

THE ETHICAL VALUES OF AFRICAN TRADITIONAL MEDIA

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Abstract

Media practice in the present generation has been associated with all forms of malpractices which are occasioned as a result of corruption. The conventional media practice in this period lacks in values which has caused bias and loss of trust on both the medium itself and the practitioners. The relevant indigenous ethical and cultural values like integrity, truthfulness and courage, with the essence of beauty, love and the good associated with the African traditional media are presented here to boast the morality standard of media practice in the contemporary times. The lack of these values in the conventional media has affected their level of acceptance especially when not presented in collaboration with the African traditional media ethics. Effort is made in comparing media efficiency in the conventional context and the African traditional system that comes in form of voices, sounds, signs, objects and performances. Considerations are made to determine their similarities and differences. African traditional media remain simple, affordable, democratized, accessible, and readily a dependable collaborator with the conventional media.

Keywords: Ethical, Traditional, Value, Media, Cultural, Conventional

Introduction

The African traditional media are the indigenous means of communication in the various communities and villages in Africa. They reflect the various talking drums, the folk songs, drama, festivals, town criers, traditional wears, art works, painting, stories and other cultural architectural edifices that reflect in palaces, shrines and other public places. African traditional media are the local means of communication that sustain the information need of the people.

The relevant indigenous ethical and cultural values like integrity, truthfulness and courage, with the essence of beauty, love and the good associated with the African traditional media are presented here to boast the morality standard of media practice in the contemporary times. The lack of these values in the conventional media has affected their level of acceptance especially when not presented in collaboration with the African traditional media ethics.

African traditional media come in forms of voices, sounds, signs, objects and performances, though, with some similarities and differences as regards conventional media. African traditional media remain simple, affordable, democratized, accessible, and readily a dependable collaborator with the conventional media. It is noteworthy that African traditional media are highly effective than all other means of communication because they are interactive, interpersonal, combine verbal communications with non-verbal codifications, and they are simple, natural and less expensive. The high content of non-verbal characteristics in the African traditional media actually makes them to be more effective because the non-verbal communicates to the mind more than verbal. The African traditional media however, are highly effective in the dissemination of information in a particular society. They are embedded in the cultural values and tradition of the people through body languages, signs and objects. They are totally devoid of corruption. According to MacBride (1984),

Starting with the simplest vocal and gestural signals rooted in their physical structure, human beings developed a whole range of non-verbal means for conveying messages. Music and dance; drum messages, signals, fires, drawing and other forms of graphics symbols, including the pictogram, followed by the ideogram, important especially because it associated with the representation of an object with an abstract idea, facial expression, gesture, mime, dance, images, music, songs, drawings, painting, sculptures.

Comparing with the conventional media, the African traditional media are highly effective in that they are interactive, and simple. They rationally combine verbal communication with non verbal codifications, natural and less expensive. They are cultural and traditionally embedded through body languages, signs and objects. The African traditional media therefore operate as a system of exchange of views and news, rather than a system of transmission from one source to another as it is in the case of conventional media. This brings in the principle of democratization in the African traditional media.

In terms of similarities, both the African traditional media and the conventional media have the ability of information dissemination. They are both meant for information, education and entertainment. Both of them serve as the watch dogs, but efficiency is more in the African traditional media because it originates from the people of the community that own the media. Though the conventional media have advantage of reach as a result of the advent of the mass media, but this reach-advantages lack effectiveness because it is not interactive and cannot be questioned. The news is always relayed the way the editors want it which in most cases are born out of some undue influence over them. But the closeness and simplicity of the African traditional media make them more effective and they are mostly located at strategic points and operate during public gatherings and festivity periods. This in a way takes care of its reach problems.

Aims and Objectives

This work presents African traditional media as one of the regional media with a good dose of values capable of redefining the global media practice. It is a system of media that would help in the understanding of the traditional philosophy of a people and help in

the propagation of the values which, for now, are grossly lacking in the conventional media practice.

These aims will be achieved using the following specific objectives.

