

The Information Value of Traditional Tiv Music and Dance in the Age of Modern Communication Technologies

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Abstract: This study focuses on the information value of traditional Tiv music and dance in the age of modern communication technologies. The question that guides the analysis is whether traditional Tiv music and dance still provide valuable information at a time which the modern means of communication are credited for providing rapid, spontaneous and swift information on virtually all issues affecting human society directly or indirectly. The analysis argues in support of the idea that traditional Tiv music and dance provide information (though not as rapid, swift and spontaneous as modern means of communication) which contributes to the socio-economic and political development in Tiv society. This information takes the form of education and mobilization of the people. The information is relevant to the people because of the popularity of traditional music and dance among the people. Similarly, the problems of low credibility and information and technological gaps associated with modern means of communication give an added advantage to acceptability and popularity of traditional Tiv music and dance in Tiv society. Traditional Tiv musicians and dancers seize the opportunity of the acceptability and popularity of the music and dance to send across to the people information on social, economic and political affairs that directly and indirectly affect their lives.

Key words: Information, music, dance, issues, political development, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Music and dance are aesthetic art which are valued and appreciated in every society. Historically, music and dance are as old as man himself. This is because as noted by Sachs (1969) what seems to be man's oldest form of musical instrument is his voice which is natural to him. True, in his primitive attempt to make music, man used his voice to sing and later progressed by beating his body, clapping his hands, striking sticks and stones and finally started making primitive instruments like the drum and flute, etc.

Music and dance, largely serving entertainment function also inform, mobilize, educate and bring about correlation of parts of society. By these functions, music and dance bring about social change (Akpabot, 1986). This was the case in the Caribbean, in the era of national struggle when music i.e., reggae was an integral element of Rastafarianism the rallying point in their popular struggle against imperialism (Gbefwi, 1997). Fela's music has also been acknowledged as a strong force in social change. Fela used his music to fight cultural imperialism (in the songs *Yellow Fever*, *Sakara* and *Lady*), corruption (in the album *International Thief*) and state repression and militarism (in the songs *Zombie*, *Unknown Soldier*,

Vagabonds in Power, *Coffin for Head of State*, *Army Arrangement*, *Who Kill Dele*, *na Baba* and *Alagbon Close*) (Ayu, 1986). Tiv traditional music and dance serve similar functions in Tiv society. Traditional music and dance occupy a very important place in Tiv society. As communication devices, traditional Tiv music and dance have done a great deal in the preservation and transmission of Tiv history, culture and folklore. They are extensively used in religious, social, political and economic life. Thus, they contribute immensely to the well being of the Tiv people and bring about development in the Tiv society.

The emergence of modern communication technologies like radio, television, newspapers, magazines and the internet has guaranteed greater speed, greater reach, clearer vision, quality output and better reception of information. In other words, modern communication technologies have brought about effective management of information for development ends. This is arguably not the case with traditional Tiv music and dance as forms of traditional communication.

The questions that arise are: What is the information value of traditional Tiv music and dance in the era of modern communication technologies? Are they not repeating what the people have already heard from the

modern mass media? Do the people still rely on them (traditional Tiv music and dance) for their information needs? This study attempts to answer these questions in a bid to ascertain whether or not traditional Tiv music and dance still provide valuable information for the sustenance of the Tiv society in this age of advancement in modern communication technologies.

INFORMATION NEEDS IN TIV SOCIETY

The Tiv people of Central Nigeria occupy a landmass that extends from the foothills of the Cameroun mountains and of the Sonkwala hills in the South, down the undulating plains to the north of the river Benue. The Tiv people occupy 14 out of the 23 local government areas in Benue state. They are also found in large numbers in Nassarawa, Taraba, Plateau and to some extent in Cross River States. The 1991 population census (the last that included ethnicity measure) has it that the Tiv people ranked as one of the largest single ethnic groups in Nigeria with a population of over 4 million. Close to two decades after the census, this population certainly has increased. The Tiv people speak the Tiv language which is understood by all Tiv people and serves as a symbol of unity and strength to them (Bur, 1993).

To understand the information needs of the Tiv people, it is pertinent to note the economic, political and social adventure and challenges of the Tiv people. From the economic point of view, the Tiv people largely live in rural areas and predominantly engage in farming, hunting, fishing, livestock rearing and domestic industries such as weaving, smiting and carving (Makar, 1994). Information that would facilitate success at the above economic ventures is desirable.

