

Promoting Indigenous Knowledge Systems for Preservation of Nigerianness: the Catalytic Function of Broadcasting

By

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Abstract

Globalisation has affected every facet of life in almost every country such that the shrinking world seems to be monolithic. In the process, indigenous knowledge systems of different societies are threatened with possible extinction. This is the crossroads that many sub-nationalities in Nigeria have faced as exogenous cultures have attempted, sometimes successfully, to decimate the age-long relevance of indigenous knowledge systems. Against this backdrop, this paper examines the catalytic function of broadcasting in preserving and promoting indigenous knowledge systems for the sustenance of Nigeria's cultural identity. Anchored on the Development Media Theory, the paper argues that the broadcast media, through programmes that showcase indigenous languages, traditional medicine, folklore, music, arts, customs and other cultural practices, can serve as a veritable platform for preserving the values that define Nigeria's diverse subcultures and strengthening national consciousness. Thus, this article contends that as globalization continues to expose Nigerians to dominant foreign cultures, deliberate media interventions are required to deepen indigenous knowledge systems and reinforce cultural pride. Therefore, the broadcast media must assume a more proactive role in promoting and transmitting 'Nigerianness' through culturally relevant programming that will preserve Nigeria's indigenous heritage for generations unborn.

Keywords: Indigenous Knowledge, Systems, Preservation, Nigerianness and Broadcasting

Introduction

The advent of Information and Communication Technologies such as the Internet, satellite systems, mobile networks and digital media have brought about drastic changes in the global social structure from 1990 onwards. For instance, television and radio stations now broadcast signals far beyond their immediate localities and national boundaries, thus shaping the opinions of people and leaders of many different countries. Also, there is the Internet and its various offerings which, among others, has created a digital highway for instant communication and networking across different continents, and also enabled for vast amounts of information for business, education, entertainment, politics or culture to be accessed by anyone from anywhere in the world (Pilati, 2002; Batta and Udo-Akagha, 2017). The effects of these technologies in making the world more interconnected and interactive have become so pervasive that most social scientists as well as communication scholars, most notably Marshal McLuhan, now regard the world as a global neighborhood family or global village – a small space or environment in which people are interconnected and can share information and experiences almost instantly despite physical distances. Therefore, it may be said that the proliferation of Information and Communication Technologies significantly drives globalisation by breaking down communication barriers, enabling instant and borderless flow of information, services and capital, and facilitating the spread of culture and ideas worldwide (Gelernter, 2012; Nichols, Nutter & Moore, 2024; Nyitse, 2024).

The adoption of digital technologies in different fields of human endeavour, in addition to compressing the global space by significantly reducing or eliminating the barriers of time and distance between nations, has also led to a homogenisation of cultures across different countries – a situation where different cultures are absorbed into the mainstream of one dominant outside culture, or when cultures sufficiently blend such that they no longer exist as unique or separate entities within a country or region. This is buttressed by Jimada (2020) who states that cultural homogenization is the single most important hallmark of globalisation, and suggests that all cultural barriers are broken down such that the local cultures are assimilated into one single dominant culture, in this case the dominant Western culture.

From the foregoing, it is obvious that cultural homogenisation is a process by which local cultures become more similar to one another because of the dominating impact of global civilizations. This phenomenon is mostly driven by the growing popularity of global mainstream media, particularly satellite television channels, which

have resulted in widespread dissemination of content – films, TV shows, music, news – which often reflects dominant cultural narratives, particularly from industrialised Western nations such as the United States of America. Mainstream media, which are dominated by multinational film and news channels such as Hollywood, CNN and MTV, continue to export different genres of content to every corner of the world, and, in the process, expose the global television audience to different American cultural values. As people throughout the world gain access to the same information, entertainment and commercial goods produced and distributed by these American television giants, unique cultural identities may begin to blend. This is buttressed by Balogun and Aruoture (2024) who state that Hollywood films, fast food chains such as McDonald's, and multinational brands such as Apple and Nike dominate cultural landscapes throughout the world, and contribute to the global expansion of Western, primarily American, culture while inspiring people to embrace Western lifestyles, beliefs and consumption patterns. Consequently, local traditions, dialects and behaviours may be eclipsed, resulting in a loss of cultural diversity.

