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Socio-Cultural Environment of Communication in Traditional/Rural Nigeria:

An Ethnographic Exploration

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The importation of mass media structures as well as models of Communication into developing societies, with cultures divergent from those of the donor nations, has not resulted in highly vaunted successes. Moemeka examines what went wrong and, in this descriptive case study, sketches the communication environment in rural Nigeria and the cultural, social and political factors that may critically affect communication impacts.

INTRODUCTION

Speaking at a development communiration seminar, Wilbur Schramm raised a very pertinent question: What went wrong with development and the high hopes which the mass media appeared to offer in the early 1960s? In addition to providing a number of answers that have political, social and economic implications, Professor-Emeritus Schramm stressed upon what has been regarded as a fundamental flaw in the use of the mass media in development – the often-forgotten fact that modern media technologies, modes and models of communication are products of Western culture and, therefore, have resulted from measures under very specific economic, social and cultural circumstances very different from those existing in countries into which the new media were introduced to help development. This has been a major cog in the wheel of effective use of the mass media because it has meant that sufficient attention has not been paid to the socio-cultural environments of recipient countries. Professor Schramm concluded his remarks by enjoining communicators to "put their chins on their palms, and their elbows on the table and think

afresh on how to ensure effective use of communication for development."[1]

The starting point in this "fresh thinking" appears to be the identification of those socio-cultural environments under which communication functioned in the past and still functions in rural communities with a view to establishing correlations between communication and community environments. For as that Anglo-Irish writer – Edmund Burke – has warned: "People will not look forward (with hope and determination) to posterity who never look backward to their ancestors" (E. Burke: quoted by Okafor-Omali, 1965: 17). This is the rationale for this paper.

The paper attempts to sketch briefly the environment in which communication functioned in traditional Nigeria and still functions in the rural areas. The attempt is purely descriptive. The emphasis is on those factors – cultural, social and political – that affect both the type and mode of communication within traditional/rural communities. There is no attempt to be analytical or to dwell directly on how people communicate, what they communicate, and in what context and with whom they communicate. This approach has been taken to ensure that the more exciting but value - laden analytical aspect does not overshadow the more basic and historical aspect that deals with the rationale behind the people's communication behaviour.

The term *traditional* has been used here in two ways: first, it has been used to mean the *geographical expression* composed of autonomous units based on ethnic group or conquest that eventually became the geo-political entity now known as Nigeria – a geographical expression which, contrary to early Western textbooks, did not only have a history but also organised structures and systems for survival, orderliness and good government.[2] Secondly, it has been used to apply to rural Nigeria (about 70% of the country) where the historical patterns of government and administration that characterised the so-called geographical expression of old are still very much in force, in spite of the presence of modern local government administration.

Whether one looks at Nigeria as a *geographical expression* comprised of auto-nomous units, or as a geo-political entity with a central government, one fact remains obvious: the country is made up of diverse ethnic groups, cultures and languages. It is therefore to be expected that the environment within which in-formation is disseminated and communication carried on would differ from one ethnic group to another and from culture to culture. However, the diffe-rences one notices are more in degree rather than of substance. Therefore one feels at ease to generalize, albeit cautiously, because the basic factors that affect communication and information are virtually the same throughout the country. The same is also true of the socio-cultural and political institutions from where these factors derive.

Our task here is to try to identify those factors that affect or underlie the reason why people communicate, how they communicate, in what context and with whom they communicate. We will, by implication, also try to point out the factors that tend to inhibit communication and why such factors tend to persist.

PHILOSOPHICAL BASE

Communication in traditional communities is a matter of human inter-relation-ships. In such rural settings, communication is almost always a question of atti-tude to one's neighbour. Therefore, acceptance or rejection of information and new ideas is dependent on how such an action will affect established relation-ships. In Nigeria vertical communication follows the hierarchical socio-poli-tical positions within the rural community. What a person says is as important as who he is – both the *what* and the *who* are, however, generally in consonance with public expectation. In other words, positions within rural communities carry with them certain cultural limitations as to what to say and how to say it. Horizontal communication is based on age-grades, occupation, geographical proximity and ethnic affinity. Here, the strength of relationship affects what a person says as much as what is said determines the type of relationship that would exist between individuals. Communication, whether for social, religious or political matters, is carried on strictly according to the established norms of the community which are based on five principles that are generally non-controversial.

