

Traditional Communication Systems in the Digital Age among the Urhobo of the Niger-Delta, Nigeria

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Abstract

Modern day mass media technologies have significantly diminished the functions of the traditional systems of information sharing, socialising, cultural transfer and the mobilisation of social and political activities in many African societies. The Urhobo of the Niger-Delta have a number of these traditional indigenous systems (or practices) including oral literature, music, drumming, symbolic presentations, markets, village gatherings, and town-criers to perform communication functions within their sociocultural systems. Many of these are still extant in modern practices despite their widespread digitalisation. This paper investigates the forms, functions, and change in Urhobo traditional communication systems in the age of digital revolution. Applying the qualitative research method (library based research and participant observation), and drawing on the works in the field of African communication and the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), the paper sheds light on how the new digital communication channels facilitate the adoption of traditional practices and form. It asserts that while modern communication technologies have changed ways people communicate with one another, Urhobo traditional communication systems still maintain relevance, and have adapted digital platforms such as the new media (social media sites, youtube, etc) to support memorial, funerary, artistic, socialisation activities. The paper concludes that traditional communication systems among the Urhobo have not become extinct, but have become technologically transformed, while they continue to retain cultural relevance and functional roles in their sociocultural systems.

Keywords: African communication systems; digital communication; indigenous media; Niger-Delta; Urhobo.

Introduction

Human society relies on communication to exist, function, and endure. Even before the introduction of broadcast media, print, and the internet to Africa, indigenous communities developed effective methods for sharing information, transmitting culture, settling disputes, uniting people, and promoting community values. These methods were a natural extension of the people's worldview and social structure, reflecting beliefs and community bonds.

The interest of scholars has been drawn toward traditional African communication systems since the pre-colonial era in their rejection of colonial stereotypes of cultural backwardness by showcasing that Africans had functional communication strategies long before contact with outsiders. Scholars like Frank Ugboajah, Des Wilson, and OnuoraNwuneli have explored the intrinsic linkage of these systems to social organisations and collective identities within African societies. Historically, communities in the Urhobo ethnic nationality of Delta State within the Niger-Delta region, Nigeria, for instance, communicated through a multiple means. These include oral poems and sagas, proverbs, festivals, music, dance, marketplace transactions, town-criers, and the use of drums, symbols, and rituals. These means of communication function not just as informational broadcasts but as vehicles for education, social integration, entertainment, religious practices, and communal governance.

In the realm of indigenous African media, traditional communication systems are viewed as communal and participative. Unlike centralised modern media, these indigenous networks foster dialogue and the direct engagement of individuals in communication processes within a culturally sanctioned environment. According to Opubor (1974), these communication methods were powerful in Africa because they were tied to traditional customs and ways of life. As Moemeka (1998) notes, they continue to have clout with the majority rural African population due to their relevance to familiar cultural norms and collective experiences.

Beyond basic communication, the indigenous methods utilised in the Niger-Delta region performed both politico-social and cultural functions. In such spheres, rituals, masquerade performances, musical traditions, drum messages and oral poems not only conveyed information, but also spurred community engagement, educated people in matters of morality, chronicled history, and promoted social order.

Among the Urhobo, for example, the oral poetic performance and symbolic communication were central to fostering kinship bonds and solidarity. These techniques are not obsolete cultural artifacts but active cultural institutions. As a

result of globalisation and the rise of new digital technologies, African communication practices are significantly transforming modern societies. Mobile phones, the internet, broadcast television and radio now play dominant roles in interpersonal communication and relationships in communities.

Traditional modes of communication have not disappeared; they are in the process of evolving and adapting to digital media platforms. Urhobo songs, festivals, traditional music, oral performances and rituals, and memorisation practices are increasingly broadcast online through media platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, YouTube, TikTok, and live-streaming digital radio services. The present paper, therefore, aims to document the traditional communication systems of the Urhobo and to study the impact of the digital age on them.

The Urhobo of the Niger-Delta

The Urhobo, who are among the prominent ethnic nationalities inhabiting the Niger-Delta, reside mainly in Nigeria's Delta State. As members of the Niger-Congo family of languages, the Urhobo speak a dialect of the Edoid branch, which manifests in various dialects across different clans. Given their prominent role in trade, agriculture, fishing, and oil extraction, the Urhobo occupy an important cultural, economic and social space within the Niger-Delta region, having built significant social relationships with their neighbours (Itsekiri, Edo, Isoko, and Ijaw).

