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The Role of Indigenous Communication Systems for Rural Development in the Tolon District of Ghana

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the role of Indigenous Communication Systems (ICSs) in the Tolon District of Ghana, and how they are used as sites for cultural constructions, and platforms for propagating information for rural development.The study adopts social constructivism epistemological worldview and qualitative content analysis to interpret participants' perspectives on the role of ICSs as sites for cultural constructions and propagating information for rural development in the Tolon District of Ghana. The study revealed that ICSs such as storytelling, drumming, the town crier, provide an avenue for the indigenous people to disseminate important information to rural communities in a language the local people are familiar with, understand, and as well inculcate good ethical and moral values to the up-coming generation. Considering this, the study recommends that ICSs should be refined and maintained to promote indigenous knowledge communication. Finally, the study uncovered that indigenous people hybridized or synchronized indigenous communication systems with new media technologies to enhance information dissemination in the rural communities. Therefore, the study suggests that rural communities could integrate both western communication technologies and traditional media forms to promote participatory media content creation and effective information dissemination in the rural communities for effective development.

Introduction

Communication is as old as humans, and it can be significant to the development of human societies only when it is effective. Conversely, ineffective communication impacts on development in a way that is negative and counterproductive to the efforts towards people's well-being. This implies that until a mutual understanding is realized in the exchange of information between the encoder and decoder, communication cannot be said to have taken place (Abdulai et al., 2017). Truly, effective communication hinges on the choice of medium and context. The notion that communication is at the core of humanity partly suggests that it defines and shapes human life and the world since human beings reckon on their communicative acumen to showcase their culture, critical thinking abilities, and creative problem solving skills in reaction to environmental challenges to their wellness.

The recent trajectory in communication research is overwhelmed by studies exploring the impacts of contemporary media on society, while others are making comparisons of new media forms to that of traditional media forms of communication (Ramsey & Moss, 2009). Perhaps, it is this thinking that has influenced the preference of modern technology-oriented mass media forms of communication such as print, electronic, internet assisted forms over the traditional media such as oral traditions, folk plays music and dance, storytelling and among other models of indigenous forms of communication. In recent times, this top-down approach to communication is found to be wanting and deficient in rural communities, especially for developmental purposes (Negussie et al., 2010; Nair & White, 1994). According to Essein (2014), the mass media is acknowledged by the rural folks to be glamorous and impersonal which is untrustworthy vis-à-vis ICSs which they are familiar with, and appeal to their sense of vision, hearing, touch, and connect well with their emotions. Said differently, ICSs are near the hearts and minds of rural dwellers because they are at home with its format, content and the inherent colloquial languages (Negussie et al., 2010; Kumar, 2006). Instructively, ICSs remain relevant for the rural folks for disseminating

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information for effecting change, and engendering development in rural communities (Oyesomi et al., 2017; Stichele, 2000).

In trying to investigate the prospects of ICSs as effective channels of communication in the rural communities, scholars (such as Finnegan, 1970; Ansu-Kyeremeh, 1997; Malik, 1982; Ugboajah, 1985; Tham-Agyekum & Loggoh, 2011) noted that ICSs are certainly very important when conveying relevant information or indigenous knowledge in rural settings. In addition, they are largely passed through generations, and through the social structures and processes (Manyozo, 2018). Despite the importance of ICSs for development in rural communities, there is lack of interests and enthusiasm by both African and Western researchers in conducting research that borders on indigenous media and modes of communication. Besides, most studies of communication in the African contexts have focused on the top-down approach or the centrifugal system of disseminating information to rural communities at the expense of the bottom-up approach or centripetal approach to disseminating information to rural communities (Negussie et al., 2010; Ansu-Kyeremeh, 1997). Against this backdrop, little effort has been made to develop ICSs to enhance rural development. For instance, in the case of Ghana, the few studies that have been conducted on ICSs have focused on the Akan and Ewe tribes of Southern Ghana (Tham-Agyekum & Loggoh, 2011; Ansu-Kyeremeh, 1997; Nketia, 1963). Relatively handful of studies (Ayirebasia, 2008; Abdulai et al., 2019) have examined indigenous models of communication in Northern Ghana. The scarcity of research on indigenous models of communication in Northern Ghana, especially in the Tolon District is regrettable because most people in the rural communities in the Tolon District of Ghana are familiar with these forms of communication and feel more competent in these forms of communication than the use of new media technologies. Therefore, the aim of this study is to explore the role of ICSs as sites for cultural constructions and propagating information for rural development in the Tolon District of Ghana. Specifically, the study seeks to answer this question: What is the role of ICSs as sites for cultural constructions and propagating information for rural development in the Tolon District of Ghana?

Since indigenous models of communication are many, the study will be confined to storytelling, the traditional drum and the town carrier (gong-gong beater). This study is partly a continuation of the discourses initiated by some scholars on the role of indigenous knowledge and ICSs in mainstream media and communication research (Finnegan, 1970; Ansu-Kyeremeh, 1997; Adjaye, 2008, Tham-Agyekum & Loggoh, 2011). The study will contribute to literature on indigenous models in media and communication research by bringing to light some of the distinct ways of communicating via indigenous models within the traditional settings in the Tolon District of Ghana. Moreover, the topic is important because development requires collegial participation, and in order to convey message with lasting effect on the audience, one has to use the language, symbols and the common media the rural communities connect with for the delivery of their messages. In addition, for development to be truly enduring, the communications media must create an environment that allows the integration and recognition of cultural values of the beneficiaries.

