

**ASSESSMENT OF THE BENEFITS AND SIGNIFICANCE OF COMMUNICATION
FUNCTIONS OF TRADITIONAL MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS OF SELECT CULTURAL
FESTIVALS IN IKOT EKPENE SENATORIAL DISTRICT**

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ABSTRACT

The study sought to find out the benefits and significance of the communication functions of traditional musical instruments at select cultural festivals in the Ikot Ekpene senatorial district: benefit and significance. Two specific objectives and two research questions were created to guide the study. The technique used for the study is the public opinion survey method. The population size is 21 respondents, which covers the selected adults from the various traditional institutions covering the select seven clans of Ikot Ekpene Senatorial District. The research instrument used for this study was a personal interview. Reliability was achieved by testing the instrument on subjects who were not part of the study sample. The study was able to ascertain the musical and extra-musical functions of traditional musical instruments at select cultural festivals in the Ikot Ekpene senatorial district. It was concluded that this study was able to assess the communication functions of traditional musical instruments of select cultural festivals in the Ikot Ekpene Senatorial District. Traditional communication seems to be useful right from when preparations are being made before, during, and at the end of these cultural festivals in passing information about the dates, the processes, attire, and other messages needed by the participants. The attire of the age group communicates humility. One of the recommendations stated in the study is that cultural festivals like new yam, water yam, melon, and corn festivals create tremendous audiences during celebration. Such occasions should be utilized to disseminate useful information, create awareness, and introduce innovation.

KEYWORDS: Traditional Musical Instrument, Traditional Communication, Cultural Festivals.

Introduction

There is no human culture where communication is not an integral part of living. Communication is a fundamental human need that assists in defining socially all the other needs for collective entities and communities. According to Umanah (1996), communication is the process through which people select data from events occurring in their environment and process these into information towards some goal. All over the world, musical instruments are an essential part of cultural life; as well as making music, they serve specific purposes related to non-musical contexts. In many religious rituals, for instance, musical instruments are indispensable. Made from solid material, they enable men to touch the immaterial. As a means of communication, they bridge the gap between this world and the other, their sound invoking a deity or giving voice to the spirit of an ancestor. During agrarian festivals and seasonal rituals, musical instruments

are often used to renew and confirm cosmological harmony, thus averting damage to a community and promising a rich harvest.

And of course, the use of musical instruments is also embedded in the ceremonies that mark the key stages of an individual's life, with music playing a central role in the various celebrations that follow us from birth to death. However, Umoette (2005), in an unpolished research work, describes the nature of tradition and culture of the people of Ikot Ekpene Senatorial District as: "it is inter-woven" and that "it is a function of cultural riches, integrating the most typical features and traditions of all the sub-cultures without exception". Furthermore, supporting his views again on the cultural formation of the Essien Udim people as part of Ikot Ekpene Senatorial District, he attests to the fact that "Ikot Ekpene Senatorial District is a home of such cultural displays such as ekpo, ekoong, and masquerades." And that, the area is noted for its music and folklore, abi-de dance is also performed by the female elders to monitor the beautiful tradition of the people and set standards of social behavior for all females in the area. Besides these, other cultural festivals that are practiced by the people of the area are; afa edia (new yam), afa ikon (new melon), and new wateryam (afa abi-de). These cultural festivals are celebrated in pari-parsu with traditional musical instruments, which in turn create diverse inspirational meanings for the performers and the viewing audience.

Statement of Problem

Traditional musical instruments are used in many cultural festivals in the Ikot Ekpene Senatorial District. These instruments, which serve as the cause for involvement and the link for interaction among the rural dwellers, have various functions and are commonly displayed or used at such cultural festivals with relish. However, the communication functions they perform during such cultural festivals have been hardly investigated. Thus, the question motivating this study is: which communication functions have these instruments perform in the various cultural festivals which abound in Ikot Ekpene Senatorial District, not excluding their benefits and significance.

Objective of the Study

1. To determine the benefit of these instruments used in select cultural festivals in Ikot Ekpene Senatorial District.
2. To ascertain the significance of these instruments used in select cultural festivals in Ikot Ekpene Senatorial District

Research Question

1. What are the benefits of these instruments used in select cultural festivals in Ikot Ekpene Senatorial District?
2. What is the significance of these instruments used in select cultural festivals in Ikot Ekpene Senatorial District?