From the socio-political challenges, the Tiv society needs the kind of information that would assist it regain a favourable image. The Tiv people are often misconceived and stereotyped in the negative sense. It is not uncommon to hear people especially their neighbours refer to Tiv people as perpetual rebels who frequently act in contemptuous and disloyal ways toward duly constituted authority. Others as observed by Ahire (1993), allege that the Tiv people are overly warlike, aggressive and domineering in their interpersonal and inter-group contacts. Yet others identify the Tiv people with excessive sexual prowess, sexual promiscuity, tolerance of adultery and sexual laxity. Information that would clarify the myths and misconceptions about the Tiv people is most desirable.

Predominantly rural, >75% of the people living in the rural areas the Tiv society is in a situation of neglect. Poor and un-motorable roads, inadequate or non-existent

potable water supply, poorly equipped and poorly staffed schools, low commercial activities and subsistent agriculture characterize it. In the light of these problems, the Tiv society needs the kind of information that would assist it to accumulate, mobilize and integrate human, material, knowledge and other resources in an interdisciplinary, planned and systemized manner for the achievement of better life for the people and eventual development of the area.

In recent times, one social problem that has come to afflict the Tiv society as is the case in many other African societies is the HIV/AIDS scourge. Without exaggeration, it must be observed there is no extended family in Tiv land that has not had a victim of HIV/AIDS. The point is that the prevalence of HIV/AIDS in Tiv land is high (Ladipo *et al.*, 2001; Benue State, 2003; Imobo-Tswam, 2006). Correct and adequate information that could effectively educate the people on ways of preventing the HIV/AIDS catastrophe is not just desirable but a necessity.

TRADITIONAL TIV MUSIC AND DANCE

Music and dance in Tiv society are inseparable. The two go together. This is because a Tiv man or woman traditionally responds to a good music by dancing to the tune of the music. If he does not dance to the tune of the music then the music is not a good one.

Music and dance permeate all aspects of Tiv life. No activity or event in Tiv society goes without music and dance. Basically, music and dance in Tiv society serve the entertainment function but beyond that they also serve information, education, socialization, mobilization and social cohesion functions. More aptly, Hagher (1987) has noted the functions of music and dance in Tiv society in the following words:

Music and dance do not only serve the purpose of social interaction as well as a school for intellectual stimulation, they also control normative behaviour. Sometimes, they serve as a medium for social protest and even sanction deviant behaviour

The Tiv people as observed by Gbilekaa (1993), use music and dance to express various emotions. There are music and dances for funeral occasions, marriage ceremonies, installations, ritual processes and the different festivals in Tiv society. Other music and dances are to record historical events. It is also common in Tiv society to find religious and political messages communicated in music and dance. Beginning from the 1950's up to the present political dispensation, politicians

in Tivland have had to make use of music and dance to canvass for support. Gbilekaa (1993) has noted the role of music and dance in the electoral process of the second republic in the following words:

In the late seventies and early eighties ... the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) and Nigerian People's Party (NPP) used music and dance to canvass for votes. In fact it is on record that when the former Vice President, Chief Alex Ekwueme came to Kastina-Ala town in Tivland to campaign, no speech was made as much. Members of his party simply indulged in dancing the then famous NPN DISCO '83 version. Of course, the NPP also had its own version of the DISCO '83 which parodied the NPN one

Churches in Tivland also extensively communicate religious messages through music and dance. The catholics and the dominant protestant group in Tivland-NKST-use music to propagate the gospel. The youth group in the Catholic church beginning from the 1980s, came out with an innovation whereby Biblical incidents are acted in the form of dance drama while songs and music about the incidents are rendered. The NKST has a similar innovation called Makaranta U lyange I Memen (MIM), meaning Sunday school. By so doing, the gospel message registers firmly and correctly in the minds of the audience.

The foregoing emphasizes the importance of music and dance as integral aspects of Tiv life. No wonder, several dances can be found in each clan in Tivland. Generally, dances such as Hinga (Squirrel), Ingyough, Ijov-mbakur (Mammy-Water), Swange, Kpingi, Takeru, Girinya, Ange, Dasenda and Kwagh-Hir, etc. are common among the Tiv. In addition, numerous Tiv oral poetry (Tiv folk songs) which disseminate vital information about political, social and economic activities within and outside Tivland, abound.

THE AGE OF MODERN COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES

Modern communication technologies are instruments through which messages are sent to large numbers of people in modern societies (Macmillan Publishers Limited, 1992). The modern communication technologies as noted by Kur and Melladu (2007) are inventions or discoveries that are tailored towards improving the dissemination of messages to large number of people. Modern communication technologies embrace all the new information and communication technologies that are connected to the mass media in one way or the other. Some of them are the Internet, communication satellite,

cable system, computers, mobile telecommunications, digital television and radio, microwave, videotext and teletext.