Furthermore, the growth of digital technology and social media has further accelerated the process of cultural homogenisation. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter create a worldwide platform for trends and ideas to be propagated quickly and broadly. Western influencers and celebrities frequently set worldwide trends in fashion, beauty and lifestyle. For example, American music and design styles have influenced youth culture in several ways, ranging from Asian metropolitan centres to African rural areas. The similarity of cultural manifestations lowers the visibility and importance of local cultures. In addition, social media algorithms frequently prioritise information that is consistent with popular worldwide trends, strengthening the dominance of particular cultural narratives while limiting the representation of local cultures. Therefore, cultural homogenisation can lead to a more standardized global culture, with less room for unique and diverse cultural expressions (Olajide & Ejere, 2022; Balogun & Aruoture, 2024).

One of the most significant concerns of cultural homogenisation is the loss of traditional or indigenous knowledge systems. Indigenous and local communities in many African countries have unique cultural identities and also often possess deep knowledge and understanding of their local ecosystems. These indigenous knowledge systems – which are deeply rooted in unique cultural experiences and encompass a wide range of areas such as agriculture, healing, language, art, governance, values, belief systems and environmental stewardship – are developed over generations and held dear by local communities with custodians such as farmers, artisans and elders. They are essential for cultural preservation as they maintain the identity, values and practices of indigenous communities. However, as cultures homogenise, indigenous knowledge systems may be eroded, devalued or replaced by more standardised or globalised, often less sustainable, practices (Ukhami, Lassana & Kabir, 2024; Wijaya, 2025). In Nigeria, indigenous knowledge systems are facing erosion mainly due to the influence of globalised practises and educational systems. For instance, indigenous agricultural methods such as bush fallowing, crop rotation and intercropping which are adapted to local conditions are being abandoned for imported farming techniques, including excessive mechanical tillage, heavy use of inorganic fertiliser, intensive mono-cropping etc, most of which may not be sustainable. Also, traditional healthcare practices which have, over time, proven effective for cancer treatment, cardiovascular health, respiratory and digestive health, and for reducing maternal and infant mortality seem to have been replaced by modern, imported Western medical systems. The adoption of the British educational curriculum by most pre-primary, primary, secondary and tertiary educational institutions in Nigeria further contributes to the devaluation of Nigerian indigenous knowledge systems (Olaniyan and Govender, 2023; Ukhami, Lassana and Kabir, 2024; Ngere et al.; 2022). In the face of this, it is obvious that indigenous knowledge in Nigeria has dwindled and the Nigerianness of Nigeria is facing the threat of extinction. However, despite the pressure on the indigenous knowledge system, the broadcast media can be a catalyst to preserve and transmit values that have come to define Nigeria's subcultures. Therefore, the catalytic role of the broadcast media in the preservation of Nigerian indigenous knowledge systems is the focus of this paper.

In this work, globalisation means the increasing influence of Western broadcast media content on different aspects of Nigerian cultures, while indigenous knowledge systems are comprehensive bodies of knowledge, beliefs and practices developed by indigenous communities in Nigeria, and Nigerianness refers to the unique identity and spirit of being a Nigerian.

Statement of the Problem

Rapid advancements in Information and Communication Technology and the intensification of globalization have created unprecedented opportunities for communication, interaction and cultural exchange across national boundaries. However, these developments have also accelerated the process of cultural homogenization, whereby

dominant foreign cultures, particularly western cultures, increasingly influence the values, lifestyles, language, tastes and behavioural patterns of people in developing societies. This is particularly evident in Nigeria where the pervasive influence of foreign media content, social media trends and imported educational and cultural systems has contributed to the gradual displacement of indigenous knowledge systems and cultural practices that have historically defined the identity and distinctiveness of the Nigerian people.