- (i) To present this system of media as people-oriented in that it is owned by the people and also meant for them, since the medium of communication is the language and the symbols of the people of the community.
- (ii) To prove that African traditional media serve as means for the democratization of the communities, participation of the people in community affairs, and for the struggle against foreign occupation.
 - (i) To identify that African traditional media is devoid of mutilation, as the message is quite simple and also comes direct to the individual involved.

Theoretical framework

The conventional media is strategic action based, because the media owners seek to influence the practitioners with threat of sanction if they go contrary to the motive and objectives of establishing such media organizations. They also will receive wonderful gratification as journalists if they keep to these objectives. But the African traditional media do not operate in this context. Rather, they operate in the context of communicative action which focuses on the rational motivation of the audience through the binding/bonding effect of the content of their message. According to Habermas (1996), communicative action is rooted in a rational motivation based on the interlocutor's ability to make efforts to redeem the claims that the hearer has accepted. It is this guarantee that affects the coordination between speaker and hearer.

The two discursively redeemable claims to validity that are of particular interest here are claims to propositional truth and claims to normative rightness. Claims to truth as Igboanusi (2006) would say reside only in speech acts, whereas the locus of normative claims to validity is primarily in norms and only derivatively in speech acts. In ontological terms, this means that the orders of society, which we may either conform to or deviate from, are not constituted independently of validity, as are the orders of nature, toward which we can assume an objectivity altitude.

From these two action principles of Igboanusi (2006), it is evident that African traditional media are a regulative media among the participants, and suggest the perspective of real-life media in which all who have interests are admitted as fellow participants, and not authorities or owners. This makes them amenable to the democratic process nature of the Africans, since participation is a key element and a guarantee that one's interest is not distorted, and that respect for the individual is preserved.

African traditional media are therefore rationally commendable because, first they allow that values can be culturally appropriated. Second, they create room for the moral discourses to review and reintegrate norms that have become paralyzed due to historical changes. Third, these moral discourses so presented have some democratic orientations, which allow for openness in discussion. There is no doubt that such principles, if well articulated, will ease the tension of morality lack associated with the conventional media. A good blend therefore of conventional media with the African traditional media will as

well guarantee the objectives of sound inter-cultural communication, fare and balanced reportage and ultimately lead to world peace and stability.

The African traditional media however are reflexive by nature. The people's mind and orientation have been rationally fixed to their methodologies, a situation which does not allow distortion in the practice, irrespective of any sort of negative external influence. This situation goes in conformity with Habermas (1996) submission on rational discourse and reasoning.

Without the backing of religious or metaphysical world views that are immune to criticism, practical orientations can, in the final analysis be gained only from rational discourse, that is, from the reflexive forms of communicative action itself.

Thus, under this sort of moral discourse as Igboanusi (2006) puts it, one can see that Habermas (1996) recommends the principles of objectivity, fundamental human equality, respect for human dignity and freedom of expression as normative ideals for ethical communication. These are values abounding in African traditional media ethics. These values according to Igboanusi (2006) are not just the altitudes required for actual debate but are the principles of evaluating whether communication is good or bad, ethical or not. They are also the purposive or teleological functions of communication.

The Validity of African Traditional Media

Given the want of inherent ethical values preservative of life and ennobling of the human person in the contemporary media practice to the extent that debasement is enthroned to the heights of sensation, emotion without recourse to the consciousness of the person, there has been a push to rediscover the media with some generally accepted normative ethics for the universal media practice, which should be a means of cultural enlightenment, recreation of their socio-cultural and political environment together with a holistic ontological definition of the people so concerned.

There is need for a more traditional and cultural responsive and responsible media, irrespective of any social cultural bias. But then it would be a better alternative to secure the respective cultures, epistemologies and metaphysics together with their languages while striving towards the cosmopolitanism of these cultures. This is not to be determined by any so as not to give any the undue advantage of superintending over others but to make the respective world milieu universally attractive. It is in this line that Ugboaja (1980), and Okonkwo (2000), would suggest a traditional turn in the practice of the media in the 21st century. This move is simply to return media communication to the rightful place of being the vehicle for language and culture towards the epistemological and ontological existential foundation of a people, where they would stand a better chance of understanding their orientation to their environment rather than the current disparagement, depravation and alienation of humanity, all in the name of modernizing media practice.