a. *The Supremacy of the Community:* In Africa, the community takes prece-dence over the individual, but depends on him/her for its existence. The desires, wants and needs of the individual are subjugated to those of the community. In Bendel State of Nigeria, for example, urgent personal matters have to be postponed, if there is a call for general community manual labour. In the Moslem North, individual grievances are, at best, ignored if they are at variance with the interest of the community as a whole. In the East, and among the Igbo, rules rather than rulers or individuals are the essential mechanisms for social order (Green, 1964: 78). In general, if what an indi-vidual has to say is not in the interest of the community, no matter how rele-vant and important it is to that individual, he would be bound by custom to "swallow his words." He may, of course, whisper his complaints into the ears of those he can trust and who can help him in other ways that would not hurt the community.

b. *The Utility of the Individual:* If the community depends on the individual for its existence, it goes without saying that the individual is considered very important. But his importance is only in the context of the welfare of the community. This may sound ambiguous, but it is simple. While the commu-nity takes precedence over the individual, it also has the responsibility to guide and protect the welfare of the individual. Because the individual is a product of community and has been brought up within the norms and mores of that community, his interests and those of the community are, generally speaking, almost never in conflict. Therefore the individual sees himself not as a slave of the community, but as part and parcel of the community which he serves and whose peace, good government and progress will eventually be of direct benefit to him. He has a legitimate right to say how he thinks the community should be run. When public issues are thrown open for discus-sion, he is given a hearing if he wants to contribute. In fact, tradition demands that he should "say his mind" in order to be seen as contributing to the wel-fare of the community. It is only after a decision has been taken and given a

ritual binder that the individual's views and opinions become irrelevant. Before then such views and opinions are regarded as very important. And it is the synthesis of such individual views and opinions which form the basis of community decisions.

c. *The Sanctity of Authority – The King :* Every community – big or small, mono-lithic or multi-ethnic – has a leader who is regarded as the King. He is the first citizen of the community and is generally given the honour and prestige befitting his position. He is usually both the temporal and spiritual head of the community and is therefore seen as representing Divine Providence. Among the Yoruba, for example, popular maxim regarding the king call him: the King, the Commander and the Wielder of Authority, next to the Almighty (Okedeji 1970: 205). The king is revered and is expected to be above reproach. Whether he rules supreme or reigns, that is, rules through a cabinet, the community expects of him no less than the ascribed status and bestowed honour on him demands.

d. *Respect for Old Age:* In Africa, old age is honourable, and the old men and women are treated with dignity and respect. They are seen as the repositories of wisdom and knowledge and, therefore, as assets of great value to the com-munity. In addition, it is strongly held that living to a ripe age is evidence of a life of justice, chastity, fair play and high integrity – a life well-spent obser-ving and respecting the norms and mores of society. The aged, therefore, serve as examples for the youth to follow. Where there is evidence to the con-trary, age alone becomes insufficient to elicit respect and recognition. It is expected that nothing but words of wisdom and good counsel should "come out of the lips" of the aged. In order to ensure the constant flow of such words of wisdom, the aged are given a place of honour in the government of the community and their advice, in general, is not easily set aside or ignored. When issues of customary and cultural nature arise, it is the aged that guide the community, leading it to actions that would fall in line with the cherished traditions of the people.

e. *Religion as a Way of Life :* "In the beginning was God; Today is God, To-morrow will be God; Who can make an image of God? He has no body. He is as a word which comes out of your mouth. That word; It is no more, It is past, and still it lives! So is God." (Mbiti 1969: 34). This pygmy hymn, which expresses an unflinching belief in the existence of God, confirms what William Bosman said as early as 1705: "They have a faint idea of the true God, and ascribe to Him the attributes of Almighty and Omni-present; they believe He created the universe and therefore vastly prefer Him before their idol-gods" (Bosman 1705: 348). This belief in God is explicitly expressed in the life of the African. Contrary to the much publicised opinions of Western colonialists and the forebearers of christianity, Africans are deeply religious. When an African wakes up in the morning, he prays; before he eats, he prays; before he drinks, he prays. Religion pervades all his life. "Wherever the African is, there is his religion; he carries it to the fields where he is sowing seeds or harvesting a new crop; he takes it with him to the beer party or to attend a funeral ceremony. . . ." (Mbiti 1969: 2). The so-called idols which he worships

are mere symbols of lesser gods who must intervene between man and the Almighty God. It is out of great reverence for the Almighty God that the African resorts to going through these lesser gods. Because religion permeates all the departments of life, there is no formal distinction between the sacred and the secular; between the religious and the non-religious; between the spiritual and the material areas of life. There is hardly any action taken in traditional Nigeria that has no religious connotation or tinge. In fact, there is no distinction between a secular act and a religious behaviour; the community is both secular and religious at the same time, but the religious part tends to overshadow because the 'rightness or wrongness' of any action is dictated by the accepted mode of behaviour which in turn is based on the religious beliefs of the community. What is a crime in law is a moral vice and a religious sin; what is a duty is a moral obligation and a religious imperative.