The general communal lifestyle of the Urhobo is anchored in their systems of social structures. These include kinship relationships, age-grades, and indigenous political frameworks, although modernisation has influenced these institutions to some extent. Indigenous cultural expression such as music, dance, rituals, oral folklore, indigenous religions, as well as social institutions (like elders, lineage heads, chiefs and age groups), provide significant aspects of Urhobo identity.

Communication and culture in indigenous Africa are inextricable. This principle is true of the Urhobo where historical communication practices served as an integral communal mechanism that helped pass on societal values, culture and shared historical memories. Information was shared orally by way of proverbs, story-telling sessions (often during moonlight) where young generations could be informed and entertained. Thus cultural beliefs and heritage were consolidated; songs, indigenous music, drums, symbols and performances were deployed to promote social cohesion and shared identity. Music and dance are integral components of Urhobo social, ceremonial, and religious life; and performances such as Opiri and Udje contribute to social commentary, protest, and entertainment. According to Mpofu (2022), it is

"crucial that African performance traditions continue to be valued...because they offer participants ...a sense of collective social identity and cultural continuity, even when mediated digitally".

The evolution of globalising information technology, the emergence of a networked culture in some African countries and digital divide in others, are also changing how indigenous African communities communicate. Today, mobile telephony, the internet, digital broadcasts, online streaming and social media have become major tools for communicating within communities. Although the modes and patterns of communication have been influenced, the Urhobo do not seem to have lost traditional communication systems as the culture appears to have evolved with the influence of new media. Urhobo music and oral narratives, traditions and festivals such as Iwu-Uriri and Udje, which often celebrate and chronicle events are found and performed more on social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube and Tiktok. Thus, they continue to coexist with traditional communication strategies, and are thus seen as adaptation rather than displacement.

Previous works of literature highlight how, in contemporary societies, the integration of information and communication technologies have created new avenues for preserving indigenous languages and cultures. Roya and Ngcobo (2023), for instance, argue that digital technologies play an important role in enabling the documented transmission and disseminated flow of Africa's diverse indigenous knowledge systems to a wider audience. Equally important is the work of Eke and Adeyemi (2024), which focuses on how in Nigeria, the rise of digital technologies are becoming new conduits to sustaining the systems of indigenous communications, though there exist risks associated with cultural dilution and exclusion to the digitally marginalised communities. Consequently, the intersection of indigenous communications practices with digital media constitutes a process of synergy, and convergence rather than outright replacement. The Urhobo engage with this new media landscape while maintaining ties to their traditions, reinterpreting their culture and reaffirming its presence within the framework of emerging technologies.

African Traditional Communication Systems

African Traditional Communication Systems comprise those indigenous channels of communication which are part of the cultural, social and symbolic institutions of African societies. Before the advent of print media, radio, television and other forms of digital communication systems, various African communities had organised communication systems to meet the needs for governance, social relations, conflict resolution, cultural transmission and mobilisation of the masses. African indigenous communication systems have been the focus of research, in part, because they seem

to pose challenges to the colonial view of precolonial Africans as having no formal or complex communication networks. Indigenous systems were not only participatory and contextually bound but also socially and culturally significant.

The indigenous systems made possible the circulation of information, storage of memory, transmission of learning, and maintenance of morale within the community. African indigenous systems of communication are typically categorised into verbal and nonverbal modes of communication. Some verbal forms of communication in Africa include: storytelling, folktales, proverbs, gossip, rumour mongering, oral narrative, conversation, marketplace exchanges, town crying, community and town meetings, songs, riddles, joke telling, poem and incantation recitation, formal and informal lectures or sermons, prayers, etc. Oral tradition plays a central role in African communication systems, as many African communities before the coming of the written word had oral traditions as the repository for their histories and cultural heritage.

African proverbs offer sage advice, reflect social mores and beliefs and provide social commentary. Folktales, oral stories that contain life lessons and moral standards also serve didactic purposes while town criers have been found to exist in a number of African communities and acted as formal agents of communication by sending news regarding the festival, meetings, calls to communal labour, wars, funerals, and other important matters through drumming, gongs or bells (Mytton, 1975). Marketplaces in many communities serve as centres for both economic and information exchange. Nonverbal forms of communication in Africa include drums and gongs, colour symbolism, gestures, signs, ritual objects, amulets, masquerades and dance.