The Symbolism of African Traditional Media

According to Okonkwo (2000), Traditional media are known for their symbolism and as such have the phenomenological common features of reference to a type of beginning-ever-present expressive representation of life and varieties in and with the cosmos. They are the symbolic indicators of natural and unnatural phenomena. The symbolism validates realities and guarantees the certainties of truth within the operative communication community. This symbolism is very precise and exceptionally unique as it varies from place to place in referential meaning. This symbolism aims at harmonization of both the imaginative, instinctive and mental forces in humans within this locality of operation and as such entertains no accidents. Hence these symbols give meaning, context, content, weight etc. They generate some serious emotional support for their concepts of values. These values are expressive of the culture from where they emanate.

One cannot quantify the communicative magnitude of the trado-media symbols for they are created from the popular instrument of reality in the locality. One can agree more with Okonkwo (2000), when he said that the media are the encounter with the paradigms of nature within a locality. Be this as it may the symbolism of this media may not be fully understood until one gets to understand that the tradition thrives in arts which in other words referred to as performance or performative-art, evident mostly in the life of oral literature which makes all the means of communication of the oral tradition richer in content and very persuasive in character.

Hence the traditional media offer a deeper explanation of the people's lived world and as such go far beyond the mere provision of day to day gossips otherwise called news. News in the African traditional media is not just news for the sake of it but news for pedagogical and axiological purposes in that we know the essential values thereof.

The Person, Language, Culture and Media Practice

The person is a contextual being as could be seen from the cultural and global definition of the person and even in the social definitions of a person; one sees that the person cannot be but only in relationship with the other as Martin Buber would say. This means that the person is always within the horizon defined and stipulated by culture where culture stipulates the horizon or limits of language. The culture and language of a person is indeed the determinants of the person's communication. If for any reason the person does not communicate these factors then there cannot be a good ontological definition of that very person. This is because the communication thus carried should be revelatory of the basic constituents of the person which include the culture and the language.

One may not understand this but as Okonkwo (2000) would say, all through history, language has been closely associated with the identity of groups of people and this has relevant political implications because where these groups have often been national, the national language has invariably been the national symbol and a basis for national pride. Such pride has on occasion also had its dark side, a source of contempt for other nations with different language or even different dialects.

To remedy this, the national communication systems are either in praise of the nationalities or in subjugation of other national systems. Hence the traditional media as we have been trying to portray is in the bid to redefine the person of the African and to show in no small means that the media practice of the traditional nations are in a serious business of self revelation and to restructure an imbalance in the politics of communication as it goes on. This means that the person of the African linguistic culture and society is as it were in the war of retaining its values including the ontological value of its own very existence but to give to the antics of the cosmopolitan media practice as proposed would mean a death to the search of identity. For no matter what one may say there is politics of domination in the conventional media; the structure of who speaks with the claim of authority of truth and objectivity is nothing but a process of show of strength, hence; who speaks and who listens reveals the structure of the stronger and the weaker for he who is always in the receiving end is the weaker and the most disparaged.

According to Igboanusi (2006) it is good to see the media ethics of the 21st century from a personalist point of view. This is because a personalist approach to communication recognizes its public nature; it reveals language as a building up of a community of life and affirming its identity-building structures which uphold the dignity of the person.

Personalism as it were discourages the negative effects of individualism of solipsistic language just as it proposes a redemptive communication. Personalism does not even encourage cultural and linguistic solipsism. Personalist media ethics confronts cultural solipsism that arrogates validity alone to the cultural circumference and linguistic determination.

African Traditional Media as a System of Integral Education

From the forgoing, one discovers that the traditional media in African social cultural setting is nothing but a system of integral education and not necessarily that of information dissemination for pleasure and money. But the traditional media has a peculiar nature and method of being more or less non verbal and limitedly verbal but with special character of being so close to the people's consciousness that it can only be for the proper understanding of one's environment and cultural circumference together with the speech peculiarity. Hence it is a social-cultural communication for a social cultural education of a people by a people. Hence it means to build up to foster ideas and modes of personal and social conduct that would enhance the dignity of a people and the good of a people. It is a view that seeks to develop progress and enhance the human person and its dignity. Hence it does not trivialize the worth of the person through the promotion of bad habits. It does not teach lurid and exploitative social structures like consumerism, pornography and violence. This media, one can say, is value media and not necessarily news media.