The idea of modern communication technologies lies in the combination of telecommunication and computer technologies in relaying, retrieving and storing information. It is the marriage of computer and telecommunication technologies (Gandy, 1989). This being the case, it is logical to trace the age of modern communication technologies to 1832 when Samuel Morse, an American artist, invented the telegraph (Morris, 1969). Many other inventions in telecommunication and computer technologies followed, the climax being those of digital technology which have brought about the notion of information superhighway.

The age of modern communication technologies has ushered in specialized and sophisticated mass media of communication. With them, researchers cannot just think of newspapers, magazines, television, radio or film. Researchers now talk of electronic newspapers and magazines, cable television, digital television and radio. Notable features of communication technologies of the modern age are greater speed, greater reach, clearer sound and vision, better reception and capacities for two way flow of information.

A nomenclature of the age of modern communication technologies is the information society which is an idea predicated on the diversity of information needs and dependencies on certain information and communication networks for the satisfaction of these needs (Udoakah, 1996). William Melody, cited in Udoakah (1996) defines information societies as those societies that have become dependent upon complex electronic information and communication networks and which allocate a major portion of their resources to information and communication activities. What this definition suggests is that in an information society, institutions and people increasingly depend on a variety of rapid, clear, swift, pervasive and useful kinds of information and communication to enable them function effectively in their economic, political, social and cultural activities.

The foregoing emphasizes the point that the age of modern communication technologies is one in which information and communication are consciously made to assume a prominent role in facilitating development. The questions arising therefore are: To what extent do traditional Tiv music and dance in the age of modern communication technologies provide information which serves development needs in Tiv society and beyond? Otherwise put what is the information value of traditional Tiv music and dance in the age of modern communication technologies? What role do traditional Tiv music and

dance play in the developmental efforts of the Tiv society? How do they promote the individual right to know? What information flows from traditional Tiv music and dance to the Tiv people predominantly living in the rural areas and how frequent? If music and dance are central to the life of Tiv people to what extent do they (traditional Tiv music and dance) discharge those functions better than the modern means of communication like radio, television, newspapers and mobile telephones, etc.? The next section of this study attempts to answer these questions.

INFORMATION VALUE OF TRADITIONAL TIV MUSIC AND DANCE IN THE AGE OF MODERN COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES

The notion of information value is predicated on the premise that information has to contribute to the development needs of the people. If it does not then it is of no value to the society. This is the main emphasis of development media theory. Advancing reasons for the effective management of an information system in participatory development situations, Mboho (2003), drawing from the research of Gow and Vansant, notes that relevant and timely information is crucial for the success of any community development programme. The need for an information system should not only be to provide information to the population, it should also determine what the information needs of the people are. Certainly, traditional Tiv music and dance as elements of oral tradition cannot perform better than the modern media when it comes to rapid and swift spread of information. As noted by Udoakah (1996), to be able to supply information which could improve the business and social life of the people requires ability to select and process complex, technical and political information into easy-to-understand messages and disseminate them to the people at reasonable frequency, knowing that people need a variety of information daily. Traditional Tiv music and dance arguably cannot do this better than the modern mass media.

On the other hand, traditional Tiv music and dance have information value when viewed from their long term effect on their audiences vis-a-vis the short-comings or weaknesses of modern communication technologies on the developing countries. The message composition of Tiv traditional music and dance take time during which the artists carefully and creatively compose and package persuasive information using a variety of persuasive devices. Some of the devices include figures of speech such as apostrophe, imagery, parallelism, idiophones,

hyperbole, metaphor, simile, personification, pun, repetition and rhetorical questions among others. Sound devices including alliteration, assonance, consonance and onomatopoeia are also employed in traditional Tiv music and dance. These devices are esthetically encoded in the message composition and creatively delivered (sung) in a manner to persuade even the most obstinate audience. In this way, the music and dance more often come to the audience in the form of story telling. Anim (2004) has noted that once the news takes on the story telling format, it is bound to grab the audience, compel them to sit down and consume the news to the end. Bird and Dardenne, cited in Berkowitz (1997) have also asserted that people respond to and process accurately information presented in story form. For this reason, they observe that much of the information in newspapers and broadcast news is difficult to process and may actually be perceived as incomprehensible. Thus, information presented in traditional Tiv music and dance is easy to grab and comprehend.