These forms of communication are inherently symbolic and context-specific, and are only comprehensible within a given community due to shared cultural understanding. Indigenous communication in Africa, as conceptualised by Wilson, relies heavily on cultural signs, symbol and gesture within the social context of interaction. African music and dance have played important roles in their indigenous systems of communication in entertaining, instructing, motivating, and expressing cultural identities and social and religious values. Drums and other musical instruments have also served for mobilising the populace and conveying symbolic messages.

Researchers also contend that African indigenous systems are able to perform roles that are very similar to what is accomplished in mass media systems including those involving dissemination of information, education, socialisation, entertainment, persuasion, cultural transmission and national development/ mobilisation.

Onyenankeya and Salawu (2018) argue that the ability of African traditional communication systems to remain relevant and effective especially in rural communities is their reliance on a ‘grass-roots’ orientation, community engagement and participation, and cultural relevance. Increasingly, research indicates that indigenous African communication continues to adapt and thrive in digital platforms. The growing presence of social media, podcasts, and on-line newspapers allows for the emergence of African cultural expression and use of indigenous languages online (Mathe, 2024). For example, Eke and Adeyemi (2024) suggest that the utilisation of digital communication tools offers avenues to reinforce and extend indigenous African communication systems in Nigeria through concerted and ethical engagement with indigenous knowledge custodians. Thus, a fusion between indigenous and digital communication has emerged as part of a continued evolution of communication.

Theoretical Framework: Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)

This study adopts the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), first introduced by Fred Davis in 1989, as a theoretical lens. The core idea of TAM is to determine how and why individuals adopt new technologies, with emphasis placed on two primary factors: Perceived Usefulness (PU) and Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU).

Perceived Usefulness, defined as "the degree to which a person believes that using a particular system would enhance his or her job performance," while Perceived Ease of Use is defined as "the degree to which a person believes that using a particular system would be free of effort"(Davis, 1989). Since its inception, TAM has been a highly influential framework within various research areas, including information systems, human-computer interaction, digital media, and social media. Venkatesh and Davis (2000) enhanced the model to include external influences such as social norms and cognitive aspects of individual's beliefs on their acceptance and usage of technology. The adoption and usage of digital communication technologies within indigenous cultural settings is conceptually appropriate with this model.

This is because TAM can shed light on how communities with well-established traditional communication networks might adapt and accept new technologies to preserve and augment their communication practices. The Technology Acceptance Model provides an explanatory structure for explaining the level of acceptance of digital media technologies by the Urhobo people as they increasingly become aware of the relevance of mobile phones, social media, online content and broadcasting. Social media platforms, mobile phones, and other digital devices and services are found to be useful by the Urhobo in staying connected, cultural preservation, social

networking and disseminating local information and culture. These platforms have become accessible and user-friendly.

The digital mediation of traditional African communication is seen by scholars like Mpofu (2022) where social media becomes the "breathing space" for the African oral tradition, allowing indigenous storytelling to transform and circulate in online public spheres. Moreover, Onyenakeya (2022) highlighted that digital technology allows for the sustainability of indigenous language media; nevertheless challenges like inadequate funding and competition from globally dominated digital content can hinder its sustainability. In this study, we use TAM to understand the integration of digital communication technologies into the existing Urhobo communication systems by focusing on perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use.

Field Report on Traditional Communication Systems among the Urhobo

Family and Interpersonal Communication

Family plays a role as an indispensable means of communicating and transmitting Urhobo cultural values. Interpersonal communication among members of family is usually characterised by informal interaction, participation, and continuity. Parents, grand-parents and other elderly members of a family usually transmit moral values, cultural practices, collective values and indigenous knowledge, and that is communicated by way of oral storytelling, songs, folklore, proverbs, oral advises and informal discussion among members.

Marriage and divorce, succession and inheritance, conflicts, deaths, disputes, funeral and land acquisition issues were typically discussed in such meetings. Interactions at meetings indicated members were actively and meaningfully involved, reflecting participatory mode of communication inherent to the local system of communication, in order to contribute to decisions affecting the family. Numerous instances of interpersonal, public and interpersonal mode of communication occurs, for instance, during wedding ceremonies, Naming ceremonies, age-grade activities, funeral rites, and collective work efforts. This kind of interaction often goes hand in hand with various verbal (such as greetings and discussion of topical issues, and a combination of other modes like visual communication such as gestural gestures, eye contact, and non verbal behaviour, physical contact and environmental cues) methods to communicate information and strengthen relationships.