Indigenous knowledge systems, which encompass traditional modes of agriculture, medicine, governance, language, folklore, values, and environmental management, constitute important repositories of the collective memory and identity of Nigeria's diverse ethnic nationalities. Yet, many of these practices are becoming increasingly marginalized, undervalued and, in some cases, endangered due to the preference for foreign models and the growing appeal of global culture. Consequently, younger generations are becoming less conversant with indigenous languages, customs and traditional knowledge, thereby threatening the continuity of the cultural values that embody the 'Nigerianness' of Nigeria.

Although broadcasting has enormous potential for cultural transmission, socialization and identity formation, the extent to which it has effectively lived up to this role in preserving and promoting indigenous knowledge systems has remained a subject of concern. In Nigeria, the broadcast media, in their quest for commercialization, audience ratings and competition with global media platforms, tend to devote more attention to foreign and urban-oriented content at the expense of indigenous cultural programming. This trend raises concerns over how sufficiently broadcasting is serving as a catalyst for the preservation and intergenerational transfer of indigenous knowledge and cultural values.

It is on this note which this paper seeks to examine the catalytic function of broadcasting in preserving Nigerian indigenous knowledge systems with specific focus on how the broadcast media can be strategically deployed to revive, sustain and promote indigenous knowledge and cultural heritage in order to safeguard the unique identity and 'Nigerianness' of Nigeria in an increasingly globalized and culturally homogenized world.

Conceptual Review

Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS)

'Indigenous knowledge systems' may be defined as the body knowledge, skills, practices, values, etc. developed by indigenous peoples through generations of living close to nature. They represent the total knowledge used to manage social, ecological, economic and spiritual aspects of life in indigenous communities and are passed down, from generation to generation, orally and through practices. According to Dhungana, Pal Ghimire, Dhungana, and Tuladhar (2023), indigenous knowledge systems refer to a network of knowledge, beliefs and traditions that are intended to preserve, communicate and contextualise indigenous relationships with their culture and landscape over time. Chiwanza, Musingafi and Mupa (2013) also see indigenous knowledge systems as a body of knowledge, or bodies of knowledge, of the indigenous people of particular geographical areas that have survived for a very long time. These bodies are developed through the processes of acculturation and through kinship relationships that societal groups form and are handed down to the posterity through oral tradition and through cultural practices such as rituals and rites.

Indigenous knowledge systems have survived for a very long time. Despite the racial and colonial onslaughts that they have suffered at the hands of imperialism and arrogance, they have persisted and continued to thrive due to a number of factors which include their fundamental connection to cultural identity, their adaptability to oral transmission and community practices, and their proven efficacy for sustainable living (Chiwanza *et al.*, 2013; Asogwa & Onwuama, 2022). Indigenous knowledge systems possess a number of strengths which can benefit not just indigenous people but all people. One of the most significant benefits of IKS lies in its holistic approach. Unlike many Western scientific models which tend to break down complex systems into smaller isolated parts, IKS emphasises the interconnectedness of all aspects within a system, thereby promoting harmony between the environment, and the community wellbeing. From this perspective, humans and ecosystems (including elements such as water, air and soil) are viewed as interdependent. As a result, humans are obliged to respect nature and are required to adopt sustainable environment-friendly practices to ensure the long-term health and balance of both the environment and the community. In essence, this holistic view translates into practices that are sustainable and environment-friendly. Such practices may include prioritizing indigenous farming methods which often focus on maintaining soil health and conserving soil water over the modernised methods such as the use of synthetic fertilizers and pesticides which can harm the environment (Khare & Kumar, 2025; Olaniyan & Govender, 2023).

Another significant benefit of IKS is the potential for cultural preservation. As an integral part of communities'

unique cultural heritage, IKS, which encompasses language, ceremonies, arts and festivals that reflect a profound connection to the land, plays a crucial role in preserving and safeguarding the cultural identities of indigenous communities. In addition, the oral transmission of indigenous knowledge through stories, songs and practical skills ensures that cultural traditions and worldviews are passed down to future generations thereby ensuring intergenerational continuity. However, the major weakness of IKS stems from its reliance on oral transmission, and this makes it vulnerable to distortions, loss and lack of continuity, particularly as populations become more displaced or influenced by globalisation and modernisation (Olaniyan & Govender, 2023; Chiwanza *et al.* (2013).