An attempt at qualitative analysis of the content of some traditional Tiv songs will bring out the information value of traditional Tiv music and dance clearer. Ker has analyzed the songs of a leading traditional Tiv folk singer, Tarker Golozo. Ker has in the analysis, identified the communicative and information value of the songs to the Tiv society in particular and the country at large.

In his songs as noted by Ker, Golozo employs a unique poetic language and diction aimed at creating a populism designed for educating and mobilizing the masses: raising (food) productivity or informing his audience about political and other events that are going on within the society. Sometimes, Golozo's songs are meant to be in solidarity with freedom movements. Since Golozo composes and sings in Tiv language, 99% of his audiences are those who understand Tiv language. As rightly noted by Ker wherever Tiv people are found in Nigeria, the chances are that 70% of Tiv songs whether on audiocassette or otherwise are the songs of Golozo. Various dance and musical groups including those that perform in hotels and at alcohol drinking spots use Golozo's songs in their respective performances. What really endears people to Golozo's songs is the strong information quality therein the songs. His songs cover social conditions, education, politics and even war. Golozo's good voice, retentive memory and ability to create a song on short notice and his histrionics are other cherished qualities of his songs. Because of the information value of Golozo's songs they can be found on audio cassette in almost every home in Tivland. Radio Benue Makurdi, FRCN Enugu, NTA Makurdi and other

neighbouring broadcast stations that broadcast in Tiv language also use them frequently. Golozo as a person has performed on live radio and television programmes in different parts of the country. The profile of Golozo and his songs is contrary to the argument presented by Professor Abasiokong, cited in Udoakah (1996) that the education standard of the town crier is low; he may be knowledgeable in the affairs of his community but not abreast of events beyond that and that he cannot be depended on for economic, commercial or serious political news. Golozo as a town crier or better put a village announcer is highly knowledgeable on social, political and economic affairs, locally and internationally. This is clearly seen in his songs which sometimes bring to his audience first-hand information on socio-economic cum political matters. Examples of his songs and their information value are the next focus of this analysis. When the Nigeria civil war started in 1967, Golozo composed a song which encouraged the Nigerian soldiers to destroy Ojukwu's land as a way of restoring unity and peace in Nigeria. The English translation of the song goes thus:

Nigeria has been shaken too much
Nor Ihongo tell the North to prepare
Nor Ihongo invite the North
Let them go and destroy Ojukwu's land
for us to have Peace (twice)

Nor Ihongo was a brave soldier fighting on the side of the Federal government and was highly admired by Golozo. So Golozo had to call on him to inform the North to destroy Ojukwu's land.

During the 1973 population census, Golozo sang with the aim of mobilizing his audience to participate actively in the exercise:

A whirlwind normally starts with igbe
Ignorance is darkness
In the year '63
We had a census
But some people did not know
Some with five children would list only one
Another with ten would list only one
The population was reducing but they didn't know
The time has come again get ready
It will start on November 25th till December
Even if you have visitor
Don't hide him away

In yet another song about the census, Golozo called on his people of Benue-Plateau state to be mobilized so as to produce accurate head count for the state:

My people I now turn to you
If a boy enters your place
And enquire information from you don't refuse
He is looking for human population

To the enumerators, Golozo also used his songs to advise them especially those assigned to work in Tivland:

You people enumerating
When you enter into someone's compound
Don't get angry
We that eat pepper
When you ask information by force we don't
tell you

The success of the head count in Tivland was largely attributable to the mobilization activities through traditional folk songs, music and dance of which Golozo's songs were a strong factor.

When the Murtala/Obasanjo military regime launched the Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) programme, Tiv oral poets such as Tondo Kumbur, Agugu Igbakumbur and Iyoughul Ute were engaged by the government to teach the Tiv people through their songs (dance and music), the proper use and application of fertilizer on their farms for high productivity. It was Tarker Golozo again who stood out. He composed songs which drew examples from the number of prominent Tiv people who became rich through agriculture. In one of his song entitled: Agorokoca Doo (Agriculture is good), Golozo lamented that when he returned from abroad (he was among the Federal Government propaganda delegation to Algeria, England and USA in 1969 during the civil war) and started telling people about the importance of fertilizer, some people were laughing at his foolishness. However, clever and apparently enlightened farmers such as Ityover Ninga Biam and Nyamkyume Amenga listened to him and eventually got good yields from the application of fertilizer. Golozo listed other people who left other jobs, took to agriculture and were better off. Captains Uke and Samuel Apuur left the Nigeria Army and went into farming. Asema Yuwa, on graduation from the university did not seek white-collar job but took to farming. Mr. Iorshe Orngudwen, on retirement as the Chairman of Gboko Local Government Council in the 1970s, went into farming. Traditional rulers like Awuhe Pever, Chief Atim Zungwe and Amasetimin Bai Adoga were also successful farmers through the use of fertilizer. Golozo himself explains that even though a singer, he is a farmer and that he has achieved a lot through his effort in farming:

Even though I sing
I also farm
I bought a motorcycle
And gave it to my brother
But it was from my farm
I bought the one I am riding now
After selling soya beans
And some rice
That's why I am riding

One area Golozo's songs have been of immense information value is in political mobilization. When the Babangida regime lifted ban on political activities, Golozo used his songs to advise the politicians on how to play the game. The electorate he advised in this song as follows:

My people, election is coming
Don't put money first
Elect people of good qualities
If one does not have naira but is good
My people elect such a person

The people of Benue state must have heeded to Golozo's advice when in 1991 they ignored all moneybag candidates and elected Rev. Fr. Moses Adasu, a non-moneybag candidate as the Governor of the state (Adasu, 1995). To the elected politicians, Golozo also advised them in this satirical song:

You deceitful people (politicians)
Your day has risen again
To deceive your kinsmen
To keep on repeating that
If you give me (your votes)
I would do as my kinsmen wish
But once elected
Such a person goes repairing
His father's compound
No one thinks of repairing bad roads

On the whole, Golozo's songs and those of money other folk singers in Tivland have been acknowledged as a potent tool of information, education, mobilization and entertainment. They provide valuable information on socio-economic and political issues that directly or indirectly affect the lives of Tiv people and beyond.

Even though the modern forms of communication disseminate similar information more rapidly, more accurately, more spontaneous and more pervasive in Tiv society, the information from traditional Tiv music and dance penetrate the audience deeper and more convincing, thereby arousing in them the desire to act

according to the demands of the information. This is because the Tiv people view traditional music and dance with high credibility.

The modern forms of communication, on the other hand are viewed with suspicion in Tivland. They are seen as government propaganda devices to further perpetuate hardship and suffering on the people. Similarly, the problems of technological and information gaps associated with the modern forms of communication limit the effectiveness of their messages in Tiv society. These problems warrant the adoption of the two-step-flow communication theory in the diffusion of messages emanating from the modern forms of communication. Traditional Tiv musicians and dancers are usually ready opinion leaders in the diffusion of mass mediated messages. These limitations of the modern systems of communication as used in African societies give popularity and acceptability to traditional music and dance in Tiv society.

CONCLUSION

This study has attempted to point out the information value inherent in traditional Tiv music and dance in the age of modern communication technologies. Information, the article identifies is of value when it contributes to development efforts in the society. Traditional Tiv music and dance contribute to the socio-economic and political development of the Tiv society. They do this through the provision of information, education and entertainment on issues that directly or indirectly affect the Tiv society as well as mobilize the people to participate in worthwhile ventures.

Even though information emanating from traditional Tiv music and dance may not be timely, rapid and get to very many people at the same time as compared with that from the modern means of communication, it still produces the desired effect. This explains why different governments have often relied heavily on traditional Tiv music and dance to bring about awareness of their programmes and policies in Tivland.

The problems of low credibility, information and technological gaps associated with the modern means of communication give an added advantage to the popularity and wide acceptability (and by implication effectiveness) of traditional Tiv music and dance in Tivland.

The inescapable conclusion therefore is that traditional Tiv music and dance provide information that is of utilitarian value to the Tiv society. This information which is often disseminated in a two way flow, serves not only the functional role in supporting effective management of the Tiv society but also a process role in

facilitating public participation in programme decisions and actions about development activities. This information supplied by traditional Tiv music and dance thus meets the needs of the Tiv society.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendation therefore is to safeguard and promote the rich cultural heritage of traditional Tiv music and dance. A way of doing this is the re-introduction of Tiv music and dance in school curriculum at all levels of education.

The family system and other stakeholders in child development should embark on vigorous education and enlightenment of Tiv children born in and out of Tivland on the need to embrace Tiv traditional value system including traditional Tiv music and dance. The children should be educated on the need not to allow the modern mass media distract them from accepting the values inherent in traditional Tiv dance and music.

The Tiv Traditional Council in conjunction with the Mzough U Tiv (the umbrella organization of all Tiv people) should embark on a massive campaign aimed at re-awakening in all Tiv people especially the young, a consciousness of the aesthetic value of Tiv traditional cultural practices including music and dance.

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