Roles of Town-criers

The existence of the office of town-crier can still be observed in several Urhobo communities, notwithstanding the infiltration of the various media and the increased

availability of modern technology. In essence, the town-crier is considered an official conduit for disseminating community information to the general public on behalf of local leadership. The information usually disseminated ranges from meeting announcement, cultural ceremonies, communal activities (such as sanitation and labour days), to deaths and accidents as well as important security notices.

In most of the communities studied, the town-criers often made announcements using metal gongs (agogo), drums or metallic objects to draw attention, typically in the early part of the morning, in the evening or sometimes mid-day when the public is assumed to be available. These announcements were made in the Urhobo language to the residents of the community in direct form. However, the research reveals that each of the town-criers did not merely act as an informant but also served as a mobiliser, a unifier, a custodian of culture, and as a tool of social control.

Market Communication

Within market environment, exchange of messages, jokes, rumours, advice and stories between customers, buyers and sellers take place regularly.

It was further revealed in most communities observed during fieldwork that markets also double as public announcements and advertisement venues where political parties, community groups, local associations and even government agencies advertise programmes to the members of the community. These market centres serve as community's informal communication forums to transmit public information and mobilise people for both community and non-community related issues. The interaction at the market not only serve as a channel for communication and exchange of information but also serve as a centre for social integration bringing people from diverse community settings to interact among themselves.

Village Square and Festivals

The village square, a typical feature of most traditional Urhobo communities still represents a critical site of public communication and interaction. This is because it provides a common public space for members of the community to converge for a range of events and interactions that may include meetings, ceremonies, arbitration, artistic performances, cultural festivals and public deliberation on communal matters. Most crucial communal decisions are usually taken at the village square and all stakeholders within the community would be brought to engage in direct interaction and discourse to achieve a communal consensus. During festivals organised and performed within the communities, public communication appears to have a direct link with the communal identity and the collective memory of the people.

Dance, music and other forms of art that usually take center stage in festivals have communicative functions and aim at reminding and reminding people of their heritage, collective beliefs, and worldview. These performances transmit vital social and cultural knowledge to the young generation as well as strengthen their social bonds with others within the community. Public discourse occurring in festival usually addresses socio-cultural themes, cultural values and shared history. The village square is also identified to be a forum where community members come together for adjudication and to debate on communal problems before elders and leaders to seek for resolution and decision-making. It offers the public an opportunity for direct and active participation in decision-making processes.

Music, Dance and Oral Performance

Analyses from field findings indicate that music, dance, and oral performance are of primary importance in the Urhobo culture of communication. Traditional music performance was found to occur at weddings, funeral, festivals, naming ceremonies, and social gatherings. These performances also serve communication purposes in addition to entertainment.

Traditional songs feature messages relating to ethics, praises, criticisms, historic events, societal behaviour and collective values. They sometimes include eulogy to hardworking individuals, critics of negative actions, praise of leaders, and expression of aspirations of the collective. Use of proverbs, metaphors, satire and symbolic language in these songs was often noted.

Traditional dance performance like Udje and Opiri, though largely entertaining also conveyed social commentary. Performers communicate through dance movements, costumes, gestures and songs to audiences. It may sometimes overtly condemn bad habits like Laziness, social misconduct and the abuse of authority.

Oral performances were also evident in funeral celebrations and communal gatherings in the communities. Praise singers and other traditional artists recounted personal, familial histories, the achievements of those deceased and experiences shared by the communities. These acts of oral art help to sustain memory and a sense of collective identity in the society.

Traditional Communication in the Digital Age

Observation further indicates that digital communication technologies have drastically redefined traditional communication patterns among the Urhobo, and that such technologies are fast being adapted to supplement and enhance traditional practices. Mobile phone communication, social media usage, and internet

applications, for example, are becoming increasingly ubiquitous in the daily life in Urhobo urban and rural communities.

On digital platforms, WhatsApp groups play a critical communication role in families, age grades, women organisations and community associations. Such platforms facilitate rapid information dissemination, mobilisation and community coordination in both the urban and rural settings. Facebook and other social media platforms have been utilised for posting messages about upcoming social events, and for sharing updates about cultural festivals, mourning and marriage ceremonies. Online videos have even come to be important for the live stream of funerals and marriage ceremonies of distant relatives in other countries who may be unable to physically attend events back home. The use of online advertisement to publicise festivals, musical shows and events among Urhobo people is equally on the increase. Online obituary posters, video tributes, and social media memorials serve to prolong the remembrance of community members in online spaces.