The part which religion plays in the life of the individual and of the community is particularly pervasive because the gods through which the people seek the blessings and benevolence of the Almighty God are symbolically very near, and their presence is felt everywhere – in the square, in the market, in the streets, along footpaths and in the home. This proximity greatly helps to ensure that individuals abide by the rules and regulations of religion as well as by the norms and mores of the community which always have religious connotations.

GOVERNMENT

The second factor that has a very strong impact on communication within a community is the kingship system that operates. The type of king that rules a people, the type of kingdom he presides over and the way the people see their king, all have strong impacts on what people talk about and how they talk about them as well as on how free they are to express their opinions. The type of kingship systems that exist in Nigeria can be broadly categorised, even in the face of pockets of differences, within each category. For example, while it is true that Nigeria was made up of kingdoms, the concept of kingship was unknown to the Igbo of the East.

And while it is generally held that rotational[3] kingship obtains in the South-East, one of the most powerful kingdoms in this area – the Opobo kingdom – is hereditary[4]. Furthermore, even though there were a number of large kingdoms which had hegemony over areas made up of different ethnic groups, e.g. the Benin kingdom, ethnic boundaries generally determined the limits of different kingdoms. And within each large kingdom, there generally are levels of kings based on stratified power structure.

For the purposes of this paper, we have divided Nigeria into six socio-political zones: North (that is, the Far North), Middle Belt (that is, Lower North), South-East, East, Mid-West (that is Bendel) and West. Generally, the system of kingship that obtains in each zone and the importance attached to the position of the king by the people have very far-reaching consequences on the nature and flow of communication and the dissemination of information within and between zones.

In the North, where the Hausa language is widely spoken, in spite of hundreds of tribal languages, the kings are known as Emirs. They are regarded as supreme beings selected by God, but crowned by man. Their word is law. They rule with absolute authority but strictly according to the tenets of the Moslem religion which requires each individual to take his position in life as determined by God and to "obey the powerful and/or rich if you are poor; provide for and protect the poor if you are rich and/or powerful." They also rule strictly according to constitutional conventions. "As leader of the faithful, the king was required to uphold and enforce the *shari'a* that is, Koranic Laws; he could not legitimately act against it. His political context also qualified the absolute authority vested in the king, principally because the security of his throne, lineage, and family were all conditional on his observance of the constitutional conventions which governed political competition" (Smith 1960: 107). Although the Emir is bestowed with absolute power by the people, it is in his own interest to reign supreme but to rule with the advice and co-operation of chiefs selected from among the people. Therefore, the Emir and his chiefs are the people's mouths, ears and eyes. Their position in the hierarchy is that which empowers them to decide what is good or bad for the people and for the community. The people are expected to have confidence in their Emir and his chiefs and to accept whatever decisions they take on behalf of the community. Such decisions often have the force of divine injunction which derives from the exalted position of the Emir. This confidence is, of course, predicated on the knowledge that the freedom of action of the Emir and his chiefs is limited, on the one hand, by the Law and, on the other hand, by the structure and context of the government. Thus even within this monocratic administration the king's power was conditional rather than absolute. It is absolute only within demarcated spheres and when exercised within the law and according to the accepted convention. Here, the real power therefore lies not in the rulers, but in the rules and regulations of the community.

In the Middle-Belt, communities are ethnically based, and kingship is rotational. The king is seen as the symbol of the people's unity; he rules at the pleasure of the elders who act as the representatives of the people. Although the king is respected and obeyed, the respect is only on the basis of his position as the symbol of the community and of its spiritual soul. He has no powers except such powers that derive from the authority of the elders. Obedience to the king is, therefore, obedience to the elders who make the decisions announced by the king. But the king has security of tenure; once appointed, it is for life. Deposition is unknown in this part of Nigeria. But in some parts of this area the elders have a right to decide whether or not a king has reigned long enough to die. If the verdict is in the affirmative, then the king must die 'at the pleasure of the elders.' Such decisions, of course, usually arise only when the king has fallen out of favour.