Traditional Musical Instrument and Traditional Communication in Ikot Ekpene Senatorial District

Traditional musical instruments are instruments made from local raw materials such as wood, bamboo, and strings to meet the needs of rural people. It is a fact that Africans are known to have developed and made use of their own musical instruments from the ancient time. There existed no region or ethnic society in Africa that did not aim at least two or more instruments for musical plays or performances. These instruments are found at different cultural festivals and celebrations. Udoh (2009) observed that:

As regards the socio-cultural background of Annang, they are orderly and are very ceremonial in their way of life. In Annang land, ceremonies are connected with birth, marriage, manhood, womanhood, homestead, death and burial, amongst others. Most of the time, these ceremonies are always accompanied with traditional music (songs and instruments). In other words, music and musical instruments are used in all spheres of life in Annang land- socially, physically, spiritually, economically, etc.

Traditional communication originated from a specific place or culture within its host community. People developed different ways of communicating based on their local language and culture. A dance performance or festival communicated messages of entertainment and information. Wilson (1989) noted that "traditional communication systems are dynamic, multi-media, multi-channel, time-houred, transactional, customary, ubiquitous, as well as integrative, low-cost, non-allienating, adaptable, and popular". Wilson (1990) further noted that "traditional systems of communication involve a complex process of information dissemination, entertainment, and education use in society that have not been seriously dislocated by western culture or any other alien influence". From the above definition, certain outstanding characteristics have been outlined. By being authoritative and credible, Wilson (1990) argues that since the traditional communication system itself is a product of society, its processes are closely allied to the social and political systems, especially in their formal structure and activities involving the generality of the citizens in the society. This guarantees the credibility of whatever messages come from the system. By being time-honored, Wilson (1990) observes that its time and period are beyond the memory of history. It is also transactional in nature because it used a combination of interpersonal channels and other modes to reach its vast audience. Among the characteristics of traditional communication was ubiquity, which means that the system and the message were available in every society at all times. Wilson (1990) further noted that traditional communication is "an admixture of social conventions, interactions, practices, and modes of speech that may not chiefly concern itself with communication". This means that there are fairly strong roots in tradition and culture. It might have been this view that caused Ugboajah (1985) to opine that "Oramedia introduce culture into communication, both culture as patterns of thought and behavior and culture as concepts, standards, and values that arise from and are shaped by material life".

In considering the above, traditional musical instruments function as tools in traditional communication that create and enhance cultural, political, health, and other

educational programs for social development. Ugboajah (1985) believed traditional systems of communication have functions and that "their most important purpose is to provide teaching and initiation, with the object of imparting traditional aesthetic, historical, technical, social, ethical, and religious values. They provide a legal code of sorts that rests on stories and proverbs generated through the spoken word. They also play other roles in the village society such as mobilizing people's awareness of their own history, magnifying past events such as mobilizing people's awareness of their own history, magnifying past events and evoking deeds of illustrious ancestors. Thus, they tend to unite a people and give them cohesion by way of ideas and emotions". Following the above illustration by Ugboajah, he asserted and confirmed the use of various traditional modes of communication, which include instrumental, demonstrative, iconographic, institutional, visual, and extra-mundane. Wilson (1988) pointed out that "most modes and forms display the capacity for multi-social functions and the communication message, the ability of the medium to get the message across to the audience in good time, and by the cultural prescription of each society...".

Instrumental modes of communication use instruments that are beaten, blown, struck, or plucked to produce sounds (signals) and messages whose clarity and efficacy may be dependent on the dexterity or expertise of the drummer and on the nature of the message. The sound or signal produced by such devices acts as an attention-directing signal before the actual messages are disseminated. These instruments, which are self-sounding, include: a large metal gong, a twin gong, a log xylophone, a basket rattle, a bead rattle, a small woodblock, a clay pot, and a wooden slit drum (abodom), which is mostly used at the installation of kings at royal celebrations, to announce the passing away of kings, to inform the community of great danger, and in various institutional groups and other musical entertainment activities. A large metal gong (nkwong) is used in cultural associations of virtuous women; a small woodblock (nkrok) is used to announce community projects; and a bell (nkanika) is used in social gatherings to draw the attention of participants to an on-going activity. Aerophonic communication instrument includes ivory horn or elephant tusk (aduk enin) blown to settle quarrels, used by secret societies to inform members about important festivals like offerings to deities; in times of war, it was blown to alert the people and to mobilize them. Membranophonic communication instruments use skin or leather drums to produce signals and messages through vibrations when beaten or struck with a stick. The membrane drum (etok ibid) or talking drum (anaam-ekpo or ntin-abon), when beaten by the drummer, delivers messages around the village.