The paper is organized as follows: after the introduction, we presented a brief background of the Tolon District, review of literature, research design and method, findings, discussion, and conclusion.

Brief background of the Tolon District of Ghana

The Tolon District Assembly was carved out from the Tolon/Kumbungu District in the Northern Region of Ghana in 2011 (Ghana Statistical Service (GSS), 2010). The district shares boundaries to the North with Kumbungu, North Gonja to the West, Central Gonja to the South, and Sagnarigu Districts to the East. In terms of the ethnic composition, the Mole-Dagombas are the dominant ethnic group in the district. In addition, about 92 % of households in the District are engaged in agriculture (GSS, 2010).

The indigens of Tolon District mostly grow food crops such as maize, rice, groundnuts, yam amongst others. Farming is usually done traditionally using hoes and cutlasses. However, in some cases, a small segment of the population undertakes mechanized farming with the help of animal traction and few tractors. Furthermore, irrigation farming is practicable in Tolon District throughout the year along the banks of the White Volta. Besides crop cultivation, the District has a vast truck of pasture for livestock production as well. In terms of major ICSs used in Tolon District, therefore, it is worth mentioning that storytelling, the traditional drum, and the town crier or gong-gong beater are the most common media used in information dissemination. These ICSs are utilized to address local interests, concerns (such as planting and crop harvesting periods), and for propagating information for the local communities in the Tolon District of Ghana (Tolon District Assembly, 2019).

Conceptualizing indigenous communication systems (ICSs) and its increasing significance

This section of the paper begins by clarifying the concept of ICSs. In this regard, ICSs refer to the summation of all the traditional channels of transmitting information, ideas, and thoughts from one generation to the next generation (Soola et al., 2010; Ansu-Kyeremeh, 1994). ICSs are used to transmit messages using the values, symbols, institutions, and ethos of the host culture (Tham-Agyekum & Loggoh, 2011, p. 2680 citing Ansu-Kyeremeh, 1997). Similarly, Singh and Mandal (2016) noted that traditional tools of communication evolved from the beliefs, customs and rituals which are deeply rooted in the traditions and characterized the earlier lives of the people in rural areas. Typically, such indigenous modes of communication are consistently evolving with changing circumstances. In a similar vein, Nwanne (2006) pointed out that indigenous communication systems use symbols, values, and local institutions to create variety and effectiveness of messages in rural communities. It is significant to note that owing to ICSs peculiarity to specific cultures which are born out of people's convictions and experiences, its interpretations may vary from one culture to the other (Tham-Agyekum & Loggoh, 2011). ICSs are also viewed as the vehicles that the common people use to convey messages including but not limited to folk music, folk scripture, folk dance, or folk painting (Nwanne, 2006). These communication systems are "Passovers" from previous generations, formed from long-term societal views and experiences. Thus, they are essential values and elements of the socio-economic traditions of African societies and its people (Oyesomi et al., 2014). According to Ayangunna and Oyewo (2014), before formal and organized bureaucratic systems of information dissemination, there were culturally specific modes of communication known as ICSs. As such, they are communication systems that rural communities create to 'traditionally generate, store, share, communicate and utilize information' pertaining to their day-to-day lives. ICSs significance lies in their familiarity with the people, the trust the people reposed in them, the people's general acceptability and their expertise in understanding and handling them (Negussie et al., 2010, p. 116). Moreover, emphasis must also be made of the fact that under ICSs, society is the owner of the media channels with a leader acting as a trustee or head of the gatekeeping process (Nwosu, 2013). In sum, it involves the transmission of news, persuasion, entertainment, announcement, and the exchange of social interactions of any kind which signify a very salient aspect of culture and the conduit for culture to be preserved, passed on or adapted (Nwosu, 2013; Mundy & Lin Compton, 2013).Interestingly, it has since been realized that the interests in the use of ICSs is beginning to soar, particularly in less developed countries for the general acceptability and credibility reposed in them by the people as source of information (Tham-Agyekum & Loggoh, 2011). This is due to the inadequacy of the top-down, and centralized methods of transmitting developmental concepts to indigenous African tribes, as well as the unforeseen negative outcomes that occasionally outweigh the benefits in the long run

Table 1
Profile of the participants.

Participants	Sex	Role in the community
TC1	M	Chief
TC2	M	Drummer/Praise singer
DR3	M	Drummer/Praise singer
ST4	M	Blacksmith
ST5	M	Drummer/Praise Singer
ST6	F	Praise singer
TC7	M	Drummer/Praise singer
TC8	M	Drummer/Praise singer
TC9	M	Sub-chief
ST 10	M	Nurse
TC 11	M	Drummer/Praise singer
TC12	M	Priest
DR 13	F	Praise Singer
DR 14	M	Sub-chief
ST 15	M	Chief
TC16	F	Praise singer
ST17	F	Praise singer
DR18	M	Drummer/Praise singer
DR19	M	Butcher
ST20	M	Barber
DR21	M	Drummer/Praise singer
TC22	M	Sub-chief
TC23	F	Praise singer
TC24	M	Butcher
ST25	M	Blacksmith

Source: Field survey, 2022.