Among the Igbo of the East, kingship as a system of government was, until very recently, unknown and is, in fact, regarded with some amount of suspicion at present. The Igbo, by nature, are republican and regard the concentration of political and religious power in one individual as immoral. "In each separate side of life, whether economic, military, supernatural or legal, there is no concentration of power in any one centre" (Green 1964: 138). The Igbo are very much against authoritarian rule; they demand to be involved in everything that

concerns their welfare. Their regard for authority is conditioned by the willingness of the man in authority to recognize their right to participate. A leader is supported by his followers as long as he does not "govern too much."

The Igbos believe in the equality of the free-born. However, they live in communities evidently more scattered than in any other part of the country and containing less households and therefore less people. "Their most immediately striking characteristic is what has been aptly called their social fragmentation" (Perham 1937: 234). They therefore often have a need for a rallying point. Because of this they do appoint a leader who is seen as a symbol, not necessarily of unity, but of the people's united purpose – someone who provides the necessary rallying point, takes the chair at meetings and announces decisions to the people. He holds office at the pleasure of the people and is expected to render public service to a level that is satisfactory to the people. He can be removed from office by a consensus of the people. While in office, however, he is entitled to the respect and recognition of the community. The Igbo world is one in which leadership must not only be achieved but also be constantly validated to be retained; it is one in which the leader is given minimal power and yet is expected to give maximum service in return.

In the South-East, kingship is an accepted system of government and is enshrined in the people's conventions. The king is appointed by the people formally where the system is hereditary; and democratically, where it is rotational. Once appointed, he becomes both the temporal and spiritual head of the community and rules virtually through an inner circle of people who belong to the community's traditional cult. This cult, in fact, has more hold on the people than the person of the king. In other words, the exalted position of the king derives its power from the existence and authority of the cult. This setup makes it almost impossible for the common people to participate in the government of the community. The only type of participation possible in this setup is *indirect* through consultations between the people and members of the inner circle. The chances of this happening is, however, very remote. But decisions which have the force of the cult behind it gain acceptance without question. The existence of this cult, therefore, is a strong check on people's utterances, behaviours and attitudes to their king and to the community. A cult that has power to enforce its decisions on a community must have the power to punish, directly or indirectly, anyone who disobeys.

The cult system also operates in the Yoruba West, where the kings – Oba – are both temporal and spiritual heads of their respective communities. The system of kingship is rotational within the royal lineages. Here, the king is appointed by the people but is ascribed such honour and prestige that his pre-eminence is not in doubt. He reigns in his capacity as the king of the community but rules through his chiefs who are invariably members of the traditional cult and whose position in the socio-political hierarchy of the kingdom is jealously guarded. In certain communities, "the executive of the societies transacted all the business of the State – the king merely submitting to them the business to be transacted. The king interfered only when there was a deadlock among members" (Okedeji 1970: 205). These chiefs who have the force of the cult behind them are so strong that they can overrule the king. When this happens, the king has to

acquiesce or risk an open conflict with his chiefs – an open conflict which is usually *resolved* by the support of the people one way or the other. In the early past, such conflicts often led to intra-tribal wars. The situation here therefore is this: as long as there is peace and harmony, the people are excluded from the decision making process by the king and his chiefs. When there is conflict, the people's support and opinions become vital. It is during periods like this that people demand and gain some concessions on issues which they were, till then, afraid to discuss openly.

In the Mid-West (Bendel), kings are the representatives of the gods on earth. They are also the symbols of the people's unity and a source of strength for the community. Although they are not regarded as supreme beings, they are not seen as "first among equals," but as the most important persons within their respective communities. In most parts of the area, the system allows for rotation of the office of the king. In others, the system is hereditary. The hereditary kingdoms include one of the most powerful in Nigeria – Benin – which, at one point in history, ruled over the whole of Mid-West, some parts of the East and a good part of the West.

The King in the Mid-West rules through his chiefs as well as through Village Heads, the leaders of the traditional work-force strata,[5] of the Professions,[6] of the womenfolk,[7] Patriarchs and Elders. Not only are the different strata and levels of the community represented in the governing body of the community, they are also given full opportunity to participate in the decision making process. The king is highly exalted and is allowed to make some decisions personally on certain issues that affect the community. When such decisions are made, the people are *just told* what has been decided upon. Usually, however, people are involved in discussing issues that affect the community in general before decisions are taken. When an issue arises, the king and his chiefs discuss it first; then a messenger – the gong man – is sent "to tell the people what is being discussed" so that they too can make contributions through traditional channels.