Demonstrative modes of communication use music and signals. Jacobson (1960) pointed out that music is "an unconsummated symbol which evokes connotation and various articulations, yet is not really defined". Music played a significant role in ordering, re-ordering, and generally shaping human society. Dietz and Olatunji (1965) noted that "music is part of everyday work, religion, and ceremonies of all sorts. It is used for communication. Many tribes have no written language, so they send messages by word of mouth through singing, blowing signals, whistling, or talking drums, which initiate the pitch of the human voice" The sounds of different drums, flutes, horns, bells, and gongs serve as signals of communication. The iconographic mode of communication involved the use of an objectified or floral icon to convey ideas or information. Example: the presentation of a bowl or saucer of kolanuts to a visitor; the sacrificing of items at the village junctions to the gods of the land; or the exchange of charcoal, fowl, feathers,

cowries, and pigeons. Floral involved the use of a boundary tree, elephant grass, or young palm fronds (ayei) to communicate ideas or meanings to the villagers.

Cultural Festivals in Ikot Ekpene Senatorial District

These festivals are believed by traditionalist such as Akuku's and Abie to be a responsible for bountiful harvest in ikot Ekpene Senatorial District and it is handed down from generation to generation.

Festival of Clearing and Burning of Farmlands (Usoro idio/ubine ikot): It is a hunting expedition and lifting of sanctions on seven years fallow farmlands for cultivation. It is celebrated to mark the beginning of the planting season in Ndiya-Ikono Local Government Area and in Annag land usually between the months of January to March.

New Corn Festival (usoro ekoon ndad akpakpa): This festival commences usually between May to July when corn is harvested as a thanksgiving for a bountiful harvest of maize/corn accompanied by dances and music.

New Melon Festival (usoro ukpeke ikon): This festival is celebrated in the months of August/September as a thanksgiving for a good year's harvest accompanied by dances and music.

Feast of the gods (usoro abasi): This is cultural, religious purification ritual and symbolic re-enactment of the mysteries of the king yam which is accompanied by thanksgiving offerings performed by the chief priest "Okuku" of the clan. It is thanksgiving or appeasement of the communal gods before the celebration of the new yam and wateryam in Annag land and Ikono Local Government Area in the month of August.

New Yam/New Wateryam Festival (Usoro usuuk edia nde abi-de): This festival is usually celebrated in the months of September/October. It is a thanksgiving feast to the gods and ancestor for bountiful yam and wateryam harvest. It is a clan communion and group solidarity, re-affirmation of traditional authority and social order, sanctioned by the awesome appearance of masked ancestral spirits in Ikot Ekpene Senatorial District.

Drum in the Sky Festival (Usoro eduwad/abodom ayong): This is the festival of spears featuring the playing of specially designed wooden slit drum (abodom/obodom) on top of trees. It is a festival that is connected with chieftaincy and giving of traditional honours and titles to deserving heroes and a thanksgiving ritual to the gods performed once every seven years in Ikono Local Government Area while Ikot Ekpene, Obot Akara and Essien Udim Local Government Areas term theirs as "Ikorok", all usually celebrated in the second week of November.

War Festival (Usoro ekong): This is a festival of traditional heroes and heroine and war generals. It is usually held in the months of September/October.

Festival of Diviners (Usoro idiong): This is a festival of traditional medicine men and diviners usually celebrated in the month of August. It is celebrated to mark their importance as custodians of the peoples' culture and traditions.

Festival of Colourful Masquerades (Usoro Ekong/Ukappa isong ekpo): A festival of colourful masquerades or of mythological and lesser cosmological spirits is an all-year round activity. Various dancing performances are in display during these festivals, and

it is a feast for the celebration of ancestral masquerades and spirits for the guidance and protection of their communities. It is meant to re-establish peace, love, and order and to publicly disgrace transgressor usually in mid-June till end of November. Ekpo masquerades in Akwa Ibom are generally regarded as “ghost”, each ghost being a replica of a person who died in this world and passed into the under-world with all the marks, taboos, deformities, diseases, beauty and natural qualities he carried to the grave (Ekwo 1986). The carvers use hardwood “nkubia”/ “ukwa” which are believed to contain powerful spirits for the most powerful of the ekpo mask. Ekpo masquerade use some traditional musical instruments like bell (nkanika), basket rattle (ekpoud) and ritual gong (ekere) as an identity that the belongs to the ekpo cult, also in appeasing the gods of their forefathers to know that such cultural display will soon commence. Ekpo is a source of religious entertainment, an instrument of social stratification. It is also used to exercise a measure of social control and to ultimately restore form, order, discipline and harmony and in the enforcement and execution of laws and administration of justice in the society.