(Negussie et al., 2010).

Despite the significance of ICSs for information dissemination to rural communities and its coexistence with systems developed under Western modernity, it has been criticized for existing only in the local languages of the social groups. This often restricts outside interpretations of indigenous knowledge/messages embedded in most rural communities. In addition, indigenous models are often limited to only the inventors of the local people who often transmit knowledge down the family lineage (Ayirebasia, 2008).

The concept of rural development and ICSs

Rural development is referred to the process of strengthening rural areas' economic, social, and environmental conditions with the aim of bettering the well-being and standard of living of those who live and work in the rural areas (Kumar, 2006). In view of this, the goal of rural economic growth is to ensure a balanced social and economic development that stresses on equitable wealth distribution and create benefits that impact on most people living in the rural areas (Kumar, 2006). Agents of development viewed rural development as a process that seeks to improve the opportunities and well-being, while trying to reduce the challenges of the rural communities (IFAD, 2016; Kumar, 2006). In the process of developing the rural communities, communication plays an important role and forms a very essential input in the process of social interventions. This is evident in the mobilization of the people by soliciting for their open participation and relevant contributions to the development process. From the grassroots level, people are mobilized for their own community development and towards national consciousness (Adeniyi, 2019; Oyesomi et al., 2017). The social change process invokes on communication in reaching out to the people and equipping them with the requisite new skills and know-how that is necessary for development to be realized. For such communication to be effective, traditional media forms are emphasized to be necessary ingredient to enhance the development process (Kumar, 2006). Moreover, ICSs could play major role in realizing the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDGs). Indeed, ICSs could be used as tools to make our cities and other human settlements—including our rural settings such as Tolon District—inclusive, safe, and resilient for sustainable agriculture development (United Nations, 2015).

In addition, Mundy and Lin Compton (2013) revealed that traditional folk media are the cultural heritage of the people and are located closely to their hearts and minds and touches their personas with great sense of intimacy. Thus, the personal appeals and sense of intimacy go with their familiarity with not only the content of the communication, but the intricacies such as the colloquial language it applies. Ultimately, there is clarity in communication because it is devoid of cross-cultural and other impediments with a guaranteed rapport. Furthermore, as old as folk media may appear, but by principle, it remains the media forms that essentially and substantially sustains the information requirements for the rural people who form over 70% of people in most developing nations (Ushe, 2015; Nwosu, 2013; Wilson, 1987). This is the reason why existing inefficiencies in rural development projects often are reflected in the inadequacies of exogenous media's capability in community mobilization strategies and inappropriate use of ICSs (Adeniyi, 2019). As a result, it is noted that a relationship exists between successful development project implementation and the use of ICSs (Edet et al., 2015; Tham-Agyekum & Loggoh, 2011). Succinctly, development agencies are expected to position ICSs for development as key factor to realizing social change thereby guaranteeing local people the chance to benefit from their rights (Adeniyi, 2019).

Moreover, Singh and Mandal (2016) alluded to the fact that mass media have the greatest potency in creating awareness of great national importance with provision of vital information and education to the people aside the entertainment. The grassroots of society are often bereft of the impact of modern mass media not because of lack of competency

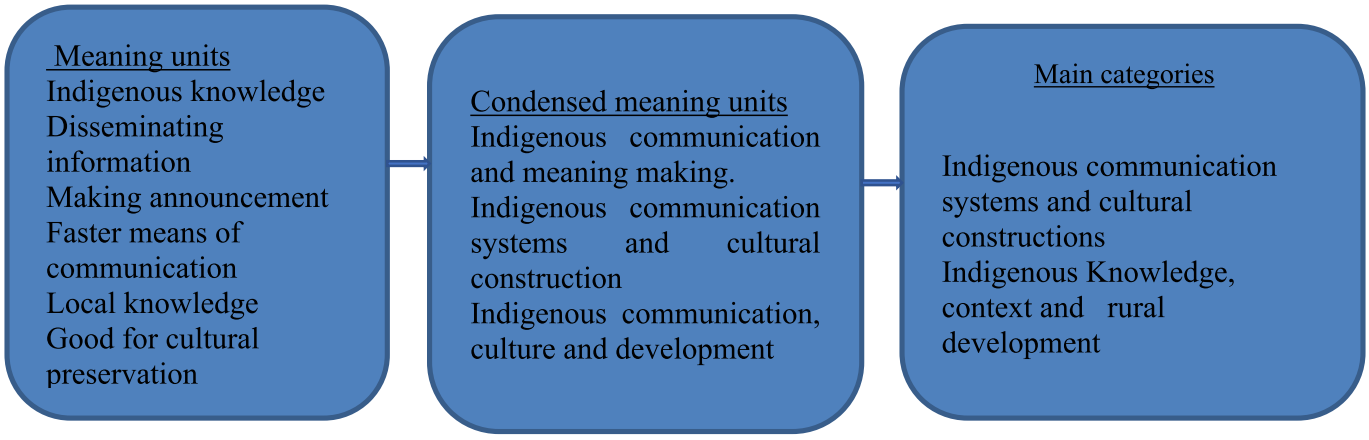


Fig. 1. Creating categories: ICSs and rural Development. Source: Researchers' own design.

in performance, but for the fact that the infrastructural gap or constrains—such as electricity, internet services and other basic resources—in the rural communities do not support the use of such media. In lieu of this, traditional media continues its major role of creating awareness among the rural folks. Additionally, the lack of connectivity of mass media with rural folks has to do with the high rate of illiteracy and low standard of living, particularly in developing countries such that mass media will be incapacitated to provide for the people in such heterogeneous circumstances.