It is in the Igbo-speaking area of Mid-West that old age is most venerated in Nigeria. At a certain age, (usually above sixty) men and women assume an unofficial and honorary title which signifies that they have reached the age of wisdom and wise counsel and therefore are qualified to be members of the Oba's "inner circle of wise-counselling." This value-laden and psychological title is *Okei-Oba* (for men) and *Okporo-Oba* (for women). This honorary title. . . demands proven integrity, impartiality, honesty, dedication to the cause of justice and fairplay, and very high moral probity. It carries with it honour and respect.

POLITICAL STRUCTURE

The political structure of any community affects the communication behaviour of the individuals within that community. This is the third factor that has a strong bearing on communication in traditional Nigeria. The basic political unit in the traditional/rural areas is the town which has the king as its head. It is also known as the political community, usually self-sufficient and independent of other communities. Within the town are villages, each with its own

Head, owing allegiance to the king. The number of villages in a town varies according to the size of the town, but usually it is not less than three and could be as many as ten.

The Village Head is responsible for whatever is done or not done in the village and is answerable to the king and the community. In order to be able to govern well, he depends heavily on the help, advice and co-operation of the Heads of the different quarters that make up the village. These heads are known as Patriarchs. They function in much the same way as the village-heads but on a lower level and they are responsible for a much smaller geographical area and less number of people. However, their responsibility is no less important. And in order to justify the confidence reposed in them, they do not take lightly their responsibilities. Their jobs are made lighter by the help they receive from the heads of the different compounds that make up the quarters. These compound-heads are known as Elders. Although the elder is not held politically responsible for what happens or does not happen within the compound, he feels normally bound to ensure peace and harmony among the different families that make up the compound. He sees himself as the father of all, and so assumes the fatherly responsibility of ensuring justice and fairplay for all.
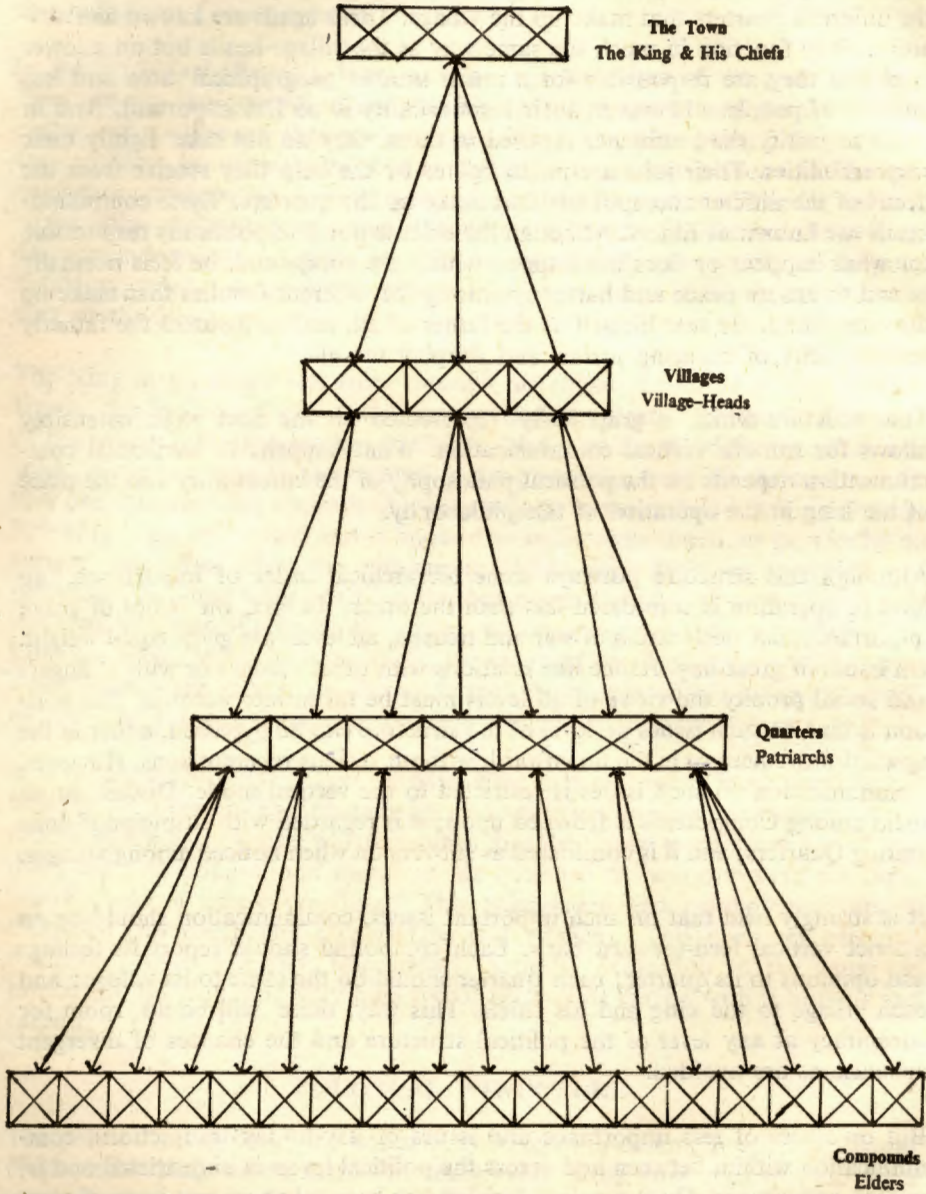
This structure which is graphically represented on the next page, ostensibly allows for smooth vertical communication. What happens to horizontal communication depends on the political philosophy of the community and the place of the king in the operation of this philosophy.