Water yam Dance Festival (Unek abi-de): This cultural dance festival is done before ekpo masquerade cultural festival comes to an end in the month of November. Female elders who are members of “ibian isong” and “abi-de” institution “are the ones who participant in this dance. They usually pound melon (etim ikpan) and bake it locally using clay cooking pot. They will then put the baked melon in plate to be taken to the first ekpo masquerade to arrive the hut (afe) in a compound. Abi-de dance is noted for its music and folklore. It is performed by the female elders to monitor the beautiful tradition of the people and set standard of social behaviour for all females in the community. It also helps the women to solidify their fidelity to marital vows. The significance of the baked melon (ikpan) being given to ekpo masquerade is that, these female elders hope is on the gods of their forefathers or ancestor to keep them alive and in the best state of health and for protection throughout their stay on earth.

Fattening and Manliness festival (mbodo nde iso ekwede Annang/mbok): Fattening festival is a successful completion and outing ceremony of virgin adolescent girls in the fattening room (mbodo) in the community. Iso ekwede Annang/mbok festival is a kind of traditional wrestling competition often displayed by young men before elders and the cream of the society as a forum of assessing the strength, might and vigour of some youths for wars, leadership and fitness of a king’s assignment and process towards the marriage of an “mbobo”. These festivals usually come up in the month of August with different traditional musical instruments displayed at the location of the festival. If you are not a virgin (mbobo) and you dare step in that playground, ekoong masquerades will beat you severely. This is because, members of ekoong cult know adolescent girls who are virgins, and those who are not virgins are known as “uwoh” meaning that they have been deflowered and done abortion before. Also, to determine the manliness in men, the finance(s) to all “mbobo” are requested to assemble on a hill. The fiancé to any mbobo that jumps down the hill with his hands touching the ground is not fit to be call a “real man”. Any of course, his wife to be, the mbobo, will be snatched from him by another man who is fit and man enough to jump down without his hands touching the ground. Any young man that jumps down successfully is being congratulated with a warm hug and a gun shot by other young men present, showing that he is man enough to handle any responsibility effectively within the outside community. The virgins are pride to their lucky husbands.

Benefit and Significance of Traditional Musical Instrument in Select Cultural Festivals in Ikot Ekpene Senatorial District

In Ikot Ekpene Senatorial District like other African traditional societies, their culture is rich and diverse with various traditional musical instruments used during cultural festivals, plays and ceremonies. The traditional musical instruments used in cultural festivals in Ikot Ekpene District and their benefits include:

Large metal gong (nkwong), twin gong (akangkang). They help in passing on messages depending on the way the beater strikes to give different notes for the understanding of the significance which is known by the performers or dancers. Ritual gong (ekere), basket rattle (ekpuod) have magical powers or divine property. They are supposed to aid seers communicate with the spirit world. Bead rattle (nsak) when tapped or shaken it produces a rattling sound to compliment other instruments.

Woodblock (nkrok) aids in passing on messages to people. The sounds do not necessarily serve as the message itself, but it alerts the people of the information to be passed on to them. It is equally used to key in new dance steps by cultural dance group in accompaniment with other instruments. Wooden slit drum (abodom). Other places like Ikono Local Government Area and Afahaobong clan in Abak Local Government Area call it "abodom ayong" – the sound of which can announce a state of emergency in the community. As a musical instrument, it ranges from music like mbobo, mbiede Affiong, abobom, etc. it is basically used by village authority to give the people firsthand information. Its tones also depend on the note which goes with significance. It is used to key in new dance steps by cultural dance group, rhythmic or musical limitations of local speech patterns which encode and transmit messages and enhances balance in sound during performances.

Bell (nkanika), whistle (ufiom). Both play rhythm of dances, gives cues and warm dancers to stop. Women use bell in social gathering to draw attention of participants to an on-going activity. It is equally used in communicating different messages to cultural dance group. They equally serve as warning instruments especially when used by ekpo masquerade cult during cultural festivals. They are also used by gourd group (mbide uta), a local brass band in communicating messages to its members during cultural dance.

Flute, elephant tusk or ivory horn (aduk, aduk-enin or aduk-uta). The sound of the flute is dependent upon the force which denotes messages known only by the members of the cultural dance group. It is a woodwind instrument that comes in four variants with defined treble, alto, tenor and bass tones, and most used in dance performances. It is used by traditional rulers to alert both cultural dancers and participants on important events like cultural festivals, offerings to deities, dictating the actions of masquerades during public ceremonies, heralding chieftaincy trains by an instrumentalist (akwa aduk), to appraise the celebrant of good doings as custodian of the peoples' culture and tradition. Elephant tusk or ivory horn is blown to settle quarrels, in time of war, it was blown to alert the people and mobilize them.