Some traditional communicative acts are already being performed and/or recorded using these new digital technologies. Thus, a community member observed: "Even our traditional music and dances are already everywhere now on these phones...we share it everywhere online." The findings also show that many of the traditional performances like dance (Udje, Opiri), music and even some funerals were documented and recorded using mobile phone and then uploaded on social media for public viewership or by using YouTube for a wider dissemination. Live Streaming has, however, made it possible for people in the diaspora, and those who could not physically travel for an occasion to participate in the mourning of loved ones through virtual attendance to funerals and other social events, while those left behind could easily share the mourning rituals online. Online advertisements about funerals, ceremonies and special occasions among the Urhobo are also gaining prominence.

The trend also demonstrates continuity with traditions such as remembering the dead. This continues in digital form, with new modes of online memorialisation such as digital obituaries, video tributes, online funeral services, and sharing messages about the deceased on social media platforms. These forms of digital memorialisation serve a similar function as traditional memorial practices by enabling communities to maintain social connection and shared memories in remembrance of individuals who have passed away.

However, observations revealed several challenges arising from the adoption of digital technologies. The younger generation has shown a decline in face-to-face interactions due to the increased reliance on digital platforms. It was also evident that

some youths, particularly those in urban communities are drifting from the use of their indigenous language, preferring to communicate online using English and/or pidgin English instead of their local language. Commercialisation of traditional practice was identified, especially through the broadcasting of cultural rituals in ways that may promote cultural dilution. For instance, certain traditional and sacred rituals which were not traditionally made available to all members of the community were sometimes presented online to a global audience. This has prompted some level of unease concerning the management of Urhobo cultural practices among community members and cultural activists.

In spite of the noted challenges, the findings indicate that digital technology provides a significant new framework for both preserving and popularising Urhobo cultural heritage across the globe, and thus has the potential to supplement and enhance rather than simply replace traditional communication systems.

Discussion of Findings

Despite the relentless encroachment of digital media technology in the Niger Delta region, the indigenous forms of communication continue to play a meaningful role in Urhobo society. This study's empirical evidence from field observation and an examination of extant literature show that Urhobo indigenous communication structures still serve as effective means of transmitting cultural information, fostering social ties, enabling community mobilisation, and reinforcing collective identity. While new technologies have undeniably influenced the communication landscape, they have neither entirely replaced the indigenous communication forms, nor the cultures which they serve. Rather, many of the traditional communication forms are actively engaged in the new digital context.

Communication in the Urhobo community remains communal in nature and participatory. Structures such as the family unit's interaction, festivals, market exchange, village meeting (egbeta, ijagbon, ukegwa), traditional dance performance, ritual engagement among other communal mechanisms of interactions are instrumental in initiating and promoting intra- and inter- personal contact. This is in line with the stance of Wilson (2015, p.55) who, on African indigenous communication systems opined that 'The communication patterns... Are woven inextricably into community life'. Similarly, Ugboajah (1985) asserted that "the traditional mass media (in Africa) are embedded in a way of life, a total social environment." The resilience of community-centredness in Urhobo communication thus speaks to the persistence of the indigenous social order in the face of urbanisation and the ubiquitous penetration of technology.

Further, oral tradition is a dominant medium for knowledge transmission among the Urhobo. Traditional methods such as storytelling, proverbs, songs, folklores, folktales, praises songs are used for educating the younger generation about Urhobo customs, social morals, and history. Finnegan's (2012, p.114) assertion that 'Orality in Africa fulfils various roles: the provision of information; entertainment; explanation of life' and history seems to correspond with findings from this research. The use of oral expression by the Urhobo is therefore reflective of the importance of oral tradition as 'the storage medium of the society's history, experience and ideology' (Vansina, 1985, p.133).

Omu (1978) has established that the traditional media performed the same role as the modern media at the community level in Nigeria's past. Findings also indicated that markets still function as potent arenas for social and communication activities among the Urhobo people. In addition to economic exchange, market spaces are also significant avenues for social, political and cultural information dissemination. Marriage details, information regarding funeral arrangements, communal problems, festival calendars and other pertinent socio-political information circulate widely within market environments. This is corroborated by Okunna (1999) who recognises the market as a critical node for information flow in Nigerian traditional societies.