Conclusion

In conclusion, one discovers that this system of communication is very revelatory and goes far beyond the conventional systems of sensational news. Here the emphasis is on values.

African traditional media adopt the virtue of truth in information dissemination. The media should defend and divulge the truth. The media however, must accept that truth based on evidence or exactness comes closer to reality. A journalist is expected to create reality. But one big question remains whether it will be easy to attain. This may be quite difficult to achieve, but will be beneficial if so achieved in the long run. Though, the Conventional Media may refuse to defend the truth, but when that affects the professional credibility, the practitioner loses public trust and confidence.

The media become ineffective to the society, whenever the truth is buried. The use of the press becomes pejorative in the hands of authorities, just like in relationship of the slave trade era. It is quite understandable that there can be some errors or misconceptions in the course of practicing African traditional media, but it is still better than other practitioners who are not able to make use of their mind and as such cannot be dedicated to the truth. Those ethical problems that confront the conventional media against truth telling are what the African traditional media remedy. African traditional media are an art which do not end on spoken words alone. They include other words of art like drawings, paintings, carvings, sculpting and so on which have the capacity of passing messages.

The most important of it all is the emphasis on the concept of the human person and the impact of the media on the consciousness of the person. Granted the conventional media do a whole lot of information dissemination at very supersonic speed but to what avail? How edifying are the news that millions have perished in Iraq and another millions in Africa? Why should a human person be made to believe that an existence is a mistake and torturous to survive? This is a product of a commercialized, unconscientiously and disorientating kind of media as spread and popularized as the norm by the super-powers. One may not understand the politics of communication and media until one gets to face the ignominious and pejorative definition of some cultures by other cultures presumably elite cultures of the world. Then it would dawn on all that there is a need to reinvent and revitalize the African social cultural and traditional media which are a value orientated and person-emancipating and actualizing media. The media of the African traditional epistemology and ontology is one of the most educative and informative media in the world in that it is a one way entry into the Igbo socio cultural and religious milieu of the Igbo.

In the current dispensation where shamelessness has become a norm, the awe inspiring African traditional media not only stands as a pedagogical system of education and social re-engineering system with the sole aim of enthroning values in the social and political system. Hence it stands as a redefinition of truth in the media practice just as it makes the person duly respected and valued as a person imbued with dignity, integrity and nobility. This media system as an affront to the overt commercialization of the system of information gathering and dissemination just as it condemns the manipulations of the system as the order of the day now.

Recommendations

The study examined the perception and adoption of African ethical values in the practice of journalism. Findings revealed that African moral and traditional values have critical functions to discharge for the attainment of a more desirable and meaningful journalistic global practice. These functions centre on enhancing ethical practice, hard work, and development inclined practice. It is therefore, recommended that to improve media practice, and make it more meaningful, it is pertinent to tap from the cherished African moral value system. To do this, the stakeholders in media profession should ensure that practitioners are not only adequately knowledgeable in these values, but believe in the values, stick to them, and actually use them in their day-to-day professional activities. In so doing, it is imperative that the values are consciously incorporated in media training curriculum. Similarly, already practicing media professionals should be subjected to re-training opportunities that would assist them acquire these ethical values. Secondly, the entire people of the African continent need a re-orientation about these ethical values. Rather than see them as “uncivilized”, “primitive”, “out-dated”, “anti-social”, “unsophisticated”, and “crude”, the society should realize the usefulness of these values in encouraging discipline, uprightness, dedication to duty, hard work, decency, honour, worthiness, morality, respectability, and responsibility. The proper elucidation of the ethical values in African traditional media shall be the tenets of the practitioners. What one can see established here is the wide range and applicability of the Traditional media practices as holds the promise of a better media practice and richer socio-cultural system. Finally, the African traditional media are highly recommended as a way out of the present day corrupt socio-political system in Nigeria, which has done great damage to the country’s media industry.

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