Although this structure portrays some hierarchical order of importance, no level in operation is considered less than the other. In fact, on issues of grave importance, like declaration of war and treason, all levels are given equal weight. On issues of great importance like relations with other villages or with strangers and social probity the views of all levels must be taken into account. The position is that on such issues no level of the structure can be bypassed, either in the upward movement or in the downward, without serious repercussions. However, communication on such issues is restricted to the vertical mode. Discussion on them among Compounds is frowned upon; it is regarded with suspicion if done among Quarters; and it is considered as subversion when noticed among villages.

It is strongly held that on such important issues, communication should be on a strict vertical feed-forward basis. Each compound should report its feelings and opinions to its quarter; each quarter should do the same to its village; and each village to the king and his chiefs. This way, there will be no room for conspiracy at any level of the political structure and the chances of divergent conclusions are avoided.

But on issues of less importance and issues of day-to-day transactions, communication within, between and across the political levels is unrestricted and is, in fact, encouraged. Once a policy decision has been taken on any issue of community importance, horizontal communication between individuals from different villages, quarters and compounds is culturally demanded in order to fully disseminate the information and to ensure acceptance and compliance.

The Structure of the Political System

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The important attention given to vertical feed-forward communication is usually completely ignored when it becomes necessary to inform the public at large of decisions arrived at by the king and his chiefs, or to disseminate information about an emergency, or to call the people to community manual labour. Such information is disseminated across levels to everyone in the community usually by the king's gong-man, on behalf of the king and his chiefs. But it should be remembered that before such decisions are made discussions on their implications must have been held (except in the case of emergencies) at each level of the political structure and suggestions and recommendations passed from level to level. Issues of a special nature like commodities and prices, classification of sicknesses, treatment of the sick, etc., are first discussed by leaders of the professions concerned before suggestions and recommendations are sent to the king and his chiefs for decision.

While it is true, in theory, that the highest level of the political structure is not bound to accept the suggestions and recommendations from below, in practice, such suggestions and recommendations are hardly ever rejected outright. This is because they represent the wishes of the people who constitute the community that is recognised by all as supreme. In addition, they are recommendations made by the elders of the community who, usually, take both the spiritual and social implications of the issues under consideration into account before making recommendations.

CONCLUSION

Although the political structure described above obtains throughout Nigeria, its operation differs from zone to zone. In some zones the differences are very slight; in others, they are significant. Such differences can be attributed mainly to differences in the kingship system. What has been described here is very true of the Mid-West zone.

In the East, the structure holds in all but two respects. The first is that the king or leader is not allowed the right to make personal decisions that would be binding on all. The Igbo are very much against authoritarian rule; they demand to be involved in everything that concerns their welfare. They abhor handed-down orders. The first taste of this abhorrence was made manifest to Europeans at Aba in 1929 when Igbo women were instigated by their husbands to riot against taxation and the imposition of warrant chiefs by Britain. Beneath the overt grievances, of course, lay a deep "unconscious, cultural protest" (Perham, 1937: 218) – a protest against non-involvement in discussions and decisions on issues that affect their lives. The second difference found in the Eastern zone is an extension of the first. The strong aversion in the Mid-West to horizontal communication between compounds, between quarters and between villages, on political and sensitive issues, does not obtain. Government at the village level in the East is an exercise in direct democracy. It involves all the lineages and requires the political participation of all male adults; people are free to discuss with whomever they want: between compounds, between quarters and between villages. "The village is autonomous in its affairs and accepts no interference or dictation from the town or any other village" (Uchendu, 1966: 41).