Forms of tradition media of communication in the Tolon District of Ghana

Traditional media of communication in Ghana comes in a variety of forms and sizes (e.g., storytelling, folk plays music and dance, the traditional drum etc). This is because Ghana is largely a heterogeneous society. Again, traditional media of communication have been put into two categories which are verbal and non-verbal forms of communications. As stated earlier, we have adopted a qualitative content analysis to explore the role of ICS as sites for cultural constructions and propagating information for rural development in the Tolon District of Ghana focusing on storytelling, traditional drum, and the town crier (gong-gong beater). In addition, we have chosen storytelling, the traditional drum, and the town crier or gong-gong beater because they are the most common channels of communication used to address local interests, concerns, and for propagating information for the local communities in the Tolon District of Ghana.

The town crier/gong-gong beater

One common traditional medium of communication in the Tolon District of Ghana is the town crier; otherwise known as the gong-gong beater. This form of local medium of communication as the name connotes is the art of beating a musical instrument called gong-gong to draw the attention of the people and then proceeds on top voice to deliver an important message to the people in the community. This is often done during the mornings and evenings to announce important meetings, ceremonies, communal labour, imminent troubles etc. According to Wilson (1987), the town crier is the custodian of the vital information of the community and will be seen in the contemporary times as the society's journalist. Again, Wilson (1987) noted that the town crier is a misnomer for what he considers a traditional emissary newsman whose role is mutually dependent and self-defining. The information so delivered or broadcast to the people emanates from the council of chiefs or source of authority in the community and not by the whims and caprices of the town crier/gong-gong beater himself. Thus, the person in this role acts according to the strict instructions of the council of chiefs who would have deliberated intensively on the matter to arrive at the information to be relayed to the people. Soola et al. (2010) maintain that the town crier is the embodiment of vital information of the people, the norms, values, and heritage of the people, and is selected based on his oratory skills or eloquence and family lineage. It is said that when he beats his gong-gong he is instantly being inundated with the people with heads turning to his direction and ears twitching.

Storytelling

Employing storytelling is an age-old ritual applied to transmit values, ideas, beliefs, histories etc. about social world which transcend almost every culture in Africa (Addie, 2019; Edosomwan & Peterson, 2016). Because majority of people could not read and write, they cure that deficiency with the art of storytelling as a way of transmitting knowledge, wisdom, history and culture from generation to generation. Storytelling is not delivered via words alone, but demonstrated aside words by facial expressions, gestures, singing and involving the audience in a way that would make the stories not only memorable, but interesting as well. Storytelling can last for many hours, and even days or years. It is often being laced with riddles and myths with the purpose of educating, entertaining and sustaining cultures. The subjects treated are on history, past deeds, taboos and beliefs and it is effective in repudiating vices and upholding virtues. It takes place by assembling people around a common spot with the elders taking turns to tell their stories. The context under study and other present-day communities has professional storytellers whose commitment is to cement the memory of the people with old events, ancestral deeds, and genealogical ties (Addie, 2019).

The traditional drum

One popular form of folk media common in Ghana is the traditional drum sometimes referred to as the talking drum and considered to be an extension of oral tradition. According to Ushe (2015), drumming is an essential part of the African culture which serves a variety of purposes. They are called talking drums because their pitch is regulated following the strikes given by the drummer and the pitches can mirror a person's voice (Ushe, 2015). The drums are of different shapes and sizes prominent among those regarded as talking drums in Dagbon are the Lungdaa, Lung-dogu, Timpaani (tontomfrom) and Gung-gong. The important functions these drums play among other things include announcing the appearance and departure of important personalities, praises for important personalities and entertainment by providing tunes and melodies for dancing. The "Timpaani" which originated from the Asante culture, and which the Asantes called "Fontomfrom" is played by the "Akarima". Its communicative function is two-pronged which is for official and for social. The distinct official cultural functions are for purposes of formal announcements and for praising the chief wherever he goes. It is also being played on Fridays and Mondays to signify the importance of these days because it is on those days that the chief comes out for the people to come and pay homage by way of greetings and for passing important information.

Research design and method

Since the purpose of the study is to explore the role of ICSs as sites for cultural constructions and propagating information for rural development in the Tolon District of Ghana, we relied so much on the views of the participants. In this regard, we located the study within the social constructivism epistemological world view. The social constructivism world view holds that individuals seek understanding of the world they live and work (Creswell, 2007). In the context of this study, we sought the understanding of the participants in connection with the role of ICSs as sites for cultural constructions and propagating information for rural development in the Tolon District of Ghana. In addition, the subjective meanings of the participants were negotiated socially, culturally, and historically through our in-depth interviews with the participants. This was meant for the participants to construct the meanings of the role of ICSs as sites for cultural constructions and propagating information for rural development.