The Concept of ‘Nigerianness’

Basically, ‘Nigerianness’ could be used as an adjective to describe something or someone who is related to Nigeria. This implies that this concept simply refers to the quality of being from or associated with Nigeria. However, being from or associated with Nigeria is not the same thing as being a Nigerian. Being a Nigerian is more than just a nationality; it is an identity, a state of mind, sense of pride which comes with being from Nigeria, and a consciousness of duty, obligation and allegiance to Nigeria. Therefore, ‘Nigerianness’ entails a complex identity forged from shared values of resilience, innovation, optimism and strong community ties, expressed through various forms such as festivals, family celebrations and cultural contributions. It involves embracing a spirit of unity despite diverse ethnic groups, service, patriotism, self-confidence and a commitment to progress, even amidst national challenges (Dan-Ali, 2010; Uzuegbu, 2018; Kolade, 2024).

Nigerianness is akin to having what is known as ‘The Nigerian Spirit’, which encompasses a profound sense of resilience, communal living and national pride, which exists despite the country’s vast ethnic and cultural differences. It connotes a sense of civic, rather than ethnic nationality, forged by shared history, aspirations and challenges. Some key aspects of the Nigerian Spirit, according to Destinali (2020), Okey-Kalu (2019), and Afolayan (2015), include the following: cultural vibrancy and diversity stemming from numerous ethnic groups, a strong cultural heritage expressed through music, dance, language, dressing, ceremonies, etc.; a deep sense of spirituality, respect for moral values and norms; a reputation for being resilient, hard-working, innovative and resourceful; and a determination to succeed on the global stage. However, ethnic and regional tensions, corruption and governance issues, and identity crises are among the major challenges to Nigerianness among Nigerians today.

Preserving Nigerianness is essential for, among others, maintaining Nigeria’s cultural identity and diversity, fostering social cohesion and national unity and preserving cultural heritage for future generations. For instance, Nigeria has more than 250 ethnic groups, each with different languages, customs and traditions. But some of the cultural identities and practices of most of these groups, including rites, festivals, music and even languages, are at risk of extinction due to the dominance of English and Americanised traditions and behaviours. Therefore, preserving Nigerianness ensures that these diverse identities are not eroded by homogenized global cultures or internal neglect. Otherwise, younger generations may be alienated from their roots, leading to a loss of self-identity. Furthermore, a strong sense of Nigerianness can help to bridge ethno-religious divides which have been the major reason behind so many conflicts which the country has witnessed overtime. This implies that preserving Nigerianness can foster national unity and social cohesion by emphasizing shared Nigerian identity rooted in values such as resilience, communalism and hospitality (Oluwadele, Adediran & Sunkanmi, 2023).

Indigenous knowledge systems can contribute significantly to preserving Nigerianness by safeguarding and promoting Nigeria’s cultural heritage, values and identity, thereby ensuring cultural continuity and maintaining connection to local roots. The *Ifa* divination system and the *Olojo* festival of the Yoruba people; the *Mmanwu* tradition and the New Yam Festival (*Iri Ji*) of the Igbo people, and the recitation of Kirari for historical figures such as Usman dan Fodio among the Fulani people are different aspects of IKS which not only showcase the cultural heritage of these ethnic groups but also reinforce pride in them. These practices are maintained over different generations, thereby ensuring that these groups sustain their cultural identities and deep connection to their regional roots amidst modern pressures (Oluwadele, Adediran & Sunkanmi, 2023).

Theoretical Framework

This paper is grounded in the development media theory which was propounded by Dennis McQuail in 1987, as an addition to the original four normative theories of the press to address the peculiar challenge of the third world. The theory canvasses media support for an existing government and its efforts to bring about socio-economic development. It argues that until a nation is well established and its economic development well underway, media must be supportive rather than critical of government, but assist them in implementing their policies.