In the West, the degree of political involvement in decision making decreases as one moves from the top hierarchy to the bottom. This is because it is held that the king and his chiefs know what the people need and know as good for the community. Even military chiefs were excluded from the Council of State in some areas of the West. "The exclusion of military chiefs in Ijebu made them support openly rebellious youths whenever they protested against monarchical tyranny or oppression" (Okedeji, 1970: 13). Furthermore, diversity of opinions is seen in the West as detrimental to quick decisions and consensus. Therefore, people are brought into the decision making process only when it is absolutely necessary.

In the Northern zone where the king is seen as a supreme being who rules with divine authority, the same political structure obtains but operates in favour of concentrated power at the topmost level. The structure is used mostly for disseminating information from the top. While village heads exercised administrative and executive powers, legislative powers are the exclusive preserve of the king and his palace chiefs. The rationale behind this operation is this: predominantly Moslem North holds the view that rulers are chosen by God on the basis of providential knowledge that those chosen are capable of ruling with justice and fair play. Therefore, they should be given a free hand to rule. The rulers also take seriously their responsibilities and are expected to make efforts to rule with the fear of, and respect for, God, showing honesty, integrity, sympathy and fairness.

Implications for Mass Media :

The philosophical base that underlies communication in traditional Nigeria as well as the kingship systems and the political structure cannot but have far-reaching implications for modern media of mass communication. The same is true of the way the political structure is allowed to operate. The identification of these implications will require a very careful and full-scale study of the way the new media were introduced, by whom and in what context, and the way they are used today in the rural areas of the country.

Any form of communication operates within the parameters of social, cultural, economic and political considerations. Research into the communication aspect of the society is essential in order to bring into focus those factors that advance or inhibit popular understanding, acceptance and involvement in societal developmental activities, and societal change in general. If the mass media are not responsible for the occurrence of mass phenomena but simply affect the manner in which interests and attention are mobilised (McQuail, 1969: 11) then it becomes important to investigate what enhances or inhibits this effect and also to ascertain how the effect occurs.

In *The Passing of Traditional Society*, Daniel Lerner explained the facilitative role of the mass media in accelerating the pace of national development. By linking the cities to the countryside, the centres of power to their periphery, the "media spread psychic mobility" (Lerner, 1958: 55). Media encourage people to "imagine themselves as strange persons in strange situations, places and times" (Lerner, 1958: 52). The inference is that exposure to the media means

exposure to information about different life-styles, modes of behaviour and unknown material goods. One would like to know whether in spite of the socio-cultural environments, this exposure had a hypodermic effect on traditional Nigerians: and whether it now has the same effect on rural Nigerians. If not, why? If it did, in what direction?