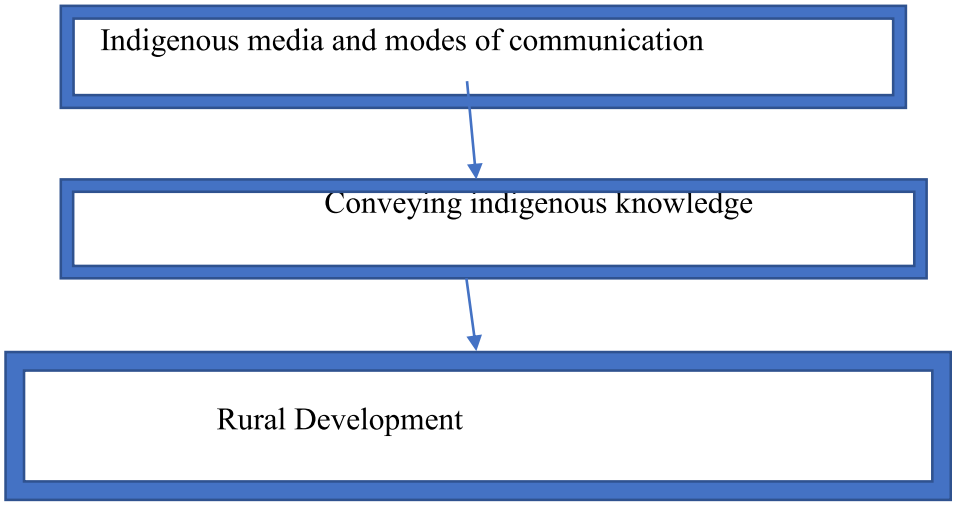
Since the social constructivist perspective holds the view that reality, in this case the role of ICSs as sites for cultural constructions, and platforms for propagating information for rural development—is constructed, reconstructed, and deconstructed based on the interactions of people in the study setting (Creswell, 2007). We inductively generated the interview questions as we did not have any research hypothesis from the outset. Thereafter, we deduced the research questions to guide the entire study. Stated differently, we deployed the social constructivism epistemological approach to enable us use interviews to gather the views and perspectives of our respondents, interpret, construct, and deconstruct them to form knowledge.

In terms of the research design, we adopted the case study approach. The case study approach posits that the researcher or researchers explores or explore a bounded system or multiple bounded systems over time through in-depth data collection involving multiple sources (Creswell, 2007, P. 89). In the case of this study, we adopted the single

instrumental case study (Creswell, 2007). This is because the rationale behind the study is to explore a single concern, thus, the role of ICSs as sites for cultural constructions and propagating information for rural development in the Tolon District of Ghana.

The framework below dovetails the role of ICSs in knowledge generation and propagation geared towards rural development. This, we do, to give critical insights towards the overall understanding of the ICSs and its impacts on the community, the people, and developmental portfolios.

Source: Researchers' own design.



Access to participants and interviews

To gain access to the study participants and sites, a letter was written to the chief of Tolon and provided detailed explanations of the rationale and relevance for the study to the district. Approval was granted by the Chief (ruler of the traditional area) and his opinion leaders as gatekeepers of the community. Besides, we obtained verbal consent from all the interviewees before each interview was conducted. As ethics require, we assured them that our aim is to explore the role of ICSs as sites for cultural constructions, and platforms for propagating information for rural development without any ulterior motive of any sought. Therefore, no interviewee participated under duress and/or undue influence.

Thereafter, we adopted the purposive sampling technique and selected the study participants. Purposive sampling is the deliberate choice of research participants due to the qualities they possess (Creswell, 2007). With the influence of the context being taken into consideration, we selected respondents who were deemed to have knowledge about the study context, indigenous knowledge, and ICSs. For instance, we included drummers/praise singers, chiefs, sub-chiefs, priests, and opinion leaders. Again, we excluded those who had limited knowledge and experiences of the study context, indigenous knowledge, and ICSs. In all, twenty-five respondents were selected for the study. The informants include five females and twenty males between the ages of 20–70 years at the time the interviews were conducted. Below is a tabular representation of the study participants (Table 1).

Through an interview guide, we conducted semi-structured interviews with ten participants in Dabgani and fifteen participants in English language. We conducted ten interviews in Dagbani because some of the participants were not formally educated in English. Our interview guide was to guide the topics we would ask during the interviews. Considering this, we did not follow exactly the way the questions were captured on our interview guide. Therefore, questions that were not in the interview guide were asked during the interviews. In addition, the interview questions were open-ended, and this offered us the opportunity to probe further the answers given by the participants. Again, the interview questions focused on indigenous knowledge, indigenous communication systems, the role and relevance of ICSs, and cultural construction. The interviews were conducted from April-June 2022. Each interview lasted between 35 min to one hour. All the interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Qualitative content analysis was used to interpret participants' perspectives on the role of ICSs as sites for cultural constructions and propagating information for rural development in the Tolon District of Ghana. We started the data analysis by sorting the transcribed text into meaning units. In view of this, participants' narratives were therefore, read thoroughly several times to get an understanding of their content, and then sorted into different main categories and re-read. This resulted into subcategories and new main categories (Fig. 1). The data analysis procedures used is highlighted in Fig. 1.

