.g. Ijapa and Yannibo among Yoruba of Nigeria)
 - *Myths and legends* (e.g. the concept of 'Omoluabi' among Yoruba of Nigeria)

The Social Media Subsystem has components such as:

- *Print media*
- *Broadcast media*
- *Social media Apps* (You Tube, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Fin Apps)
- *Websites*

The Receiver Subsystem has components such as:

- *Communication skills* (including Oramedia proficiency)
- *Attitude*
- *Knowledge*



- Society
- Communication Experience (co-orientation level)
- Culture
- The sender uses a combination of Oramedia and Social Media components to *encode* messages. But sometimes only one of the Subsystem is deployed. Skill is required for the communicator to combine component parts of the subsystems to encode his or her message. In most traditional communication forms, the medium and the message are often inseparable. The more skillful the communicator is, all things being equal, the more successful the communication effort will be.
- We argue that it is when the Sender uses appropriate combinations of Oramedia and Social Media components that his or her message is most effective.
- The feedback component (encoding and decoding) cyclically links the three subsystems.
- Mass media network is located under the social media subsystem because through media convergence and media hybridity, all forms of mass media are locatable in the social media.
- The main actor in the communication process is the person who rides the tricycle (communicator). Where decoding is poor (for instance, when the receiver does not understand proverbs or folklore used by the communicator or does not have access to the mass media channel deployed (no telephone receiver network), the communication is ineffective.
- The communicator does not have to use both Oramedia and Social Media Subsystems always. When he or she uses either of the two subsystems, it compares to riding a bicycle. A bicycle does many things a tricycle does but a tricycle is more balanced on the ground and can carry more loads. For example, a CEO making a dinner speech may incorporate myths and legends (Oramedia subsystem) into his or her address, using video and *Powerpoint* Presentation tools (Social Media subsystem). The OSMR Model, therefore, emphasis inter-dependency.

Discussion

In presenting the Tricycle Model to fill the knowledge gap in the human communication process in Africa, we do not posit that previous models are not good. Rather, we assert that the model we present here more accurately represents the true or typical communication scenario in most parts of (rural) Africa where indigenous or traditional communication is more dominantly used in day-to-day communication. The Tricycle Model, therefore, is not meant to represent all communication situations.

The modern mass media systems is making steady incursion into rural areas of Africa, disrupting gradually the traditional media praxis. The government's non-use of traditional media has contributed to this development – what we may call 'media systems imperialism'. Many youths have lost touch with traditions: they cannot and do not speak African languages, do not dress like Africans, do not understand African culture, folklore, folksongs, etc. The foregoing makes it difficult for them to deploy Oramedia in their communications. But the elderly in rural Africa can hardly communicate without deploying traditional communication forms.

The Tricycle Model is thus expected to serve as heuristic stimulus to African communication scholars to devote much more attention to traditional communication. More research needs to be carried out on the nature and efficacy of Oramedia, especially how it can work with modern mass media systems. Currently, there is a tendency to lump all forms of traditional communication as Oramedia (which we have also adopted in this paper for convenience). Nevertheless, the components of Oramedia need to be studied more clinically. Many aspects of traditional media forms are extinct. Which forms are still in active use? What are their relative efficacies?

The Tricycle/OSMR Model incorporates modern mass media systems (social media, print, broadcast, web media) meaning that a communicator gathers more steam and energy when he or she deploys all the subsystems, striking



balance on the three wheels, depending of course on communication goal and context. Oramedia and the modern mass media are not parallel lines that do not meet.

Adoption of innovation such as TVET requires the deployment of appropriate communication models, especially in rural Africa, where resistance to new ideas is high. The concept of ‘circular economy’, for example, aims at efficient management of the Earth’s resources to make them sustainable. It involves harnessing raw materials such that they are reusable, protecting the environment and curtailing wastes. The challenge here is largely communication in nature. People in rural areas of Africa are hooked to their traditional ways of doing things and are slow (even often resistant) to adopt innovations. A pragmatic way to encourage them to adopt TVET is therefore a homegrown model such as OSMR/Tricycle Model.

Conclusion

Communication, the interactive and transactional process of sharing information, knowledge, ideas, meanings or understanding, is very complex and dynamic. Any model representing communication experience must therefore be simple and pragmatic. The essential purpose of a communication model is to accurately represent (in picture, diagrams and other forms of visuals) happens during a communication phenomenon.