Marketplaces remain powerful centres of integration and mobilisation. The research further showed that the music and dance traditions continue to hold significant communicative power for the Urhobo people. Traditional musical and dance performances like Udje and Opiri are important vehicles of moral, educational and satirical communication and also serve as avenues for historical recollection and documentation. Songs and traditional performances have been observed to convey clear messages about values, communal relations and responsibility.

As Agovi (2005, p.33) argues, "African performance systems...are used to decode and transmit cultural messages...through a rich vocabulary of sound and motion." The performances also mirror Barber's (1997, p.27) contention that African oral traditions remain "active, creative practices engaged with the unfolding of historical time". This study further highlights the continued relevance of indigenous musical instruments in conveying specific messages. The utilisation of drums, bells, gongs, rattles and horns during festivals, burial ceremonies, weddings, dances and other traditional gatherings effectively communicate diverse messages from merriment and warning to assembly and prayer. This corresponds to Akinfeleye's (2008, p.24) assertion that the drum has been traditionally employed as a medium of 'coded signals to signal danger, or summon assembly' in Africa. A further prominent finding is that traditional symbolic and ritual forms of communication remain intricately tied

to Urhobo traditional belief systems. This involves the use of symbols such as the kola nut, palm fronds, white chalk, and colours to convey socially recognised meaning during ceremonies and ritual practices. The use of oral ritual communication, including libations, invocation of ancestral spirits, divination, incantations and proverbs by spiritual leaders has been documented as crucial in the mediation of messages between the people and the spirit world.

This reflects Mbiti (1991)'s argument that African systems of communication cannot be disentangled from the spiritual, cosmological and symbolic dimensions of life. The study also aligns with the notion of Ibagere (2010, p.45) that 'the symbolism in African ritual objects communicate more than meets the eyes, they carry deeply embedded meanings' which have socio-cultural implications. Of particular significance is the emerging finding that traditional communication systems of the Urhobo have begun to transcend the physical and penetrate digital environments. Modern digital platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok are now increasingly utilised by individuals and communities to transmit indigenous content.

Festivals, burial ceremonies, traditional music, folk stories, dances, and cultural presentations are routinely documented and shared on various social media sites reaching both local and global Urhobo audiences. This confirms the observations of Castells (2010) who emphasises how digital networks are reshaping global communication practices and social interactions by overcoming the constraints of time and space. It is also clear that these digital media tools are playing an essential role in preserving and propagating indigenous Urhobo culture.

Many Urhobo artists, musicians, traditional groups, and other community organisations are now employing online platforms to archive, disseminate, and promote Urhobo language, music, dance forms, stories, and other aspects of their culture. This is consistent with Jenkins' (2006) thesis that user-created and distributed content empowers communities to circulate their own cultural expressions within the digital sphere. Furthermore, the study found that indigenous modes of commemoration are increasingly reflected in contemporary digital communication. The use of obituary posters online, broadcast of funerals, video tributes and condolence messages on social media platforms re-enacts the spirit of traditional mourning customs among the Urhobo people. This implies that the indigenous cultural values associated with sociality and relationship-building are being reproduced and transmitted through digital media channels. This resonates with the argument by Couldry and Hepp (2017) that digital media is increasingly contributing to the construction of social realities and symbolic exchanges.

Despite these benefits, digitalisation poses great challenges to indigenous Urhobo communication systems. One of the primary concerns implicated in this study is that there is decline in the usage of the local language among young people, with many of them preferring to communicate in English and Nigerian Pidgin on social media sites. The study also highlighted the reduced face-to-face interactions among members of the Urhobo community as a result of over reliance on mobile phone usage and social media. The finding is in conformity with Turkle's (2015) position that digital communication tend to minimise social interaction.

Conclusion

The traditional communication practices - oral narratives, music, dance, festivals, symbolic expressions, market place interchange, community meetings, and public displays - among the Urhobo are not only means of receiving information, but a way of life for communicating, strengthening identity and building social ties.

Although globalisation and digital technologies such as mobile telephony and social media have introduced some changes in how communication is undertaken in contemporary times, however, traditional communication systems of the Urhobo remain the foundation of their daily interpersonal relationships. Hence indigenous songs, music, and other performances are circulated using different platforms on digital media such as YouTube, TikTok and Facebook for consumption by local and global audiences.

The traditional communication forms of the Urhobo are sustainable in the era of digitalisation. This can be achieved by adapting and transforming the cultural communication modes and incorporating them into the digitally mediated forms in order to enrich, expand and extend their reach and scope of usage.

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