Interpretation of the data was guided by Heidegger's (1962) hermeneutic phenomenology. This philosophy focuses on the interpretations of significant statements in the data for meanings and significance. The hermeneutic phenomenology supported us to unearth details and other minor pieces embedded in the data. It, therefore, enabled us to interpret, construct meanings, and accomplish a sense of understanding as lived and experienced by people relative to ICS's role in promoting rural development (Wilson & Hutchinson, 1991). Consequently, the hermeneutic phenomenology guided us to scrutinise, appreciate, and interpret the transcribed interview data to bring to light and reflect upon the lived meaning of the interviewees' fundamental experiences (Gadamer, 1998). In this regard, we read through the entire data line by line to tease out the deeper meanings explicitly found in the participants' understanding of the role of ICSs as sites for cultural constructions and propagating information for rural development in the Tolon District of Ghana. To ensure the credibility of the study, we used the member checking technique. Considering this, we sent the key themes back to the respondents to assess the extent to which the themes had captured their views.

Findings and discussion

This section of the study discusses the findings on the role of ICSs in the Tolon District of Ghana, and how they are used as sites for cultural constructions and platforms for propagating information for rural development. The findings are discussed under two main themes: indigenous communication systems and cultural constructions, and indigenous knowledge, context, and rural development.

Indigenous communication systems and cultural constructions

It is obvious that the pervasive uses of mass media have not taken, and may never take the place of traditional media as the common channels for information dissemination, cultural constructions, re-constructions, and avenues for addressing local interests and concerns in most rural communities in Ghana. To this end, one of the participants was asked to describe the role of the town crier in the community, in response, one respondent narrated:

> *Town criers are used to disseminate important messages in this community. The services they render are very relevant. When there is an important national exercise to be carried out in the community, the chief employs the town criers to make announcement in connection with the significance of the exercise, the date, time and venue the exercise would be carried out so that members of community would be informed and prepared for the exercise. The town criers are also used to make announcement when there is a communal labour* (DR 3).

The submission of the participant has shed light on the role and relevance of the town crier as a communicator, and a medium for disseminating important information to the people in the community. Again, it has also illuminated the connection between the town crier and the council of chiefs or source of authority in the community. Considering this, Etukudo (1989) asserts that the town crier is an important link between the opinion leaders and members of the community. Moreover, the creation and dissemination of messages by the town crier, consumption of the messages, and creation of meanings by members of the community would depend on the context which gives legitimacy to the messages encoded and decoded. In view of this, those who are not socialised into the practices of the community may not understand the messages disseminated by the town crier.

Furthermore, drumming has an important place in the social life of the people in Africa. In view of this, the participants were asked to explain the role and significance of drumming in the Tolon District, and one of the participants explained:

> *… I am a drummer because I was born into a family of drummers (lungsi) and brought up by drummers. Drumming is part of our way of life. I would say, it is our culture and occupation by birth. It is not every member of our society who can become a drummer, drumming is passed down through the family line (TC11).*

In the opinion of the participant, he is a drummer because he was born into the family of drummers. In addition, drumming is something that is learned over a lifetime, and people acquired the skills of drumming by learning the art of drumming. The data further revealed that to become a drummer, one would have to belong to a family of drummers and learned the art of drumming through constant practice with experienced drummers. In relation to the same question, another participant opined:

> *My role is very important in the life of this community. I use the drum for appellation of chiefs, exchange of important historic information, and to explain the links among kingships and history. We also use the drum in events like funeral, festivals, weddings, naming ceremonies and important gatherings to provide tunes and melodies for dancing, announcing the appearance of important personalities in social gathering and teaching the younger generation how to drum (DR 18).*

The views submitted by the participant underscored the importance of drumming in the community. It means that drummers participate in the life of their communities by using the drums to create the links among kingships and history and provide people with knowledge of how they are connected to the past. The revelation confirms the findings of (Ushe, 2007) that among the Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba, the talking drums are personified as human beings. Thus, on certain public occasion's personal names, genealogies and unique characteristics of people are expressed in drum language. The information has also highlighted that drummers provide melodies and tunes for people to dance during festivals, funerals, naming ceremonies among others. This understanding is in keeping with the postulation of Manyozo (2018) that indigenous communication systems are based on the principal attributes that they are largely spoken or performed.

To offer information on how western media technologies are employed with traditional media technologies, a question was posed and the participants responded:

> There are a lot of modern media technologies these days. We now have access to radio and television which often help us in disseminating important information to members of the community. But the town criers are still used along with the radio and television to make important announcements such as immunization exercises, funeral announcements, weddings, and communal labour (TC 11).

Here, the participant implies that indigenous communication systems are used along with modern media technologies to make information much more accessible to members in the rural communities. This understanding is contrary to the underlying assumption that Western media and literacy are used to release the traditional individual from the "tribal web" or "the scaling up and scaling down" of mass media to avoid going back to an oral system of communication (Lerner, 1958). In addition, the views articulated by the participant revealed that indigenous communication systems are not only flexible and dynamic, but they co-exist with Western media technologies. Moreover, they hybridized or synchronized (Ansu-Kyeremeh, 1997) Western media technologies along with tradition media technologies to create and disseminate messages to members of the rural communities. Therefore, integrating both Western communication technologies and traditional media technologies could generate knowledge that will improve information dissemination, education and entertainment in most rural communities in Ghana.