As the name implies, the theory relates to media in third world nations. It favours journalism that seeks out good news and requires that bad news stories are treated with caution because such stories could be economically damaging to a nation in the delicate throes of growth and change. The media therefore is seen to fulfill particular social and political duties; hence media freedom while desirable should be subordinated to national integration, socio-economic modernization, promotion of literacy and cultural creativity.

The development media theory seeks to accentuate the positive. It nurtures the autonomy of the developing nations and gives special emphasis to indigenous cultures. It is both a theory of state support and one of resistance to the norms of competing nations and competing theories of media.

As the press performs its responsibilities, it bears the following tenets in mind according to McQuail (2010):

- i. Media must accept and carry out positive development tasks that are in line with the policies formulated by the political leadership and freedom of the press should not be at variance with economic priorities of the government and the development needs of the citizenry.
- ii. Media should therefore give priorities to the coverage of those areas that touch on the lives of the people. In other words, content should be development-driven and should centre on socio-economic and political lives of the people.
- iii. In the overall interest of development, the state has the right to intervene in media operations by the use of censorship devices, especially when the activities of the press are not in consonance with the development objectives of the government. Mass media should accord priority to politically, geographically and culturally contiguous developing countries in their coverage as part of the holistic strategy for less developed societies.

By implication, the development media theory underscores the need for broadcast media institutions to contribute to cultural development and social integration in Nigeria. The broadcast media, through programmes in indigenous languages, documentaries, cultural festivals, educational broadcasts, traditional music, storytelling, and discussions in indigenous practices, can serve as channels for transmitting indigenous knowledge from one generation to another. In this regard, broadcasting becomes a catalyst for preserving the 'Nigerianness' of Nigeria by fostering cultural pride and strengthening national identity.

Preserving Indigenous Knowledge Systems: The Catalytic Role of Broadcasting

Given the effects of globalisation and cultural homogenisation, indigenous knowledge systems of different societies face continued threats of possible extinction. With more than 250 ethnic groups and 500 languages, Nigeria's indigenous knowledge systems have often been disregarded as primitive in favour of Western knowledge systems. This can erode cultural identity and weaken the sense of Nigerianness among Nigerians. Given this, there is need for coordinated efforts, interventions and collaborations to promote and preserve Nigeria's indigenous knowledge systems so as to counter cultural erosion, foster national pride and ensure that Nigerianness thrives among Nigerians. Broadcasting has the potential to serve as a powerful catalyst for preserving Nigeria's indigenous knowledge systems in a number of ways which, according to scholars including Tesbee (2011), Mari (2016), Ezeaka and Nwafor (2022), Odesola and Bernice (2024), and Ire (2025), revolve around documentation, education, language preservation, community engagement and cultural resistance. With regard to documentation, broadcasting can be used to counter the challenge of erosion of Nigerian cultures by capturing and sharing cultural narratives through radio, television and digital platforms. This will ensure that oral histories, such as Yoruba tales of Oduduwa or Igbo stories of the Tortoise, are recorded and accessible to future generations. Also, coverage of cultural festivals such as the Argungu Fishing Festival or the New Yam Festival on channels such as the *Nigeria Television Authority (NTA)* and *Africa Magic* creates visual and auditory archives for preserving rituals and practices that might otherwise fade.

Beyond documentation, broadcasting can foster inter-generational knowledge transfer through cultural education. This involves prioritising programmes which showcase different aspects of IKS and highlight their relevance. This way, broadcasting can bridge generational gaps and ensure that indigenous knowledge remains a living tradition. Such programmes may include educational programmes which engage younger generations with cultural quizzes, reality shows which feature cultural performances; for example, traditional dances and cultural festivals, or talk programmes featuring elders discussing herbal medicine or spiritual practices. There are some of such educational contents on stations like *Wazobia FM*, *Soundcity*, *Arewa Radio*, *Radio Nigeria*, and *TVC* which introduce audiences to local histories such as the Igbo Atilogwu.