All this, is beyond the scope of this paper which is only a first step in the total effort required to identify and document the effect of foreign culture, particularly the mass media, on traditional Nigeria. This first step is important in that it has helped us to realize that communication in traditional/rural Nigeria has an underlying basis; has a political pattern to follow; and is guided by rules and regulations that have strong roots in the norms and mores of the society.
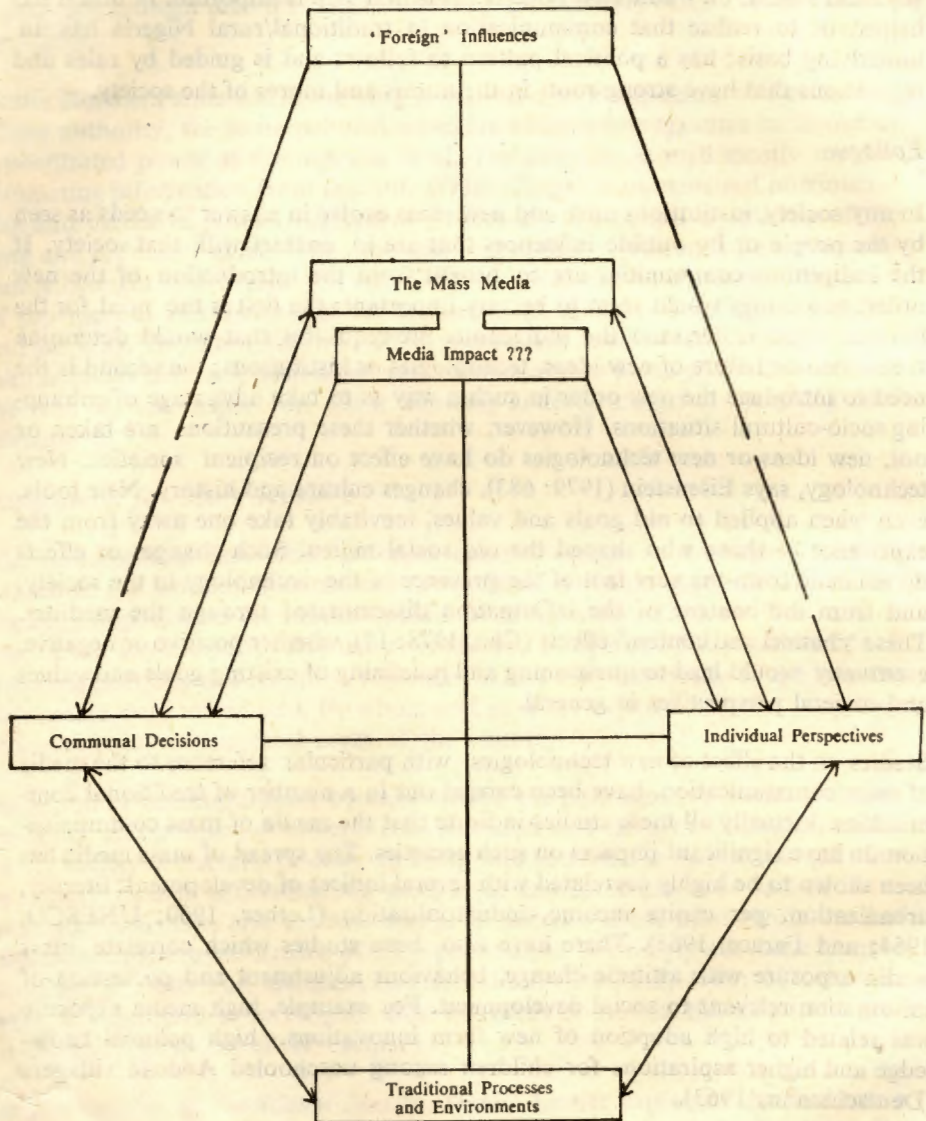
Epilogue

In any society, institutions arise and new ideas evolve in answer to needs as seen by the people or by outside influences that are in contact with that society. If the indigenous communities are to benefit from the introduction of the new order, two things would seem to be very important: the first is the need for the innovators to understand the indigenous pre-requisites that would determine the success or failure of new ideas, technologies or institutions; the second is the need to introduce the new order in such a way as to take advantage of enhancing socio-cultural situations. However, whether these precautions are taken or not, new ideas or new technologies do have effect on recipient societies. New technology, says Eisenstein (1979: 683), changes culture and history. New tools, even when applied to old goals and values, inevitably take one away from the experience of those who shaped the old social milieu. Such changes or effects do emanate from the very fact of the presence of the technology in the society, and from the content of the information disseminated through the medium. These 'channel and content' effects (Chu, 1978: 17), whether positive or negative, eventually would lead to questioning and redefining of existing goals and values and societal perspectives in general.

Studies on the effect of new technologies, with particular reference to the media of mass communication, have been carried out in a number of traditional communities. Virtually all these studies indicate that the media of mass communication do have significant impacts on such societies. The spread of mass media has been shown to be highly correlated with several indices of development: literacy, urbanization, per capita income, industrialization (Lerner, 1960; UNESCO, 1964; and Farace, 1965). There have also been studies which correlate mass media exposure with attitude change, behaviour adjustment and possession of information relevant to social development. For example, high media exposure was related to high adoption of new farm innovations, high political knowledge and higher aspirations for children among unschooled Andean villagers (Deutschmann, 1963).

On the other hand, mass media effect has not always been positive. On issues concerning societal cohesion and cultural stability, mass media have been known to have played, sometimes unintentionally, a rather disintegrating role. For example, McQuail (1969: 29) points out that in Blumer's analysis of mass

A graphic expression of the Research Question :

What impact did the Media of Mass Communication have
on Traditional Nigeria, and now have on Rural Nigeria ?

'Foreign' Influences

The Mass Media

Media Impact ???

Communal Decisions

Individual Perspectives

Traditional Processes
and Environments

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