Again, in the context of Africa, folk tales serve as a means of handing down customs, traditions, and other cultural variables from one generation to the next generation. In relation to this, one participant narrated:

> *After a hard day's work, especially during harvesting period, we gather children and adults together to tell stories and to help in either shelling corn kernels of the cobs or plucking groundnuts for the community member* (TC24). When asked, why they engaged in storytelling, another participant added: *It brings us together, it promotes change, and we acquired a lot of knowledge and skills from the experienced members of the community* (ST 6).

From the perspectives of the two participants, storytelling is not only a medium of delivering messages in the Tolon District, but it is used as a site where cultures are constructed, re-constructed, sustained and communicated from one generation to the next generation. In addition, the two participants pointed out that storytelling is used as a rallying point in most communities in the Tolon District where some community members come together to share their history, culture, wisdom, and knowledge to members of the community. Besides, the participants have also cast light on how story telling is used to promote behavioural changes and inculcates good ethical and moral values to the up-coming generation. The revelations above resonate with the assertion of Manyozo (2018) that indigenous communication systems such as storytelling, dance, festival, and folk music provide an avenue for the common people to communicate indigenous knowledge to members of

the community in a language and idioms the local people understand.

Indigenous Knowledge, context, and rural development

In the rural settings, the various indigenous communication modes have some contextual significance fitting into the aspirations, expectations, and value systems of the people. For instance, it is common knowledge that a particular traditional medium is likely to be evoked into function for a specified context. This postulation is amply demonstrated in the submission of a participant as follows:

> *The gong-gong or drum can be used at any time, but specifically for praising the chief whenever he is going somewhere. When he is not going anywhere, it is played on Mondays and Fridays. In terms of personal use or as a source of income, there is no limit to its use. They can also be used at gatherings such as enskinment of a chief, wedding/marriages, funerals, entertainment, or dance (TC 8)*

It can be inferred from the above reasoning that although the gong-gong or drum is usable at any possible time, but its appeals and fitness are for some specified contexts such as for glorifying the chief during his official outings and particularly on Mondays and Fridays to herald such days as more important days in the weekly calendar of the communities. Not only that, but during convocation ceremonies for newly installed chiefs, marriage ceremonies, funerals and for other entertainments, specific indigenous communication modes are provoked to use. This understanding supports the findings of (Ushe, 2007) which indicate that among the Hausa and Yoruba of Nigeria, for example, praise names and titles of rulers were poured forth on the drums or horns as a way of information dissemination. Every society or culture in Africa has its own native and traditional modes and channels of communication, which define its existence, organization, and progress. In addition, it is also palpable in the research participant's submission that it serves as source of livelihood for the people who ply that tradition. This clear-cut demarcation of the contextual usage of indigenous communication modes is the reason for its internal and deeper connection and appeal to the people. In all these occasions, the people are immersed in the process with their vigorous participation which resonates with Rasila and Mudau (2012) assertion that communication for rural development is one with active participation of the community members. While it relates to very important cultural implications, it also serves as source of entertainment and income generation for the drummers. Similarly, participant TC1 also outline the contextual significance of storytelling as presented below:

> *……. storytelling is also one key form of traditional media of communication. This form of traditional media of communication is used often by the aged or the elderly in our society. Storytelling is also used when there is the need to educate the youth or younger one in our society about any behavior change (TC1).*

The above text is reflective of the context of storytelling usage and the segment of the people who mostly apply it. In the text, it is presented that storytelling as a traditional medium of communication is used when there is a need to educate people, particularly the youth with the motive of changing their conduct and attitudes in line with the aspirations, expectations, and values of the society. This element of behaviour change via storytelling as a traditional media channel resonates well with theory of change which reckons on the presupposition that a sustainable integration of communication channels will initially bring about better awareness, application, and effects on some key behaviours. The thinking is that behaviour change commences with unawareness involving unhealthy behaviour which goes with lack of will to change. With such useful interventions such as storytelling, willingness to change is inspired into a person leading to action towards changing which culminates in practising the action or change in a sustainable manner (Fink et al., 2018). With special reference to storytelling, it is asserted that good stories stick to the mind, are rarely forgotten and noted to be engendering dramatic change in behaviours (Fink et al., 2018). Change in attitudes goes a long way to bring about positive change in socio-economic outcomes. It must also be understood that any means of communication must be in tandem with not only the mental context of the people but rooted in their cultural context to a large extent (Cabanero-Verzosa, 2004).

The vivid ramification of this foregoing on rural development can be seen in how professionals working to ameliorate the plight of the communities in and around Tolon deploy such traditional media forms to further the course of their interventions. Research participant (ST10) who incidentally was a nurse recounted his experiences this way:

> *As a nurse, I normally go to the community and as part of the community entry, I have to visit the chief and tell him about my mission. The chief will invite the town crier to go round and make the announcement. So, during the actual day for the program, I normally get some of the women together with some of my people and train them to tell stories on let's say causes of malaria and its implication to their health (ST 10).*

The above statement emanated from a nurse who doubles as a research participant. Indeed, nurses are serious stakeholders when it comes to development works in the rural communities. In explaining the processes adopted in entering Tolon and its communities, the process starts with information dissemination to the communities via town crier through instructions from the centre of authority which is the chief. When the people are assembled through the announcement from the town crier, the nurse employs storytelling after training women to efficiently do that alongside the medical professionals. This fosters interactive session for imparting knowledge and learning. According to Fink et al. (2018, p.5), "developing an interactive and compelling communicative strategy, which caters not only to individuals' reason, but also to their perceptions and beliefs is essential to ensure that better understanding of health behaviours eventually translate into practice". As the people are associated with the process, they get empowered with useful information that directly address their challenges, needs and concerns in a friendly way (Rasila & Mudau, 2012).