The preservation of Nigeria's linguistic diversity, a cornerstone of cultural heritage, is another key area in which broadcasting can contribute to the preservation of Nigeria's cultural identity. By often broadcasting in indigenous languages, the broadcast media can keep such languages vibrant and relevant, thereby encouraging younger audience members to embrace their linguistic roots. This can help to counter the dominance of English in daily street conversations and sustain the languages of the different ethnic groups in Nigeria alongside the cultural wisdom embedded in them. Many Nigerian stations often feature programmes broadcast in local indigenous languages, including drama series on *Africa Magic*; agricultural programmes such *Utom Inwang* on *Atlantic FM* and *Akwa Ibom Broadcasting Corporation* and other general culturally inclined programmes.

The broadcast media can also contribute to the preservation of Nigeria's cultural identity by providing opportunities or platforms for dialogues that advocate cultural revival, and showcase local traditions, languages and arts. For instance, there are interactive radio shows on stations such as *Memories FM*, *Radio Akwa Ibom*, *Tang Sio FM* and *Inspiration FM* which allow listeners to share cultural stories and experiences, discuss marriage customs, or explore folklore, thereby empowering listeners and communities to take ownership of their heritage. Such content can also inspire artisans and attract apprentices, thereby ensuring continuity. Furthermore, by showcasing declining local traditions, practices and art, broadcasting can challenge the marginalisation of Nigeria's indigenous knowledge and offer a counter-balance to the dominance of Western cultures and knowledge systems. Documentaries on Nigerian multi-national news channels such as *Arise News* and *Channels TV* about herbal medicine and farming techniques, for example, offer opportunities for the custodians of these cultures to enlighten outsiders on such issues as the origin or the significance of these practices, and in the process counter stereotypes which may have arisen from ignorance, mischief or malice.

Despite broadcasting's potential and continued effort, scholars (Chiwanza *et al.*, 2013; Brodowicz, 2024; Ire, 2025) argue that the role of broadcasting in serving as a catalyst for the preservation of indigenous knowledge systems is faced with numerous challenges. One of such challenges is that urban-based media often neglect rural communities where indigenous knowledge is most intact. Nigeria's indigenous knowledge systems are predominantly rooted in rural areas where communities maintain closer ties to ancestral practices. However, urban-based media, concentrated in cities tend to prioritize content that aligns with urban audiences, globalised culture and commercial interests that often sideline the rich cultural heritage of the people preserved in rural settings. This neglect manifests through limited coverage, under-representation, infrastructural disparities and focus on modernized or Westernised narratives.

Another challenge stems from the issue of commercialisation. The commercialisation of broadcasting, driven by profit motives and audience demands, often leads to the distortion of Nigeria's indigenous traditions. Urban-based media outlets rely heavily on advertising revenue and viewership metrics. Hence, they prioritise content that appeals to urban, cosmopolitan or global audiences. This commercial focus can result in the oversimplification, sensationalisation or misrepresentation of indigenous knowledge to make it more "marketable."

Conclusion

Globalisation and its numerous effects, including cultural homogenization, have come to stay as one of the effects of rapid advancements and high proliferation of ICTs. Given the global digital divide, cultures of industrialised western nations continue to dominate the global media landscape, and, as a result, constantly threaten to erode and replace those of less powerful nations, including Nigeria. Broadcasting has the potential to serve as a powerful catalyst for preserving Nigeria's indigenous knowledge systems in a number of ways which revolve around documentation, education, language preservation, community engagement and cultural resistance. By producing and airing indigenous content which showcase different aspects of Nigeria's diverse cultural heritage, broadcasting can preserve Nigeria's indigenous knowledge and also breathe new life into its cultural tapestry, thereby ensuring that the wisdom of its diverse peoples endures for future generations.

Recommendations

In the light of the above discourse, the following recommendations are proposed:

- i. Nigerian broadcast stations should prioritise producing and airing indigenous contents which showcase different aspects of Nigeria's diverse cultural heritage so as to encourage younger audience members to embrace their linguistic roots.
- ii. Blending traditional with modern media can ensure that broadcasting not only preserves Nigeria's indigenous knowledge but also breathes new life into its cultural tapestry, thereby ensuring that the wisdom of its diverse peoples endures for future generations.

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