Log xylophone (ikon eto). When struck with two sticks, it produces different notes depending on the part that was struck. It is generally used as a musical accompaniment.

Talking drum (anaam-ekpo or ntin-abon). This drum leads most of other musical instruments depending on the dance steps, dictating the pace and melody of the music; its biggest strength is the ability to communicate between the singers, the audience and the band. The sound of this gives direction to the dancers and ekpo masqueraders on what to do at a given time during cultural festivals.

Traditional musical instruments are significant in ancestral worship. Remembering ancestors is still a current practice in many cultures, including in the West. Ancestor worship however is very specific for Asian cultures, while in traditional African cultures ancestors are thought to have the power to work both good and evil on a descendant's life. Ancestors and elders must therefore be pleased through music (Europeana, 2022).

In rituals around birth, weddings and death, traditional instruments are seen to be of great significance and this occasion are part of the so-called rites of passage - a term that includes also rituals of puberty. They mark the passage of a person through the life cycle, from one stage to another over time, or from one role or social position to another. As a rule, they are accompanied by singing and dancing and/or the use of musical instruments. In many cultures the birth of twins, for example, is associated with very specific rituals, sometimes with rattles, sounding sticks and even xylophones. In some funeral rituals, an anthropomorphic musical instrument is used to represent the deceased person (Europeana, 2022).

Methodology

The technique used for the study is the public opinion survey method. The population size is 21 respondents which covers the selected adults from the various traditional institutions covering the select seven clans of Ikot Ekpene Senatorial District. The research instrument used for this study was personal interview. Reliability was achieved by testing the instrument on subjects who were not part of the sample of the study.

Research Question One

What are the benefits of these instruments used in select cultural festivals in Ikot Ekpene Senatorial district?

The response provided in the descriptive analysis of the interview answer this question. According to clan heads, traditional musical instruments apart from serving as entertainment medium and information channels for the rural dwellers, are also local administrative machinery for the ruralities. They help engender peace and harmony in the society, correct societal ills, mould characters promote law and order, respect for elders and authorities, teaches morals, prevent violence and premature death. They also remained the new generation of their culture and tradition, reveal the unknown, provide divine protection and strengthen culture bonds. Akuku, (2008) in his study says that traditional modes helped in the successful organization, project implementation and conflict resolution. Traditional musical instruments used as instrumental mode of communication are very effective in rural communication. These instruments have various benefits to the rural people as earlier mentioned. This justifies the adoption of medium theory by McLuhan as cited in Tom, G (2012) which postulates that "the medium is the message". This theory suggests that the form a medium embeds itself in

the message, creating a symbiotic relationship by which the medium influence how the messages is perceived and that the channel of transmission is more important than the messages content and that he medium becomes the environment.

Research Question Two

What is the significance of these instruments used in select cultural festivals in Ikot Ekpene Senatorial District?

Interviews said that traditional musical instruments vary and thus, make varied music, vocal accompaniment and dance steps. But the whole significance of these instrument is to create and sustain the mood of joyous celebration. Happiness and exuberance emanate from the various instruments. Laughter, convivialities are the rhythm of the vocal instruments as youths, men and women of different culture groups display. The findings on significance of these instruments align with the culture performance theory which assumes that traditional musical instrument must not relent in repeating in all ramifications, those desired activities such as cultural festivals, special occasions intended to affect the lives of the people positively thereby bringing about meaningful development and social oneness. And these instruments also communicate through the rhythm of vocal instruments as a way of crafting their social world and making of it during entertainment.

Conclusion

This study has been able to assess the communication functions of traditional musical instruments at select cultural festivals in the Ikot Ekpene Senatorial District. Traditional communication seems to be useful right from when preparations are being made before, during, and at the end of these cultural festivals in passing information about the dates, the processes, attire, and other messages needed by the participants. The attire of the age group communicates humility. The significance of these instruments is also seen during the actual commencement of these cultural festivals as a means of entertaining, educating, informing, and mobilizing the people. Information from them is taken very seriously and elicits obedience and compliance. These instruments are indispensable parts of the people's lives and very necessary for their continued existence. People's behaviors are to a large extent guided by group influence, and they fear being summoned to the village square or sanctioned for any misconduct.

Recommendations

1. As part of the people's culture and traditions, the skills and knowledge of these instruments should be transmitted from one generation to another as a natural legacy.
2. Cultural festivals like new yam, water yam, melon, and corn festivals create a tremendous audience during celebration. Such occasions should be utilized to disseminate useful information, create awareness and introduce innovation.
3. The use of traditional communication should be emphasized and promoted during cultural festivals to ensure a smooth, beneficial, and entertaining outing.

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