Our search through the communication literature online fetched no model that describes the African form of human communication in a holistic form as it exists today. A similar library search generated several models which have not been extensively spread in world communication literature. Notable among the latter are the “Umbrella Paradigm” (Ugboajah, 1985)’ “HIV/AIDS Communications model” (Akpabio, 2001); and “Octopus Health Communication Model” (Folayan, 2011). Given the fact that Africans communicate in very distinct forms, lack of models in the African context represents a huge gap that African scholars must fill. The pioneering works of Doob, Ugboajah, Wilson, Ansu-Kyeremeh, Salawu and Akpabio need to be stepped up from exploratory to experimental studies in terms of patterns, impact and limitations of Oramedia. The extent of Information Communication Technology disruptions on Oramedia also needs to be investigated.

Success stories recorded here and there in the use of Oramedia need to be properly documented using the OSMR and other models. For example, let us examine the following communication case studies to underscore the potency of the OSMR model.

Table 1: OSMR potency using selected case studies

| SN | THE COMMUNICATION PROBLEM | SOCIAL MEDIA SUBSYSTEM SOLUTION | ORAMEDIA SOLUTION | IMPACT |
|----|--|--|--|--|
| 1 | Nigeria needed to change from British Pound Sterling to Naira and Kobo as her official currency` | Produce and distribute print, radio, TV jingles.billboards using models of Nigerians spending the Naira. | Juju music superstar, Ebenezer Obey produced a music album on the subject matter which became super-hit in the South West. | The modern mass media produced less impact despite its huge cost. Ebenezer Obey’s credibility and musical skills led to a resounding success and |



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|----|---|--|--|---|
| | | | | every household was properly informed of the currency change. Cost to government was zero, as Obey recorded the music on his own volition. Oramedia is extremely cheap comparative to modern mass media |
| 2 | A University management desired to run a communication campaign against indiscipline on campus. | Posters , radio jingles and billboards are produced and strategically placed across campus | The legend “Omoluabi” (the ideal character of a Yoruba child of integrity) was developed and used as theme of the posters, jingles and billboards` | Combination of modern mass media and oramedia produced greater impact |
| 3. | A parent needs to properly say goodbye to his daughter at a marriage ceremony in such a way that it makes lasting impact on her for a lifetime. | Design card in glowing colours with the headline (Be a good ambassador of your family and always remember the daughter of whom you are.) | The compere sings a Yoruba folksong: Father: <i>Omo o mi lo, mo f'adura sin o o, omo o mi lo, mo f'adura sin o o. Ko ma tosi ko ma k'agbako nile oko. Omo o mi lo, omo o mi lo, mo f'adura sin o o.</i> Bride: <i>Baba mo mi lo, o f'adura sin mi o, Baba momi lo, o f'adura sin mi o.</i> Translation: <i>Child, you are going, I send you forth with prayers...May you not go wretched or face disasters in your new home. ...Father, I am going, you have sent me forth with prayers...etc.</i> | The impact of the Oramedia input is incomparable. Almost always when this folksong is rendered, both parents and bride break down in tears. The scenario is difficult to describe. |



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Table 2: Media Influence (by development projects in the former Bendel State, Nigeria)

| | Operation Feed the Nation Programme | Local Government Reforms | Universal Primary Education Campaign | Total |
|---------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------|
| Social forums | 15 (14.4%) | 34 (32.6%) | 17 (18.3%) | 66 (21.2%) |
| Town Crier | 10 (9.6%) | 20 (19.3%) | 15 (14.1%) | 45 (14.4%) |
| Newspaper | 2 (1%) | - | 3 (2%) | 5(1.6%) |
| Radio | 8 (5.5%) | 4 (3.8%) | 7 (6.7%) | 9 (6.1%) |
| Local Market | 43 (32.7%) | 14 (13.5%) | 20 (19.3%) | 68 (21.8%) |
| Television | - | - | - | - |
| Local School | 35 (33.7%) | 32 (30.8%) | 42 (40.4%) | 109 (34.9%) |
| Total | 104 (100%) | 104 (100%) | 104 (100%) | 104 (100%) |

Source: Andrew A. Moemeka, *Local Radio: Community Education for Development*. Zaria: Ahmadu Bello University.

Conclusively, the OSMR model places Africa communication in the foremost position to which it has always belonged before the intrusion of the “modern mass media”. Both forms of media have significant values when fused or deployed independently depending on the purpose and context of communication. One should not be annihilated for the other. However, practical application of the model to various projects is necessary to further ferment and shape the model.

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