In another development, a participant who was a chief was asked how important traditional media is to his people or community and here goes the response:

> *Is used to convey certain important messages to the people. It is used to communicate to the populace about meetings or gathering at the chief's palace. Traditional media play an important role in our way of communicating, without it we would not be able to communicate to everyone in this village when we want to. As you can see, we do not have electricity, it is from these traditional media we get our information (TC 7).*

It is clear from the submission above that crucial messages are circulated within the communities in the Tolon District of Ghana via traditional media in terms of summoning the people for meetings and other gatherings. Community development does not happen in a vacuum, but through efficient mobilization of the rural folks to be part and parcel of the process by owning the intervention since it is there for their well-being. It is also evident in the text that the community lacks electricity supply which goes without saying that the people are bereft of modern media gadgets such as the television, radio and internet connectivity which modern media reckon on. Thus, it is not only an option under their circumstances, but a must and solely dependably way to reach out to everyone in the community.

Moreover, traditional media can synchronize with each other to increase its impact and effectiveness in achieving the goals of development interventions. The ensuing text from participant (TC4) showcase a blend of drama and storytelling ostensibly to entertain, but in reality, to educate people on health issues:

> *I got to realize that whenever I am to sensitize the local people and I decide to speak verbally, they do not give it maximum attention unlike involving the local people themselves to dramatize through storytelling or perform it,*

they grab it very fast. For example, I can use that to dramatize through stories the implication of malaria to the local people even in a form of entertainment is also educating them as well. I use traditional media to enhance the practicality involve (TC 4).

The above statement portrays the use of drama blended with storytelling to educate the community about malaria which is one of the deadliest diseases in Ghana. The participant after realising that merely talking to the people without involving them in the process of knowledge transmission process is ineffective resorted to participatory process. This approach is infused with some element of entertainment which is educative at the same time. Hence, the process is not only made interactive and educative but entertaining and open to dialogue because the people are involve in doing what they are familiar. Earlier researcher in this area such as Ansu-Kyeremeh (1998) concur that these modes of communicating development-oriented information is effective and popular among rural folks because it is noted to be transactional and very participatory. It creates room for community members to work using new information via familiar means that are comfortable to them. Further, the community involvement implies the general acceptability of the indigenous communication modes which are conducted in the local languages and laced with local idioms reflective of their interpretation and understanding pattern (Essein, 2014).

More importantly, in characterizing further the relevance of traditional media in rural development context, a participant highlighted on the cost implication of this media forms:

It is less expensive, because it does not involve any sophisticated tool or equipment. It is easier for the people to adapt. It does not require any formal education in order to access it unlike other media like the newspapers and internet (TC4).

The impulse of the above participant's submission is that in terms of the cost involve in using the traditional media, it is less expensive in the sense that the apparatus or accoutrements that constitute traditional media is simple, durable, readily available in their immediate environment without any sophistication. It does not involve any formal training which goes with huge cost to the trainees and ultimate users or beneficiaries. The less expensive nature of traditional media will certainly go a long way to reduce the cost of development projects or programmes in the rural set-ups. To many development communication experts, integrating development communication into projects ensures increase participation which facilitates coordinated as well as collaborative activity resulting in improved results for projects. It also advances sustainable stakeholder engagement and as such, goes with proper budget lines (FAO, 2014). But projects that leverage on traditional media have these budgets on the lower side as compare with the mainstream media thereby promoting community ownership and legitimacy of development objectives and interventions.

Limitations of the study and future research directions

The study could not incorporate all the prevailing ICSs in the Tolon district of Northern Ghana, and so, it would suffer some deficiencies in contribution from some of them such as drama and dance. Additionally, this study has reported evidence of the need to hybridize or synchronize the traditional media with new media forms such as contemporary social media but could not report on how the integration is done. It would, therefore, serve an insightful research intervention in this area to further interrogate the impact of other traditional communication media aside what has been given a highlight in this particular study.

Conclusion

The paper explores the role of ICSs as sites for cultural constructions and propagating information for rural development in the Tolon District of Ghana. Our analysis of the views of the 25 participants in the Tolon District cast light on the need to hybridize or synchronize traditional media with Western media technologies to make information much more accessible to the common people in the rural communities. In view of this, the study recommends that rural communities could integrate both new media technologies and traditional media to generate knowledge that would improve information dissemination in the rural communities. Again, the study revealed that indigenous knowledge communication systems such as storytelling, dance, festival, and folk music provide an avenue for the common people to communicate indigenous knowledge to members of the community in a language and idioms the local people understand. Considering this, the study recommends that indigenous communication systems should be refined, transmitted, and maintained.

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Muhammed Abdulai: Conceptualization, Methodology, Supervision, Funding acquisition, Validation, Visualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. **Hadi Ibrahim:** Formal analysis, Writing – original draft, Investigation, Resources, Funding acquisition, Validation, Visualization. **Abdul Latif Anas:** Data curation, Validation, Visualization, Project administration, Writing – review & editing.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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